Liminal Identity in Contemporary American Television Science Fiction

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<u>Abstract</u>

This thesis examines the foregrounding of a particular type of liminal human protagonist in contemporary American television Science Fiction. These protagonists, which I have termed the 'unliving,' exist in-between the realms of life and death, simultaneously both alive and dead whilst occupying an indistinct middle-ground. I examine how the liminal nature of these protagonists has been used as a means of exploring various aspects of personal identity during the early years of the twenty-first century. Developing anthropologist Victor Witter Turner's work, in which he argued for the universal occurrence of liminality in cultural, political, economic and social contexts, I argue that the use of liminal protagonists in American television Science Fiction constitutes a demonstrable trend. Although they are to be found in ever-increasing numbers in (and outside) the genre, their growing presence and significance have yet to be properly discerned, studied and appreciated. I analyse the use of these unliving protagonists in four key texts: *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* (The Halcyon Company/Warner Bros. Television, 2008-2009), *Battlestar Galactica* (Universal/Sci-Fi TV, 2004-2009), *Caprica* (Universal/Sci-Fi TV, 2010-2011) and *Dollhouse* (Boston Diva Productions/20th Century Fox, 2009-2010).

Textual analyses of serial television are often dismissed as outmoded and irrelevant to the study of television. Part of the aim of this thesis is to repudiate this widespread assumption. Therefore, my methodology involves the use of close narrative analysis to interrogate my chosen texts, situating my findings within broader sociocultural contexts. Utilising this methodological approach reveals how these texts engage with contemporary concerns and anxieties regarding illness, religion, trauma, and gender. Ultimately, this thesis presents an intervention within ongoing discourses regarding the relationship between these subjects and personal identity in 21st century America.

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Finally, this thesis is dedicated to my Mother and to the memory of my Father. Not even the Welsh have words to convey my gratitude for all they have done for me, but "cariad mawr am byth" comes close.

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Introduction

"Are you alive? Prove it."

These are the first words spoken in the opening scene of *Battlestar Galactica* (2003, 2004-2009). A commercial hit and a critical triumph,[1] the initial two-part mini-series spawned a regular weekly serial which lasted five years, during which time the programme's narrative engaged with various themes ranging from the intensely personal to the mythically epic, tackling several different provocative and controversial sociopolitical issues along the way. The challenge presented by this first line of dialogue, however, was to prove emblematic for the entirety of the programme's tenure on television, as well as for its subsequent spin-offs – TV movies *Razor* (2007) and *The Plan* (2009), television show *Caprica* (2010), and web series *The Resistance* (2006), *Face of the Enemy* (2008) and *Blood and Chrome* (2012). The words are directed towards a human male (an unnamed 'Armistice Officer' portrayed by Ryan Robbins) and uttered by what appears to be a human female but is actually an artificial intelligence (AI) from a species known as the Cylons. This Cylon (Tricia Helfer) is so advanced that, where one might expect to find microchips, diodes and a metal endoskeleton underneath the fleshy exterior (such as that found beneath the skin of Arnold Schwarzenegger's titular antagonist/hero in the *Terminator* franchise), there is, in their stead, muscle and bone.[2] After asking her question, the Cylon leans in and passionately kisses the dumbfounded Officer. Their encounter occurs on a remote station, purpose-built for an armistice meeting between humans and Cylons which occurs once a year, ever since the cessation of a war between the two species. However, the Cylons have, until now, chosen not to attend these summits and this is the first known meeting between the two species since the end of the war, 40 years previously. Prior to the

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[1] See Chapter Three for a broader overview of *Battlestar Galactica*'s success.

[2] The Cylons are gradually revealed to consist of various Cylon 'races' – including human-like AIs, a range of more traditionally recognisable machine-like robots, and what are referred to by the human-like AIs as 'hybrids' (who are more 'cyborgian' than the AIs in that they are clearly bio-mechanical beings).

arrival of the Cylons, the Armistice Officer is seen rifling through intelligence documents. These include schematics of how Cylons looked at their last encounter – bulky, archaic robots. The Armistice Officer finds the sudden and unexpected appearance of this new, sophisticated and sexually alluring 'model' so perplexing that he is literally rendered both speechless and physically uncommunicative. Whereas he appears impassive, even inanimate, the Cylon is articulate, full of vitality and vibrancy. Their respective demeanours effectively confound our expectations to such an extent that the viewer is confronted with the stark realisation that the apparently simple question "are you alive?" is, in effect, exceptionally complex, and any potential answer is problematical – and potentially nonsensical. The objective and incontrovertible truth of whether someone (or something) is "alive" has unexpectedly become subjective, variable supposition. This pivotal scene exemplifies how, when the supposedly solid and unyielding barriers demarcating what is 'living' and what is not appear to destabilise, diminish and dissolve, the previously imperceptible space in-between becomes visible and distinct. This interstitial realm is the province of the liminal and it is at the heart of this thesis.

The conception of the liminal and of 'liminality' as it appears within this thesis reflects my understanding - and development - of the work of Victor Turner (1967; 1969; 1974; 1982; 1985; 1986), refined to suit the focus of my own research. Originally coined by Arnold van Gennep (1960) to describe the second stage of a tripartite paradigm in his seminal study of cultural rites of passage (parts one and three being the pre- and post-liminal, respectively), Turner argued for the universal occurrence of the 'liminal' period in wider cultural, political, economic and social contexts, as well as within cultural texts. Whereas Turner employed the concept of liminality to explore a broad range of social exclusions, my working definition has a stricter focus – specifically, the state of existing within a boundary realm between life and death, straddling both extremities but never entirely belonging to either. Although I use the terms in their more general sense when delineating correlations between the liminal characters of my chosen texts and associable sociocultural discourses, 'liminal' and 'liminality' will typically refer to the indeterminate condition and intermediate positioning of these characters – a state of existence I refer to as 'unliving.' Though the Oxford English Dictionary defines this term as

"not living or alive; lifeless," my use of 'unliving' deliberately evokes (and suggests a diametric opposition with) the term 'undead' – a word synonymous with a variety of Horror archetypes such as vampires, ghosts and zombies. However, these archetypes have all crossed the threshold between life and death before returning or being reanimated in some way; they have already passed through the liminal phase and entered a state of post-liminality – hence the requirement for a different term with which we can refer to those characters who are *truly* liminal (in that they occupy an indefinite intermediate space between life and death). Furthermore, the undead are portrayed as having been irredeemably altered by their post-liminality. They are 'othered' – usually perceived to be unnatural or freakish and often portrayed as fearsome, villainous, and malevolent. Even when they are the protagonists, their undead status affords them extraordinarily super-human abilities which emphasise their inhumanity, resulting in their being paired up with a more conventional, human hero.[3] Conversely, the unliving, by virtue of a perceptible struggle to maintain (rather than unnaturally regain) their humanity, are perceived to be *intensely* human and immensely relatable.

It is my contention that the foregrounding of unliving protagonists within numerous programmes constitutes a demonstrable trend in American television Science Fiction during the first decade of the Twenty-First Century.[4] I argue that it is possible to identify a propensity for portraying characters that are delineated and defined by a variety of indeterminate subject positions and, ironically, it is precisely the inability to straightforwardly categorise these protagonists as either living or dead (as opposed to the (pre)deceased 'undead') that brand them as part of a larger

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[3] Cf. *True Blood* (2008-2014) wherein the half human/half fairy lead character, Sookie Stackhouse (Anna Paquin) enjoys romantic liaisons with two vampires – both of whom are portrayed as desirable but who display otherworldly, violent and dangerously unpredictable behaviour (in opposition to Sookie's benevolent and homely steadfastness).

[4] Despite *Battlestar Galactica* and *Caprica* having been filmed in Canada, and the former also being part-financed with the British broadcaster BSkyB, I would argue that all of my chosen texts can be labelled 'American' as they display a recognisable aesthetic associated with 'Quality' U.S. drama, they were all created/overseen by an American crew and feature a cast of predominantly American actors/American-accented protagonists. For a detailed study of how the 'American aesthetic' absorbs the potential internal transnational conflict brought about by *Battlestar Galactica*'s production context see 'Downloading doppelgangers: New media anxieties and transnational ironies in *Battlestar Galactica*' by Mark A. McCutcheon (2009).

tendency within American TV Science Fiction. The existential questioning of proof of life is central to this development. However, this questioning is intensified and augmented through the use of liminal protagonists as a means of exploring varying aspects of personal identity and, ultimately, questioning what it means to be 'alive' necessitates a broader investigation into what it means to be 'human.'

The use of liminal characters to question notions of human identity is not new in American Science Fiction television (and, in the following chapter, I offer a brief overview of similar characters predating those that provide the focus of this thesis). Nor can liminal characters be said to exist solely within the Science Fiction genre. Before I look at some examples of liminal characters is non-Science Fiction television programmes, it behoves me to give some indication as to how the term 'Science Fiction' will be used in this thesis. It is not my intention to provide a detailed explanation of the term here, however, as Chapter Three centres upon the thorny issue of genre definition in more detail. Nor is it my objective to offer a survey of developments in the academic study of Science Fiction – extensive work has already been accomplished in this regard, such as Veronica Hollinger's tremendously useful (though unsurprisingly dated) synthesis 'Contemporary Trends in Science Fiction Criticism, 1980-1999' (Hollinger 1999). Suffice to say, my use of the term resembles that of a theorist whose definition of 'Science Fiction' has remained the most robust and convincing since it first appeared over thirty years ago – Darko Suvin.

Suvin's *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979), was tremendously influential in several ways. Notable for being a book on the theory of Science Fiction written by an esteemed academic, it was published by a respected publisher and dealt not only with 'high' literature but also popular fiction (or 'paraliterature' as Suvin referred to it). The most remarkable thing about Suvin's book, however, would prove to be its enduring legacy as a method of approaching, defining and studying Science Fiction narratives. It advanced the theory of studying Science Fiction as texts of 'cognitive estrangement,' arguing that this process defines Science Fiction as a genre. It refers to how a Science Fiction text presents a setting or situation which is mysterious, extraordinary and strange, bordering on the apparently impossible (a strange fiction or 'novum') but portrays it in a way that is recognisable, unexceptional and customary, by way of believable scientific theory.

The duality inherent in this framework enables a fresh perspective on the 'real' world by encouraging readers to evaluate it against the imaginary one. The act of cognition does not simply lead to a mirrored reality. Rather, it facilitates discourse between the real and imagined worlds, encouraging the process of appraising and analysing the former for what it is, and the latter for the kind of alternative it offers.

Suvin states that non-cognitive estrangement differs from cognitive estrangement in the way that it does not construct the imagined world by familiar means and, consequently, is unable to provide social commentary. Suvin declares that non-cognitive estrangement can be found in folk tales, fairy tales and myths – so-called 'metaphysical' genres that deal primarily with principles which transcend known science. In these narratives any type of event can occur, any sort of environment is possible and characters are capable of any kind of action or feat simply because the narrative itself is patently impossible. According to Suvin, this type of narrative arises when the novum remains unexplained or unexplainable. Thus, the presence of the novum in itself does not guarantee a text is Science Fiction.

It could be argued that certain liminal characters perform a similar function to that of the novum. Like nova, they are to be found in texts of both cognitive- and non-cognitive estrangement. This thesis is, of course, concerned with the former (i.e. Science Fiction) but liminal characters that occupy an indistinct middle-ground between life and death can be found in a wide range of programmes belonging to various genres (and broadcast eras), their presence suggesting non-cognitive estranging elements within texts which may otherwise appear to be more straightforwardly 'realistic.' For example, in the courtroom drama *Ally McBeal* (1997-2002), the character of Billy Thomas (Gil Bellows) died partway through the programme's five-season narrative but often 'visited' the titular protagonist (Calista Flockhart) after his death. Similarly, in *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005), the employees of the Fisher's funeral home often conversed with the recently departed. However, it was never confirmed whether these characters (amongst similar examples from other contemporaneous programmes) really were caught between the realms of life and death. The suggestion was, rather, that they were delusional manifestations generated by/within the psyches of other (living) characters. These manifestations were present only so long as 'they' were needed, i.e. until the protagonist(s) managed to solve a thematically associated psycho-emotional predicament.

Furthermore, what televisual texts of all genres have hitherto avoided is to make these kinds of liminal characters a programme's chief protagonist. Life/death liminality has rarely been the domain of characters with which an audience would be expected to empathise. They have, instead, been used in a supporting capacity, their ambivalent and wavering subjective positioning within the text existing to contrast with and bolster the relatively robust and straightforward personal identity of the protagonist(s). For example, the deceased Billy's appearances in *Ally McBeal* serve to provide Ally with a means of establishing and expressing her 'real' persona by allowing her to articulate the feelings she keeps hidden from everyone else, whilst conversations between the 'dead' and the Fisher brothers in *Six Feet Under* fulfil a similar function. Of course, the protagonists in these texts exhibit signs of what can be termed 'character growth' (which may be understood as subtle shifts in personal identity), and this is often manifest in a protagonist's realisation of their own self-worth (as in *Ally McBeal*), or acceptance of their own true nature (such as David (Michael C. Hall) coming to terms with his sexuality in *Six Feet Under*). Throughout the course of these narratives, however, as in the majority of contemporaneous televisual drama (including Science Fiction), there was never any doubt regarding the protagonist or protagonists' subject position in relation to life and death. Occasionally, a character wound up in some form of indeterminate state, but only when their entire character arc had been played out (i.e. at a series' conclusion).[5] Meanwhile, recent examples of American television Science Fiction have exhibited a marked inclination to centre their on-going narratives around protagonists whose subject positions regarding life and death are unfixed, unknowable or in a state of flux. The emergence of these characters has yet to be properly discerned, studied and appreciated and one of the aims of this thesis is to redress this imbalance.

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[5] An example of a previously 'stable' protagonist's character arc ending in just such an indeterminate state occurs in the final episode of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (1993-1999). During the closing scenes, Captain Benjamin Sisko (Avery Brooks), whilst engaging in physical combat, falls over a cavernous precipice, apparently to his death. However, he later 'visits' with his wife, Kasidy (Penny Johnson), explaining to her that he has joined 'the Prophets' in the 'Celestial Temple' (how members of the native Bajorans refer to a group of alien beings who exist outside of 'normal' space-time, and the wormhole these aliens 'built'), and that he will return to her one day "maybe [in] a year, maybe yesterday" (7.25, 'What You Leave Behind').

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Television: Legitimate and Illegitimate Art Forms and Approaches

Employing the hitherto under-studied phenomenon of the unliving in American Science Fiction television as a basis, this thesis explores the wider (and oft-contentious) field of Television Studies – specifically questions regarding what constitutes a 'legitimate' approach in TV Studies. Television is, I would argue, ripe for study - now more than ever. The last decade has seen exponential growth in innovative viewing technologies including HD and 3D TV, Digital Video Recorders (DVRs), as well as a popularisation of new forms of media hardware such as Apple TV and Roku boxes. More recently, video-on-demand and streaming services including Netflix and Amazon Instant Video have diversified by, for example, creating exclusive original content such as Netflix' *House of Cards* (2013-) and *Orange is the New Black* (2013-), or offering free access for subscribers of the company's other services (e.g. Amazon Prime customers).   Meanwhile the purchasing of TV episodes through iTunes (as well as their illegal downloading via bit torrent websites) has become routine practice for millions of consumers, whilst 'long-tail' consumerism facilitated and sustained through internet retailing makes the release of many obscure, overlooked or previously neglected programmes on DVD and Blu-Ray a financially viable endeavour. Furthermore, not only does television's easy and widespread availability enable viewers to consume their chosen programmes in a manner which befits their personal lifestyles and schedules, but it has the secondary effect of emphasising the text over associated peripheral processes such as the dictates and constraints of (ir)regular broadcast schedules and the diverse range of potential breaks often associated with traditional ways of viewing TV (between instalments or seasons, or within individual episodes). As Jason Mittell has argued in relation to the DVD box-set (and whose argument is equally as applicable to the other aforementioned viewing routines), "the ability to watch DVDs on your own time and pace, without commercials or interruptions, helps emphasize the medium's artistic merits over commercial imperatives" (Mittell 2010a).

All these developments coalesce to ensure that current television audiences are well-served and that TV, as a communication and entertainment medium, continues to play a significant role in the everyday lives of most people in the developed world.

As Gary R. Edgerton and Michael T. Marsden assert in their introduction to a special 'Television as Text' issue of the *Journal of Popular Film & Television* in 2012:

> Television as a convergent technology, a viable art form, a global industry, a social catalyst, and a complex and dynamic reflection of the many audiences it reaches around the world is alive and well in the 2010s. The reinvention of TV during the Digital Era (approximately 1995-present) is merely the third major transformation of a medium that has developed through a prehistory (before 1947), a Network Era (1948-1975), and a Cable Era (1976-1994). Television today has grown more personal, adaptable, available, portable, and widespread than at any other time in its history… Despite premature forecasts of the medium's demise, television has proven more resilient than ever. (Edgerton and Marsden 2012, p. 3)

Obviously the very existence of publications such as the aforementioned *Journal of Popular Film & Television* (and the recently-launched *Journal of Popular Television*) proves that the medium attracts a certain amount of academic interest. Historically, however, Television Studies was often regarded as either a component part of the wider category of Media Studies (with its corresponding emphasis on the social and political ramifications of TV as a method of disseminating ideas), or as a derivative of Film Studies. The latter tendency proved to be especially troubling as it was frequently accompanied by the condescending and disdainful perception of TV Studies as the study of a poor relation to film – film being construed as a more 'legitimate' form of artistic expression. This attitude was informed by wider cultural debates around artistic valuations of both media – whereas 'cinema' was often regarded as an 'art' and the act of viewing films in the correct 'space' requiring an excursion to the movie theatre, the TV screen had an everyday presence within the home and was frequently perceived as (literally) part of the furniture, its product regarded as a sort of 'set dressing.' Thankfully, there were exceptions to these notions and, as both the method of delivery and the perceived 'quality' of both cinematic and televisual content continue to change, increasingly overlapping and resembling each other in many different ways, one may argue that these distinctions matter less and less. Exaggerated or not, however, it cannot be denied that these interpretations are, even today, not uncommon. Furthermore, I'd argue that they

have been maintained, at least in part (and possibly unintentionally) by a general disinterest on the part of the academy, until comparatively recently, in recognising/(re)constructing the lineage of Television Studies. This is despite the undoubted impact within the wider fields of media/communication/cultural studies generated decades ago by studies such as Horace Newcomb's *TV: The Most Popular Art* (1974) and Raymond Williams' *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1974 [1990]), and subsequently by works as diverse as Jane Root's *Open the Box* (1986) and Robert J Thompson's *Television's Second Golden Age* (1996). Providing a comprehensive history of the lineage which exists around these milestone volumes would be an immense undertaking and outside the remit of this thesis but, fortunately, the process of identifying and 'rescuing' this lineage has already begun.[6] I do believe, however, that a brief survey of recognisable trends within the field will prove beneficial in positioning my own work in relation to both historical and contemporary debates around television. I argue that TV Studies may need to consider textual and narrative trends and tendencies in the medium more than it has done previously in order to select the most suitable methodologies for the study of those same texts. Therefore, it is vital that I provide some detail about traditional approaches before I can suggest an alternative which, I believe, proves its effectiveness when considering one of these developments in particular – the rise of the 'unliving' liminal protagonist.

Arguably, the first example of a serious, sustained academic study of television *as* television (and not just as exemplar of the media industries' many modes of communication) was Horace Newcomb's *TV: The Most Popular Art*, published in 1974. Whereas earlier television theorists, such as Marshall McLuhan, had posited that the televisual image was not straightforwardly interchangeable with that of the photographic or filmic, this demarcation was made solely to distance those 'genuine' art forms from the inauthenticity of television. Newcomb also recognised differences, but he did so in order that he may advance a theory of television as a separate - but not inferior - art form. Acknowledging previous work

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[6] Evident through the increase in publications and events centred upon the history of TV Studies such as the *Generation(s) of Television Studies* symposium held at the University of Georgia on 12 April 2013.

on television by social scientists such as Eugene David Glynn and Leo Bogart, and (mass) cultural theorists such as Dwight McDonald and Ernest van den Haag, Newcomb addressed and refuted their concerns regarding the supposedly detrimental effects of television watching before arguing his case for TV as 'the most popular art.' The book featured separate chapters on what we would now recognise as genres, but which he labelled 'formulas' (for example, sit-coms, courtroom dramas, and soaps). He hypothesised how these various formulas, although shaped by different stylistic, thematic and narrative concerns, actually had more in common with each other than with similar output from other media. Newcomb ended his book with a call to distinguish a 'television aesthetic' whilst simultaneously acknowledging the centrality of sociocultural context to a fuller understanding of the text, prophesising the continued advancement of the importance of television in terms of both popularity and artistic expression.

1974 also saw the publication of another title which would become even more influential than Newcomb's – Raymond Williams' *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*. Whereas Newcomb's focus was on television as text, Williams' interest lay mainly in the corporate, commercial and technological aspects of the medium. However, the book is primarily remembered for Williams' exploration of how scheduling affects content and the concept of 'flow.' The popularising of this concept was to have enormous impact upon studies of television in the years to come. Whereas Williams' book was undoubtedly welcome in that it was (and remains) an impressively measured and theoretically-detailed academic study, making use of much empirical analysis in a field not typically associated with such objective methodologies, it is also unquestionably true that its success helped overshadow other potential approaches which may not have relied quite so heavily on empiricism and, as a result, were often accused of a lack of impartial academic rigour and a tendency to overstate the importance of the text at the expense of commercial and technological contexts. I discuss flow more fully when I introduce my own methodology (the impact of the concept was such that it would be impossible for me not to acknowledge and address it). Suffice to say here that the ramifications of Williams' work were felt throughout the field of Media Studies and they loomed large in the burgeoning field of TV Studies in the following years.

It would be unfair to suggest that textual approaches to television, as exemplified by Newcomb, were completely side-lined by the success of Williams' work and the impact of the notion of flow. Indeed, one of the most enduring cornerstones within the field of television studies has been the regularly updated book *Television: The Critical View* (1976; 1979; 1982; 1987; 1994; 2000; 2007). Edited by Newcomb himself, there have been seven editions to date – each one reflecting trends within television studies with certain chapters enduring over several editions before being replaced by more timely/relevant pieces.

Academic attitudes towards Television Studies (and our understanding of what the field entails) have come a long way since the earliest of Newcomb's edited collections wherein he even felt it necessary to explain the absence of any criticism originating from newspapers (Newcomb 1976)! Indeed, the past few years have witnessed the launch of various academic journals specialising exclusively in Television Studies. These include *Critical Studies in Television: The International Journal of Television Studies* (first published by Manchester University Press in 2006) and *The Journal of Popular Television* (Intellect Books, 2013). This is not to suggest that a consensus has been reached on what count as 'legitimate' scholarly discourses around television, or how valuable certain approaches to the study of the medium may be. Even well-respected theorists such as Mittell are often compelled to address the doubts and criticisms of fellow television scholars (cf. Mittell 2010) and, as I have previously mentioned, the lineage of Television Studies has often seemed frustratingly phantasmal for many years. In part, this thesis represents an attempt to endorse the existence of a distinguishable lineage of Television Studies. It does this not by endeavouring to obfuscate the diversity of the constituent elements which, together, lead to its establishment, and I would not dare to suggest that Television Studies, as an academic discipline, is not riven with internal discrepancies because, after all, it is - as are most other disciplines. Rather, this thesis endeavours to corroborate a TV Studies lineage by celebrating and developing its chimeric qualities and, subsequently, drawing upon an array of resources – access to which is enabled by virtue of the multidisciplinary nature of Television Studies.[7]

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[7] The centrality of this liminal aspect of TV Studies to my thesis is examined in greater detail in Chapter One.

In his editorial for the first issue of *The Journal of Popular Television*, James Leggott notes how "Television studies has of course moved well beyond its infancy, but the field is still developing and expanding in fascinating ways" (2013, p. 4). It is hoped that this thesis will, in some small way, contribute to the continued development of this fascinating thriving discipline. With so much current popular, critical and academic activity concerning television, there has never been a more potentially productive opportunity to study television as an art form and to investigate the trends, themes and preoccupations presented within TV texts. As Michael Kackman has stated:

> Both television and the academic discipline that has developed around it have steadily gained legitimacy and accrued cultural capital over the past two decades. The medium – once roundly dismissed as a guilty pleasure or "bad object" – is now regularly discussed in aesthetic terms previously reserved for the relatively more legitimate popular art form of cinema. Auteurism and formalist narrative analysis are resurgent, finding their preferred object in the "mature" complexity of the contemporary serialized prime-time drama. (Kackman 2010)

This thesis is grounded in just such a narrative analysis of this form of television drama, although my chosen texts belong to a genre which has not always been held in such high esteem - Science Fiction.

Science Fiction: Discourses, Debates and Definitions

Viewers of Science Fiction television, arguably more than those of any other genre, are avidly courted by various sections of the entertainment industry, being perceived as a potential market of early adopters,[8] and consuming a wide variety of content over a multitude of platforms. But, far from being perceived solely as the domain of 'geeks' and 'nerds,' Science Fiction programmes have also come to occupy coveted

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[8] 'Early adopters' is a term used to identify those consumers who are willing to buy the latest technology as it appears, rather than wait to see if it becomes commercially viable. As much of Science Fiction is also interested in the exciting potentialities of new technology, the perceived correlation between viewers of Science Fiction television and these early adopters is logical and understandably widespread.

time-slots in television schedules, as well as prominent positions in 'new season' advertising campaigns of almost every U.S. network. Most notably, the all-important 'Fall schedules' which mark the beginning of the TV year are brimming with Science Fiction premieres (as well as those of Fantasy and Horror programmes, genres often associated, and frequently conflated, with Science Fiction). Even in the U.K., though most prime-time programming on the terrestrial channels (BBC 1 and 2, ITV, Channel 4 and Five) is customarily made up of domestically-sourced content, many of the digital channels (particularly Sky, FX, E4 and More4) are crammed with imported dramas – most of them American, and a disproportionate amount (certainly by traditional U.K. television scheduling standards) are contemporary Science Fiction. Furthermore, these programmes often make up the lion's share of 'high-profile'[9] digital television output. These include those which provide the focus for this thesis – namely the aforementioned *Battlestar Galactica* and *Caprica*, *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* (2008-2009), and *Dollhouse* (2009-2010). To this list of high profile televisual Science Fiction texts, we can add *Almost Human* (2013-2014), *Defiance* (2013-), *The Event* (2010-2011), *Falling Skies* (2011-2015), *FlashForward* (2009-2010), *Fringe* (2008-2013), *Heroes* (2006-2010), *Terra Nova* (2011) and *Under the Dome* (2013-), as well as certain Fantasy and Horror programmes which, depending on how one chooses to define 'Science Fiction,' could potentially be considered borderline Science Fiction texts – for example, *Lost* (2004-10), *The Walking Dead* (2010-) and *American Horror Story: Asylum* (2012-2013).

This question of definition has plagued Science Fiction since its conception, predates any televisual iteration and has, perhaps, suffused more academic discussion around the genre than any other aspect. As I have already indicated, I examine problems of definition in relation to Science Fiction television in particular in Chapter Three but, I believe, a brief historical overview of how the term 'Science Fiction' has been interpreted provides some useful context here.

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[9] 'High profile' in this instance being those programmes which garner the most media attention through advertising (both on-air and ancillary campaigns) and coverage in those TV listings magazines aimed at viewers with access to digital television ('TV & Satellite Week' and 'What Satellite & Digital TV' etc.) rather than those aimed primarily at terrestrial television viewers ('Radio Times,' 'TV Times,' 'What's on TV' or 'TV Choice' etc.).

The origins of Science Fiction criticism are predictably sketchy but J. O. Bailey's *Pilgrims through Space and Time: Trends and Patterns in Scientific and Utopian Fiction* (1947) can be considered a creditable starting point. Bailey defined 'scientific fiction' as "a narrative of an imaginary invention or discovery in the natural sciences and consequent adventures and experiences… It must be a scientific discovery - something that the author at least rationalizes as possible to science" (p.312). Hugo Gernsback, in the April 1926 issue of *Amazing Stories* magazine, had already alluded to this new literary genre (which he called 'scientifiction'),[10] but it was Bailey who first adopted a critical approach. However, the book was based on his 1934 doctoral dissertation and was more of a study of the themes inherent in the genre than an analysis of the narratology of SF.

Bailey's review was limited to non-contemporaneous texts and it wasn't until Damon Francis Knight's *In Search of Wonder* (1956) that a significant attempt was made to examine 'modern' Science Fiction. Knight's book did not attempt to advance a 'unifying theory' of Science Fiction. It was simply a collection of reviews. But it was the first of its kind, the first sustained piece of work to examine the genre, and its importance to the study of Science Fiction was immediately appreciated, earning Knight one of the recently created Hugo awards.[11]

A raft of other 'serious' books on Science Fiction followed shortly after, including Kingsley Amis' *New Maps of Hell* (1960), which – despite its disputed academic quality[12] - became one of the most influential books within the burgeoning field of Science Fiction studies[13] (the first college course on Science Fiction writing had begun at the City College of New York in 1953), and helped make Science Fiction not only an acceptable topic for intellectual debate, but an increasingly

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[10] Hugo Gernsback, 'Editorial' in *Amazing Stories*, 1 (1926) cited in Clute, John and Peter Nicholls 1993 [1999], p.311.

[11] 'Hugo' being the initially unofficial, yet oft-used way to refer to the Science Fiction Achievement Awards which recognised excellence within (and confirmed the growing importance of) the new genre. The nickname (which eventually became official) served to honour the pioneering work of Hugo Gernsback.

[12] The book was a collection of lectures Amis had delivered at Princeton University in 1959 – many of which were, according to Peter Nicholls, "not the most scholarly" (Clute and Nicholls 1993 [1999], p.28).

[13] Cf. Clute and Nicholls 1993 [1999], p.28.

popular one too. Finally, in 1965 an attempt was made to compare all previous critical responses and identify a defining tendency. This was James Benjamin Blish's seminal article 'SF: The Critical Literature,' published in *SF Horizons*, 2 (cited in Patrick Parrinder 2000). However, this still proved problematic as each of the individual studies surveyed varied considerably in quality and style. Though, individually, they had advanced new and stimulating ideas about Science Fiction, collectively the studies failed to provide a satisfying definition and proved resistant to a unifying theory or approach. This was, in part (as Amis had begun to ascertain), because of the inherently political nature of much – if not most – of what could be termed Science Fiction. It was deemed that Science Fiction texts reflected the political beliefs of the writer and, therefore, were so loaded with specific ideologies (whether overt or covert) that a reader or critic would unconsciously be responding as much to the ideology expressed as to the method of expression.[14] Needless to say, a unifying definition of Science Fiction would have to accommodate texts exhibiting all ideologies and political perspectives.

Furthermore, the term 'Science Fiction' was questioned - and found lacking - by respected critics and writers such as Judith Merrill, Brian Aldiss and J.G. Ballard. Merrill – favouring Robert A. Heinlein's term 'speculative fiction' – objected to the necessity of having scientific method as part of the narrative, preferring to shift the focus onto all fictions that contained an element of social change. Aldiss, meanwhile, protested against the self-ghettoising nature of the term, arguing that it suggested a specialist type of fiction when its appeal should be universal, whilst Ballard balked at the very idea that Science Fiction had (or had to include) any real science (cf. Clue and Nicholls 1993 [1999], p.312). It began to look as if a grand unifying theory of Science Fiction would elude critics and scholars alike indefinitely.

Then, in 1979, Darko Suvin's *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* was published. The culmination of years of work, including articles which had already appeared separately in journals and periodicals, it clarified and developed Suvin's own conception of Science Fiction as texts of 'cognitive estrangement.' Suvin argued that the presence of cognitive

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[14] For example, Blish's own *They Shall Have Stars* (1956) was resolutely anti-McCarthyite.

estrangement within its formal framework is what defines Science Fiction as a separate genre. As I have previously outlined, it refers to how a Science Fiction text presents us with a situation or environment which is unknowable, strange and unfamiliar, unnatural or atypical, verging on the seemingly impossible, an *extra*ordinary fiction (what he terms "a strange newness, a novum"), but presents it in a manner which is known, familiar, natural, unremarkable and normal, through ordinary science ('science' in this instance being analogous with the German term *Wissenschaft* or French term *Science* meaning 'knowledge'). The effect of this dual nature, inherent in Science Fiction, results in our being able to look afresh at our own world by comparing it to the fictionalised one, and the cognitive effect does not merely reflect our reality, but also allows a discourse between the two worlds, commenting upon our own.

Suvin's theory was, by no means, the only attempt at defining Science Fiction at this time. Robert Scholes' theory of Structural Fabulation (1967; 1975; 1979) became very influential and was, arguably, the most successful of all the other approaches. A fabulation, Scholes argued, is a text which challenges naturalistic narrative by questioning two assumptions made by these narratives – that we can correctly perceive and truthfully behold the world around us, and that we can then express this truth. Any attempt at verisimilitude may be jettisoned within fabulist texts and replaced with a variety of violations of the traditionally naturalistic text which can affect form or style. For example, the traditionally linear nature of events may be discarded in favour of an approach which positions two contrasting events next to each other in the narrative, sacrificing the 'reality' of the natural passing of time for a clearer view of a 'truth' (whether it be emotional, economic, cultural or political). In this way, narrative form, style or subject matter can be distorted or warped, then evaluated against reality in a conscious (as opposed to cognitive estrangement's largely unconscious) manner and many fabulist texts emphasise the method of their own telling, refuting the cognition which Suvin's theory requires.

Despite the popularity of Scholes' work, Suvin's theory endured and eventually became the most often applied within the field of Science Fiction study. This was partly due to the relative lack of specificity of Scholes' theory, meaning it could also be used for non-Science Fiction (though, admittedly, related) genres such as Magical Realism. In the final analysis, as illuminating an approach as structural

fabulation is, it shares a great many characteristics with postmodernist approaches and its use as a defining agent of Science Fiction is limited.

Metamorphoses of Science Fiction was significant for proposing a theory that offered something so many others had failed to do – a coherent and consistent methodology for defining Science Fiction. For this reason, it remains popular to this day and is why I have chosen to use it in this thesis.[15]

Science Fiction, Telefantasy or Cult?

Even when definitions of both 'Science Fiction' and 'Television Studies' can be agreed upon, academic approaches to Science Fiction Television are complicated further by the increasing use of competing designations - principally 'Telefantasy' and 'Cult' – to refer to similar texts. Unlike traditional debates over generic terms that emphasise textual elements which help distinguish between one genre and another (e.g. the iconography of the Western versus that of a Kitchen sink drama), the terms Science Fiction, Telefantasy and Cult are often perceived as being virtually interchangeable. For example, treatises on programmes such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), *Star Trek* (1966-1969), and *The X-Files* (1993-2002) have appeared in a variety of academic tomes whose titles sometimes refer to the texts studied as 'Science Fiction,' sometimes as 'Telefantasy' and sometimes as 'Cult.' The apparent interchangeability of these classifications naturally begs the question of why one would choose one over either of the other two.

Appropriating the term from fan communities, Catherine Johnson (2005) champions the term 'Telefantasy' as a way of referring to those 'fantastic' television texts which are usually labelled Science Fiction, Fantasy or Horror. Acknowledging the problems of definition created by the apparent increase in generic hybridity, Johnson adopts the term as an inclusive signifier for designating texts connected through their portrayal of particular 'unrealities.' She suggests it is robust enough to comfortably accommodate TV texts belonging to all three genres, maintaining an

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[15] Most recently, Suvin's work on cognitive estrangement has been adopted and adapted by critics and academics such as Fredric Jameson and Patrick Parrinder. I examine their refinements in relation to Suvin's original theory in Chapter Three.

implied, recognisable internal integrity whilst avoiding the pitfalls of traditional labelling and the resulting problems with genre theory.

Whereas 'Telefantasy' is medium-specific, the term 'Cult' has been used to refer to a variety of media texts which complicates the process of definition further - just *how* does one arrive at determining qualities that are equally applicable to, for example, a Russ Meyer movie from the 1960s, the British television programme *Ultraviolet* (1998), and the various iterations of the *Star Trek* saga (both televisual and filmic) over its 40+ year history? Furthermore, characteristics that signify what can be regarded as 'Cult' (and what cannot) may be not always be apparent from an analysis of the text itself. As Roberta E. Pearson has noted:

> The mode of reception, rather than the mode of production or textual characteristics, seems best to define cult film… [even as] Scholars have written of cult television in terms of textual characteristics, the mode of production and the mode of reception. (Pearson 2003)

Pearson provides a tentative definition of 'Cult' television which states how Cult TV programmes must fulfil all of the following criteria: they must be plentiful and ubiquitous, with potentially infinitely large metatexts, from which fans fashion their own ancillary texts. Pearson's convincingly rigorous and systematic attempt at defining the term, especially regarding the differences between Cult film and Cult TV, is extremely effective at distinguishing between what may be considered Cult or what may not at any particular time. However, the emphasis on temporally variable extra-textual determinants such as obtainability and fan activity highlights the slippery malleability of the term as a method of categorizing the texts themselves. Ultimately, despite their widespread use as convenient signifiers, the meaning of the terms 'Cult film' and 'Cult television' are too unstable and overly reliant on an awareness and knowledge of peripheral factors to form a cohesive basis for study. As Pearson herself acknowledges, "the industry, fans and scholars use the terms to refer to very different things but all know cult film or cult television when they see it" (Pearson, Roberta E. 2003).

All things considered, at least in relation to this particular project, I favour the term 'Science Fiction' over that of 'Telefantasy' or 'Cult' for the simple reason

that, as undoubtedly problematic as it is, the term 'Science Fiction' is still considerably better defined than either 'Telefantasy' or 'Cult' which, whilst both are useful conceptions in their own right, suffer in comparison with the more established and more recognisably generic term. Bearing in mind that the issue of generic limitations is central to my examination of the use of liminal characters in my chosen texts, this necessity for as much intrinsic generic consistency as possible is not immaterial.[16]

The multi-layered debates around SF/Telefantasy/Cult, however they may be settled, do not signal an end to the struggle regarding how best to group televisual texts. Although similar wrangling over generic definitions exists in relation to a variety of cultural forms (films, plays and books, for example), these have intersected with a separate discourse concerning specific developments in television drama – namely the emergence of 'Quality' and, more recently, 'Complex' TV. Where there once existed a seemingly irrefutable misalliance between television shows regarded as Science Fiction and markers of 'quality,' this incongruence has, over the course of the last ten years especially, become increasingly questionable, with programmes such as *Lost*, *Battlestar Galactica* and *Game of Thrones* (2011-) gaining critical acclaim and attracting a high degree of academic attention (and for their content rather than their function/effects). They are also often nominated for – and win – popular accolades such as Emmys, Golden Globes and Peabody Awards. The increasing mainstream recognition for the genre indicates not only a growing willingness on the part of the award bodies to give serious consideration to these programmes, but also how these programmes' content assists in aligning the texts with notions of excellence.

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[16] This is especially true when I examine Science Fiction and religion in Chapter Three.

Complex TV and the Limits of 'Quality'

Robert J Thompson's influential *Television's Second Golden Age*, published in 1996, documented the emergence and rapid proliferation of what had become known as 'Quality TV.' He maintained that Quality TV consisted of a constantly expanding group of television dramas from a variety of established genres which shared certain formulaic characteristics which meant that Quality TV could, therefore, be considered a genre in itself. Necessitated by the increasingly hybridised and diversified nature of television programmes, the intervening years since Thompson first envisaged this relatively straightforward conception of Quality TV have witnessed an increase in the number of other discourses intersecting, complementing, and contrasting with his ideas. These include the constant formation of new genres and sub-genres, different ways of referring to similar groups of texts which may not necessarily correspond with traditional notions of genre, and questions regarding the very concept of 'genre.' Despite this, Thompson's concept of Quality TV has proven to be a persistently popular method of approaching and categorising certain texts and, rather than diminishing in light of these more recent developments, the concept has evolved in such a way that recent years have seen a recognisable 'second wave' of Quality TV. As Rhys Blakely observed in 2011, "the renaissance of American television, most pundits agree, began on January 10, 1999, when the first episode of *The Sopranos* hit audiences with the force of a pistol butt to the temple" (Blakely 2011). Although Blakely's newspaper article does not use the term 'Quality TV' (and, of course, pinpointing a specific start date for the beginning of any cultural 'moment' is seriously problematic), the "renaissance" he describes refers to those markers which, along with Thompson's original indicators, are associated with second wave Quality TV – specifically, television's new-found capacity to challenge film as the dominant form of storytelling entertainment. Whereas Thompson's study remained very much focused on television's internal mechanisms, the development of Quality TV theorised as an evolution of traditional televisual narrative norms, the rise of second wave Quality TV occurs very much in parallel with a decrease in the supposedly unique pleasures obtainable by watching feature films. Indeed, Blakely's article pivots upon the widespread perception of television's growing tendency for not only encroaching upon particular gratifications

associated with movie-going (notably, high production values), but also enabling both high-profile stars and critically-lauded actors and directors to create 'visionary' texts with an emphasis on artistic, rather than commercial, accomplishments - something seen as incompatible with Hollywood cinema. Furthermore, the extended running time afforded by a television show offers narrative possibilities unavailable to any feature film (either studio-financed or otherwise), and the less restrictive creative environments (both behind the camera and onscreen) of cable channels such as HBO, Showtime and AMC enables programme makers to represent situations, characters and narratives prohibited on network television.

Blakely's article notes the significance of recent Oscar winner Kate Winslet's lead role in the television mini-series *Mildred Pierce* (2011), thereby emphasising the erosion of traditional assumptions regarding the superiority of film over television as an art form. What Blakely does not mention is that the mini-series' writer, director and producer was the critically-lauded, 'indie' favourite Todd Haynes (who has since returned to television to direct a single 30-minute episode of the comedy-drama series *Enlightened* [2011-2013]). *Mildred Pierce*, therefore, can be seen as emblematic of second wave Quality TV, incorporating all of Thompson's markers of quality, whilst also showcasing recognisable 'stars' (it co-starred Guy Pearce amongst other well-known actors), being directed by an acclaimed director, and blessed with a sizeable budget (the period drama boasts a level of both scale and detail that indicates it obviously cost a lot of money to make).

Blakely's awareness of the reasons for, as he puts it, the 'renaissance' of American television demonstrates how discourses around Quality TV have emerged within a wider cultural sphere in both the U.S. and the U.K., and not solely in the academic community. The debates around the apparent convergence of Quality, Mainstream and Cult TV, for example, as discussed by academics such as Matt Hills (2010) also appear regularly in popular journalism - such as the response to the American broadcasting of the BBC's *Torchwood: Children of Earth* (2009) which appeared in *The New York Time*s (Hale 2009).[17] It would be an obvious

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[17] Despite Hale's praising of the high production values of *Children of Earth*, his grudging approval of the performances of the programme's stars, and the fact that the American entertainment press had been hyping it up as a highlight of the summer schedules, he finds it impossible to consider it a 'Quality' television show. Hale choses, instead, to regard it as "good fun" rather than "good" because

oversimplification to assume that such populist debates originate in the corresponding academic discourse but, whatever the exact nature of this relationship, the shared concerns and numerous commonalities indicate the significance and, especially, the relevance of contemporary academic work on television Science Fiction.

Definitions of Quality Television often foreground the importance of multifaceted characterisation, moral complexities and unpredictable narrative development. These traits are undoubtedly comparable to texts such as those which form the focus of this thesis – simply by virtue of a mutual concern with ambiguity and indeterminacy. However, whilst this thesis acknowledges the existence of this corresponding interest within current debates surrounding the definition of Quality TV, my engagement with these discourses is tangential as the emphasis is on Science Fiction's increasing propensity to engage with issues of contemporary human subjectivity through unliving protagonists. In place of an attempt to make my chosen texts adhere (or even forsake) the 'Quality' template, an acknowledgement of the programmes' disposition towards some of that template's attributes instead reinforces a manifestly more natural appellation for these texts – as examples of what Jason Mittell has termed 'Complex TV.'

<u>Quality Complex Science Fiction Television: A Contradiction in Terms?</u>

Despite its undoubted widespread appeal, and the growing tendency within academic circles to accept television Science Fiction as a valid area of study (especially when its approach to character and narrative tallies with that of quality television), the study of certain tropes and topics recur with astonishing regularity – which could be seen as particularly unfortunate for a genre that often provides potentially infinite narrative and formalist possibilities. But Science Fiction academia often exhibits a habitual preoccupation with overly-familiar texts such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or the *Star Trek* franchise (1966-),[18] perennially profiled creative individuals such as

it is "goofy sci-fi." He cannot, however, deny its mainstream popularity as, by the time his article was published, the programme had already garnered solid ratings in the UK.

[18] According to a survey of academic writing on popular culture carried out by *Slate*, the on-line current affairs and culture magazine, *Buffy* has garnered far more academic attention than any other

Joss Whedon and Russell T. Davies, and particularly trendy subject foci such as the industrial and institutional determinants of television Science Fiction (especially concerning currently 'fashionable' broadcasters like HBO), or reception studies (active audiences and textual poaching, in particular). As valuable and welcome as all this academic attention undoubtedly is, I contend that it is equally as important to analyse Science Fiction television programmes that are often overlooked. The dearth of academic attention given to these programmes may be due to a variety of reasons. For example, short-lived tenures (hence my focus on *Caprica* which ran for just one season), their dismissal as critical failures (e.g. *Dollhouse*), or their devaluation for their association with highly 'commercial' properties (the 'low culture' of *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, for example). Similarly, I maintain that it is also crucial to explore rarely-studied aspects of otherwise academically popular texts where their polysemic attributes have been overlooked in favour of prevalent readings. For example, *Battlestar Galactica* has garnered much attention (both in academic and popular discourse) over the past decade. However, the majority of this interest has been in the political dimensions of the text (notably its allegorical association with the 'War on Terror'), to the detriment of other potentially fruitful avenues of study. My thesis attempts to redress those imbalances of theoretical attention in the field of contemporary Science Fiction studies that result from the predominance of the aforementioned trends. This thesis aims to reassert and accentuate the importance of sociocultural contexts which many of these studies fail to consider outside of relatively narrowly-prescribed and well-trodden approaches. Moreover, the number of insightful academic books about television Science Fiction - such as Roberta Pearson's (2009) excellent edited collection on *Lost* - are currently vastly outnumbered by hastily-published anthologies of fan-led or heavily-biased discourses of dubious merit.[19]

Many television Science Fiction programmes, including *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* and *Caprica*, have received almost no academic analysis

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film or television show. The same article also mentioned *Star Trek* as another academic favourite (Lametti et al, 2012).

[19] For example, books with a religious agenda such as (Kraemer, Cassidy et al. 2001) Also, pseudo-academic cash-ins such as (Hatch, Morris et al. 2006)

whatsoever.[20] It is my contention that the relative dearth of scholarly attention paid these texts is, in part, a consequence of a prevalent misconception that, whereas Quality TV (commonly understood as "television worth studying") contains some form of social or political commentary, this is not necessarily true for Complex TV.

According to Jason Mittell, Complex TV can be regarded as a separate and distinct mode of narrative entertainment which emerged during the 1990s. Avoiding the covert (or sometimes blatant) qualitative evocations associated with the term 'Quality TV,' Mittell's article 'Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television' charts the formal attributes of Complex Television, arguing that the phenomenon has redefined narrative norms and is sufficiently widespread that it actually defines contemporary American television. Mittell states:

> At its most basic level, narrative complexity is a redefinition of episodic forms under the influence of serial narration ... Rejecting the need for plot closure within every episode that typifies conventional episodic form, narrative complexity foregrounds ongoing stories across a range of genres. Additionally… many (although certainly not all) complex programs tell stories serially while rejecting or downplaying the melodramatic style and primary focus on relationships over plots of soap operas… Unlike soap operas, these prime-time serials are not uniformly dedicated to delaying narrative closure, as typically these shows feature some episodic plotlines alongside multi-episode arcs and ongoing relationship dramas. (Mittell 2006)

Mittell also notes how Complex TV programmes foreground unconventional storytelling devices such as analepses, alterations in chronology, the repetition of the same event narrated by different characters, and narrative ellipses which lead to the withholding of pertinent information. Narrative complexity thus often necessitates

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[20] As of the time of writing, there are no books (for either an academic or general readership) or academic articles on *Caprica*. Meanwhile, academic study of *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* is comprised of one short article - (Froula 2012) Despite forming part of an immensely lucrative entertainment franchise, the programme has also, so far, fared equally poorly in terms of non-academic publishing – being the subject of one solitary chapter (George A. Dunn's 'True Man or Tin Man? How Descartes and Sarah Connor Tell a Man from a Machine') and a handful of fleeting references in a 'pop philosophy' book - (Irwin, Brown et al. 2009)

"intensified viewer engagement focused on both diegetic pleasures and formal awareness" (Mittell 2006).

Aspects of Mittell's definition of Complex TV would appear to resonate with certain qualities attributed to Science Fiction texts. Indeed, cognitive estrangement could be regarded as an example of a formal narrative device, unconventional storytelling techniques are rife within the genre, and many of Mittell's own examples of Complex TV programmes can be categorised as Science Fiction. However, despite an apparent simpatico between Complex TV and Science Fiction, and the numerous shared attributes between Complex TV and Quality TV, the relationship between Quality TV and Science Fiction is often fraught and may explain the relative dearth of academic attention afforded the genre. For example, both *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* and *Dollhouse* can be discussed as narratively complex but have never been described as Quality television programmes. The latter's narrative is regularly regarded as being as multifaceted as its identity-shifting protagonist, but also incoherent and the programme itself significantly inferior to Whedon's earlier forays into television (*Buffy*, *Angel* (1999-2004), *Firefly* (2002)).[21]

Kackman, noting how many 'low' serial forms such as melodrama are often predicated upon complex narratives, remarks that – despite the shared pedigrees, within varying examples of Complex TV, "kinds of characters, settings, dilemmas, can be seen as cleverly complex, deserving of the 'quality' label…[whilst others] will be relegated to the scrap heap of soapy excess" (Kackman 2010). The difference is made, Kackman argues, not in terms of aesthetics, but culturally, as some forms of complexity have greater emotional or sociopolitical resonances or 'legitimacy' than others. Thus, the question of whether a certain example of Complex TV can also be considered as Quality TV relies on the viewer's level of cultural recognition, based upon their understanding of various sociopolitical determinants such as gender, race, class etc. Kackman notes:

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[21] I believe that the common perception of *Dollhouse* as an 'inferior' text reflects a widespread failure to appreciate the programme's nuances and, in Chapter Five, I make a case for the many merits of the show, suggesting reasons why it has (so far) failed to engage with viewers to the same degree as Whedon's more celebrated television fare.

> Quality TV is in part based upon a set of premises about the particular indexical quality that tv narrative is presumed to have with everyday life. Definitions of quality television, both popularly and in our scholarship, depend on a basic formulation that goes something like this: narrative complexity generates representational complexity; representational complexity offers the possibility of political and cultural complexity. (Kackman 2010)

Whereas Kackman regards this subjective mechanism as hindering the rationality of using 'Complex TV' as a valid label for the grouping of texts, I'd argue that, irrespective of its usefulness as a method of defining certain kinds of texts, it is a useful method of facilitating a transition from purely aesthetic appreciations to a wider contextual understanding. Furthermore, this transition highlights the importance of the concept of personal identity to the act of television viewing in terms of both text and context.

Personal Identity: Text and Context

I use the term 'personal identity' in the widest possible sense in this thesis. It is purposefully nebulous and not dependent upon singular notions such as Cartesian theories of the soul as a unifying authority, or psychological continuity as proposed by John Locke. Rather, my use of the term merely relies on an impartial belief that each individual possesses a sense of self which is both cohesive and persistent – though levels of cohesiveness and persistence may vary from person to person. The question of whether this sense of self is based mainly on mental or bodily substance is left deliberately unanswered as this is a matter which is at the heart of all of my chosen texts, and with which they all engage in different ways – some foregrounding debates around conscious/spiritual continuities, others around corporeal continuity. Indeed, it is my contention that texts which focus upon liminal characters (such as those in this study) represent an attempt to 'work through' issues of personal

identity, and the shifting emphasis between mental and bodily substance provides a suitable axis upon which this similarly unfixed and variable concept pivots.[22]

Personal identity most often revolves around aspects of individual physiognomies, behaviours and preferences. These include gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, culture, nationhood, class and ideology (amongst others). Following Kackman's theory that narrative complexity generates representational complexity and representational complexity offers the possibility of political and cultural complexity, whenever any of these aspects provides the focus of a text (whether that focus lasts an episode, a season, a series, or a franchise), then what is represented/explored (as text) necessitates an understanding on the part of the viewer that corresponding cultural competencies must be engaged in order to fully appreciate the narrative.

One can, therefore, argue that personal identity does more than provide textual subject matter – it indicates context. The process of contextualising consequentially generates discourse – and, through this process, the focus on personal identity expands to include 'identity politics.' Alberto Melucci, explaining the sociopolitical connotations of the term 'movement,' coincidentally provides a proficient definition of identity politics:

> A collective actor which empirically calls itself, or is called by observers, a 'movement', consists of a number of different analytical levels of social action, which are kept together in a historical and political setting under certain conditions. 'Identity politics' is a discursive way to refer to one kind of empirical actors, like the women's movement, the gay and lesbian movement, ethnic revivalism, and so on. (Melucci 1996, p. 187)

Clearly, the past ten years have seen an increase in the visibility of identity politics within American society. The inauguration of Barack Obama as the country's first African American President in 2009, and current debates around the legalisation of gay marriage have pushed issues of race and sexuality to the forefront of public

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[22] Chapter One provides a more detailed exploration of how unliving liminal protagonists can be mapped on a grid illustrating variations in both corporeal/spiritual and mental presence/absence along two separate (but related) continuums.

discourse, whilst the continued socioeconomic inequalities between men and women, and arguments over immigration reform means that gender and ethnicity remain highly-sensitive and hotly-contested subjects. Obviously, it is over-simplistic to suggest a direct line of causality between them but, I believe, it is judicious to bear in mind the possibility that there may exist a rough correlation between the increase in narrative and representational complexity within certain television programmes, and the pronounced visibility of issues of personal identity and identity politics over the last decade or so. I will address this line of hypothesising more directly in the thesis conclusion but these issues naturally intersect with the individual case studies which form the basis of the following chapters. Cumulatively, these examinations may help provide an answer to those questions that loom large over this project – specifically, why do these *particular* kinds of texts feature this *particular* type of liminal character, and why *now*?

Methodology

This thesis examines representations of certain aspects of personal identity as embodied by 'unliving' liminal protagonists in contemporary American Television Science Fiction. By analysing indexical qualities shared between the fictional narratives of these shows and 'real life,' this thesis suggests the potential sociocultural relevancies of these unliving protagonists which, in turn, may help explain their prevalence within the genre at this time.

I begin each chapter by conducting close textual study to identify the dominant tropes and thematic motifs of that text. My chosen method of textual study is narrative analysis. As Mittell (2010) has pointed out, textual analysis of serial television is too often dismissed as an outmoded and irrelevant approach to the study of cultural texts and one of the aims of this thesis is to help repudiate this assumption. It is my contention that narrative analysis provides a valid alternative to currently more fashionable approaches which, taken as a whole, signify a general shift towards examining either the production or the consumption of texts at the expense of the texts themselves.

Despite the relative ease with which we may cluster *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Caprica* and *Dollhouse* together as

'Science Fiction,' their merits as exemplars of the genre have been continually debated and contested within popular and critical (if, rarely, academic) discourse – both in terms of 'Quality'/'Complexity' (i.e. artistic merits) and generic designation. For example, despite being a prequel series to *Battlestar Galactica*, *Caprica*'s melodramatic, soap operatic aspects were regularly cited as one of the programme's most prominent characteristics, both by the programme's creators (cf. Anon 2008) and its detractors (cf. Phillips 2010). Narrative analysis, being equally applicable to any dramatic television genre, avoids the pitfalls of generic specification – as well as other variables such as the presence or lack of indicators of 'Quality,' or a text's authorial status (whether provided by writer, creator, producer, 'showrunner' or network).

The style of narrative analysis I adopt as my methodology resembles the approach advocated by Kristin Thompson – particularly in *Storytelling in Film and Television* (2003) , which proposes a long-overdue televisual equivalent to the process of textual analysis that has been an established part of film studies for decades. Thompson's book is a based on series of linked lectures on the similarities and differences between the practice of storytelling in both media and, as a collection of "essayistic investigations" (Thompson 2003, p. xii), does not provide direct methodological instruction. What Thompson does suggest, however, is a convincing argument for the potential value of adopting an approach to the study of television that resembles the kind of close textual analysis often used in film studies – but one which takes into account the unique properties and characteristics of the televisual medium. Like Mittell, Thompson highlights the conspicuous avoidance of close textual analysis in traditional studies of television, suggesting three broad reasons for this lack of scholarly attention:

> Some hold a lingering prejudice against taking television seriously as an art form. Alternatively, some scholars would subsume individual programs into the broader field of cultural production, encompassing many media. And, third, many scholars have relied – extensively, I shall suggest – on the televisual "flow," or overall scheduling, rather than on single programs. (Thompson 2003, p.3)

In the decade since Thompson wrote these words, the prejudice against viewing TV as an art form has, thankfully, diminished considerably – partly due to the increased academic, critical and popular cultural awareness of the creative possibilities of television exemplified by the second wave of Quality TV. Intrinsic to this general change in attitude is the increasing veneration of complex and/or artful narratives – a development which has helped shift much of the emphasis within academia from a conception of television as a vaguely interchangeable example of 'the Media' towards television as a recognisably unique mode of expression.

Whereas the influence of Thompson's third focus point – televisual flow – has, in tandem with her first two, displayed an analogous decline, it remains a remarkably pervasive concept within the field of TV studies. As I have previously asserted, the concept first appeared in Williams' seminal *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* wherein Williams claimed that "planned flow, is… perhaps the defining characteristic of broadcasting, simultaneously as a technology and as a cultural form" (Williams 1974 [1990], p.88). Williams argued that, whereas television may resemble previous art forms in that it is constructed of distinct units (in this instance programmes, rather than paintings, novels etc.), the experience of consuming these texts is quite different – the act of 'watching television' being a general consumption of an endless flow of units (programmes, announcements, advertisements) which lose their individuality in the process, rather than of several distinct cultural experiences. Although examining flow through the prism of consumption has become standard discourse in Television Studies, this represents a slight misappropriation of the concept as Williams originally coined the term in relation to an aspect of television distribution, namely programming. I would argue that this is one reason why the notion of flow remains widespread within academic approaches to television. Despite the growing acceptance of television as a unique form of artistic expression, and an increasing willingness to accept the programmes themselves as conveyors of this expression, textual analysis remains a comparatively unpopular (and undervalued) methodology in contrast with those approaches that emphasise production and/or consumption. Little wonder, then, that the concept of "planned flow," with its inherent emphasis on industrial/commercial determinants, remains common. The recent upsurge in personalised viewing schedules through DVD box sets, DVRs, streaming services et al., however, indicates that flow is not

the overriding regulating force in regards to the television viewing experience that it may once have been (though the continuing importance of 'event' television and high incidence of 'live' viewing ensures it is by no means defunct), and academic recognition of these developments has resulted in an increased awareness of – and a willingness to implement - textual analysis as a valid methodology. This willingness extends beyond tolerance but, as of yet, a broad embracing of such analysis remains frustratingly elusive. This thesis is intended, in some small way, to help facilitate this adjustment.

As Thompson points out, part of the reason why the concept of flow has remained prevalent for forty years is a general academic disinterest in postulating alternatives. The validity of flow has been considered self-evident and, in the main, this notion has remained unchallenged. There have, however, been attempts to refine the concept in order to make it more relevant in different contexts (whether temporal, geographical or commercial), and to recognise the more active participatory role performed by spectators in the television viewing process. One such attempt which also has a direct influence on my own methodology is Horace Newcomb and Paul M. Hirsch's 'Television as a Cultural Forum,' originally published in the *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* in 1983 and reprinted in the fourth, fifth and sixth editions of Newcomb's aforementioned *Critical View* book series (1987; 1994; 2000).

Newcomb and Hirsch used flow as the basis for their concept of 'viewing strips.' Whereas flow supposes the viewer's television watching experience is identical to the scheduler's programming, viewing strips allow for variations in these patterns caused by the switching of channels. Although this approach, compared with Williams' model, certainly allows for a greater degree of flexibility where viewing experiences are concerned, it remains problematic for a variety of reasons. The high number of variables results in an overwhelming number of potential strips (i.e. "texts"), making extensive analysis simultaneously increasingly unfeasible and potentially meaningless (as many of these texts will be purely theoretical). Needless to say, once again, this approach also disregards the idea that a text's component parts (individual programmes etc.) are worthy of study in and of themselves.

However, 'Television as a Cultural Forum' does, in my opinion, advance an incredibly pertinent and useful proposition – the importance of cultural contexts to

an understanding of televisual texts. Drawing upon the work of anthropologist Victor Turner (which, as I explain in the next chapter, is also fundamental to my appropriation of the concept of liminality), Newcomb and Hirsch note:

> Contemporary cultures examine themselves through their arts, much as traditional societies do via the experience of ritual. Ritual and the arts offer a metalanguage, a way of understanding who and what we are, how values and attitudes are adjusted, how meaning shifts… [Television] focuses on our most prevalent concerns, our deepest dilemmas. Our most traditional views, those that are repressive and reactionary, as well as those that are subversive and emancipatory, are upheld, examined, maintained, and transformed. (Newcomb, Horace (Ed.) 2000, p.564)

Television itself is, thus, a liminal realm – a between and betwixt space where social, cultural and political concerns are re-created, re-interpreted and 'worked through.' Originating from psychoanalysis, the term 'working through' deliberately evokes the process wherein a patient repeatedly recounts the memory of a particularly traumatic experience (which may have only recently been identified as a psychological stressor) in order to better integrate it into their personal history.[23] This concept of television as a mechanism for working through sociocultural issues also finds expression in the work of John Ellis. Musing over the similarities between television and the practice of working through, Ellis has noted how:

> [Television] works over new material for its audiences as a necessary consequence of its position of witness. Television attempts definitions, tries out explanations, creates narratives, talks over, makes intelligible, tries to marginalize, harness speculation, tries to make fit, and, very occasionally, anathemizes. (Ellis 2000, p.79)

Television drama, in particular, is an arena in which potentially disquieting issues can be portrayed and discussed through the relatively safe and accessible

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[23] See Chapter Four for more on the psychological process of 'working through' in relation to trauma.

process of representation. As Newcomb and Hirsch point out, "the rhetoric of television drama is a rhetoric of discussion" (Newcomb, Horace (Ed.) 2000, p.566).

Similarly, the methodology employed in this thesis pivots upon a systematic interrogation of the text through a focus on representation – specifically, representations of personal identity. Although this approach might suggest an emphasis on characterisation (dialogue, personal behaviour, character-arcs), it is by no means limited to character study. Rather, I consider characterisation as a constituent of a text's narrative, along with other facets such as themes, tropes, plot points and story arcs. Collectively, these aspects work in tandem to create what Mieke Bal terms a "narrative system" (Bal 2009, p.3). By focusing exclusively on narrative analysis as my key methodology, other formal aspects (such as sound, image and mise-en-scène) are unaddressed. In no way is this omission meant to indicate that these aspects are unimportant or do not contribute to the liminal aspects of my chosen texts. Indeed, *Battlestar Galactica*, for example, relies heavily on sound and image to signify the presence of liminal phenomena – the eerie music heard when 'Head Six' (Tricia Helfer) appears and the peculiar lighting of Laura Roslin's (Mary McDonnell) prophetic dream sequences are but two instances whereby formal aspects are used to accentuate the supernatural qualities present in those instances, and the repetition of which aids in giving the programme its distinctive aesthetic. However, it is my contention that these (albeit important) formal elements serve to bolster the liminality already inherent in these programme's themes, plots and characterisation. As my case studies will illustrate, these texts put the concept of liminality at the very heart of their narratives. They are, above all else, *about* liminality. Although a study of how the concept is conveyed stylistically would, undoubtedly, be interesting, my focus is on the ways in which these narratives engage with six specific 'markers' of liminality that are expressed in themes, tropes, plot points, story arcs, and characterisation, particularly as it relates to a protagonist's function within the narrative. I detail these markers in the following chapter.

It is my belief that, by analysing a narrative system, one discovers the ways in which texts engage with and explore sociocultural issues, such as personal identity. Indeed, identifying these elements within the narrative is, in my opinion, not only central to understanding the overall significance of a text (i.e. what the text

is really 'about'), but the key to situating the text in its correct social, cultural and/or political context. I maintain that this two-stage process allows an organic 'opening out' of textual study, facilitating a natural progression from the intimate approach of narrative analysis to socioculturally sensitive contextualisation, thereby repudiating commonplace accusations of restrictiveness and ahistoricity often associated with traditional structuralist approaches. By employing it as an essential first step in this two-stage process, I therefore advocate the relevance and effectiveness of the much-maligned process of textual analysis.

Similarly to how the defining characteristic of the unliving liminal protagonist is the act of crossing the boundary between seemingly incongruent and distinct realms, so this 'opening out' of analysis enables an engagement with a diverse number of pertinent and provocative discourses. Furthermore, my methodology recalls that adopted by Karen Lury who noted how her "approach mirrors the activity of television, since it is, in some sense, parasitic on other disciplines" (2005, p.1). To this end, my research is interdisciplinary in nature, utilising studies originating in anthropology, sociology, psychology, psychiatry, philosophy, literary studies, film studies, gender studies, cultural studies and even oncology.

Thesis Structure

Chapter One offers a brief history of liminality, detailing how the concept has evolved from van Gennep's initial theorising, through Turner's practical modifications to more recent uses of what might by now be referred to as 'Turnerian' liminality, before forming my own working definition of a specific kind of liminality which functions as a conceptualised space indeterminably located between the conventional realms of life and death – liminality as the realm of the unliving. I close the first chapter by determining that a 'lineage of liminality' runs through the history of television Science Fiction, fashioning a discernible taxonomy. I offer a brief survey of this lineage before turning my attention to the most recognisable precursor of the unliving liminal human – the cyborg. I examine how this figure has been used in American television Science Fiction to represent the ambivalent relationship between human and machine, and how it has often embodied the duality

inherent in our relationships with new technologies. This duality being both a potential harbinger of a more positive future for humankind and, paradoxically, the threat of a loss of individuality, potential human obsolescence, and the eventual destruction of humanity.

Building upon J.P Telotte's work on the cyborg (1995; 1995a), in Chapter Two I examine what happens when the cyborg is replaced by a new (recognisably 'human') liminal construct, and Telotte's 'public body' is replaced by a body whose precarious existence often relies upon invisibility. Whereas, according to Telotte, cyborgs are conspicuous by their exaggerated physicality, the liminal characters I focus on are observably unremarkable, often physically inadequate or deficient in some way, and sometimes even theoretically incorporeal. I consider what the shift towards greater invisibility might say about contemporary subjectivity, and therefore what thematic concerns the texts themselves exhibit. The titular fugitive of *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* is representative of this type of character and provides the focus for this chapter. Sarah's involuntary obligation to remain socially 'invisible' within the narrative is analogous with her medically precarious standing as a person with an indeterminable diagnosis of terminal cancer.

I argue that Sarah is as much of a liminal character as the cyborg, albeit not of the kind traditionally associated with Science Fiction texts. Human subjectivity in this case is not defined in relation to the binary opposites of human/non-human or (wo)man/machine but to those of life/death and a liminal space that encompasses both. Whereas the Horror genre's undead occupy a more easily defined space in that they are already dead, Sarah inhabits a truly liminal space which lies somewhere between life and death but which also straddles both – she has not yet died, but neither is she fully 'alive.' I look at how Sarah's act of time-travelling beyond the point of her own death in the television programme puts her into a liminal time zone and enables the creation of what Barbie Zelizer refers to as "the subjunctive voice" (Zelizer 2004, p. 162). Zelizer conceptualises subjunctivity as a realm of possibilities – a zone which exists outside of linear time wherein the singular, expected outcome is suspended, allowing for a multitude of various potential outcomes. The subjunctive voice therefore compels us to explore all possibilities - no matter how unlikely – engendered by an image (or televisual text), irrespective of the unavoidable consequences that await a subject in the time period after the events

portrayed in the photo (or text). Subjunctivity presents a temporal reprieve from inevitable events, offering a range of theoretical possibilities where one may expect to find just one singular certainty.

Furthermore, drawing upon Susan Sontag's work on illness as metaphor (1991), I argue that the specific nature of Sarah's terminal illness – cancer – is used to reinforce the idea of Sarah's liminal existence. Adopting Bryan S. Turner's study on the body and society (2008), I propose that Sarah's liminal status as social outsider is synonymous with a rejection of the regulation of her body through various ideological apparatus, resulting in her 'unnatural', diseased condition. I contend that, just as the figure of the cyborg enables an engagement with the sociocultural discomfort and mistrust of new technologies, so the figure of the liminal human subject enables an engagement with discourses around death and illness which is a noticeably prevalent concern in contemporary television Science Fiction. Finally, in response to what I believe to be an inherent Lacanian psychoanalytic imperative within the text, I employ psychoanalytic film theory to reveal how Sarah Connor's liminal nature can be read as an opportunity for her to elude patriarchal conventionality.

In Chapter Three, I examine the programme *Battlestar Galactica*. Like *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, *Battlestar Galactica* features a terminally-ill, fully human liminal subject, Laura Roslin. Like Sarah Connor, Laura attempts to fulfil her goal of ensuring the survival of her species (Sarah via ensuring the survival of her son, Laura through finding a new home for her people). Unlike Sarah, however, Laura's narrative is endowed with spiritual significance, the suggestion that her destiny has been prophesised, and the suggestion that there are metaphysical forces at work. During *Battlestar Galactica*'s final season, Kara 'Starbuck' Thrace (Katee Sackhoff) also becomes a liminal character, her status within the text becoming increasingly mysterious and unknowable as the seemingly irrefutable fact of her continued existence becomes ever more untenable due to mounting evidence suggesting she is actually dead. Like Laura, Starbuck's liminal existence is correlated with a metaphysical schema. In addition to the wholly human liminal characters, *Battlestar Galactica* also features another apparently sentient (yet physically deceased) protagonist - one of the cyborg Cylon 'number six' models (played once again by Tricia Helfer) - who is (apparently) only visible to one other

character, and who claims to be an 'angel'. The explanation for this character's liminal state creates an important narrative enigma within the text which is centred upon the possible existence of a metaphysical being whom the Cylons recognise as 'God'.

I look at how the notion of liminality facilitates a credible and critically-lauded narrative engagement with themes which have hitherto been considered well outside the remit of TV Science Fiction. I argue that, unlike previous eminent American TV Science Fiction properties such as the *Star Trek*, *Stargate* and *Babylon 5* franchises, *Battlestar Galactica* allows for the possibility that religious belief is predicated on the existence of a palpable metaphysical entity, not simply upon faith in an intangible myth of dubious provenance (often the result of self-serving alien intervention). Significantly, the likely prospect of the existence of 'God' provides the show with its underlying and fundamental narrative enigma. Using Darko Suvin's theory of cognitive estrangement, I argue that television Science Fiction has, until recently, failed to go beyond the thematic limits prescribed within this paradigm, despite the fact that its limitations were formulated in regards to literature (which popular cinematic Science Fiction has been contravening for years). The inclusion of liminal characters allows *Battlestar Galactica*, unlike previous examples of American Science Fiction television,[24] to effortlessly employ techniques of non-cognitive estrangement whilst still being categorised (and marketed) as recognisable Science Fiction.

In Chapter Four, I examine *Caprica*'s engagement with the concept of trauma through its focus on the distress and familial crisis caused by the sudden and unexpected death of two teenage girls, Zoe Graystone (Alessandra Torresani) and Tamara Adama (Genevieve Buechner) who then 'haunt' the text as liminal presences. Though physically deceased, they both continue to exist through their own digitised 'avatars'. Whilst Zoe's on-line 'back-up', Zoe-A (an electronic repository of the 'real' Zoe's thoughts and feelings), is initially 'downloaded' into an

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[24] For example, within the *Star Trek* franchise, every God-like being encountered was fraudulent and either an alien like Apollo in 'Who Mourns for Adonais?' (2.02, *Star Trek*) and 'God' in *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier* (William Shatner 1989), or a supercomputer with delusions of grandeur as in 'The Apple' (2.05) whilst the Gods (or 'Goa'uld') of the *Stargate* universe are parasitic organisms that inhabit the bodies of humanoid hosts, using advanced technology to instil fear and awe in their 'subjects.'

advanced robotic exoskeleton (a literal ghost in the machine), Tamara is electronically reconstituted through all the mental and emotional imprints recorded during her lifetime and flourishes inside a sprawling cyberspace, evolving into an almost mythical presence who, ironically, *cannot* die. Zoe-A, is literally de-humanised when she becomes a Cylon but her 'spirit' lives on. Meanwhile the digital version of Tamara exists to all intents and purposes as an intangible version of her 'real' self. Both characters can be read as a challenge to the viewer to see them as anything other than human, forcing us to question whether a corporeal presence is necessarily a pre-requisite for human subjectivity, whilst simultaneously and provocatively inviting us to muse upon the moral and emotional uncertainties presented by the possibility of everlasting life and an end to grief.

Drawing upon existing studies of trauma, I situate the text within larger debates centred upon television's response to (and subsequent portrayals of) sociopsychological reactions to the events of 9/11. I compare texts such as *Caprica* with other sites of liminal engagement, such as the September 11th Missing Person Posters, which obfuscate the conventional boundaries between life and death (cf. Jones, Zagacki et al. 2007). Similarly, the liminal nature of both Zoe and Tamara is facilitated by the programme's simultaneous, dual emphasis on both the philosophical intricacies of life's big existential questions (such as what 'death' means, the possibility of an afterlife) and the emotionally gruelling challenge of dealing with grief and 'moving on.'

My final chapter focuses on the programme *Dollhouse*. Whereas *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, *Battlestar Galactica* and *Caprica* all feature overt Science Fiction codes and conventions (time travel, robots, cyborgs, spaceships), *Dollhouse*, whilst undoubtedly futuristic (notably in the persistent fetishisation of inexistent, highly sophisticated technology), differs from the other series in the characterisation of liminality. The liminal nature of the *Dollhouse* 'actives' is brought about through the separation of mind and body; leaving a (supposedly) 'empty' body that becomes the receptacle for another mind and consciousness. This unusual condition facilitates the exploration of different facets of human identity, most notably concerning matters of sex and gender.

After a brief historical survey of programmes featuring the figure of the 'Action Chick,' I examine how the mapping of narrative agency as a method of

judging gender representation becomes problematic when dealing with a text such as *Dollhouse*. Drawing upon the work of Judith Butler (Butler 1990; 1993), I look at how the programme is far from being 'anti-feminist' as some academics and cultural commentators have argued and, instead, powerfully subverts the notion of gender, ultimately undermining the reductionist trope of the 'Action Chick' so beloved of some feminist critics.

The thesis concludes with a return to Turner's work and his paradigm for the liminal journey, determining its usefulness in examining the portrayal of human subjectivity in contemporary American Science Fiction television, and how the resulting data may be used to contextualise these texts in relation to recent sociocultural developments in the U.S.

Chapter One

Locating Liminality and Defining the Indefinable: Liminal Bodies in the Twenty-First Century (and Beyond)

Introduction

The Routledge Encyclopedia of Postmodernism defines 'liminality' as "denoting an indeterminate existence between two or more spatial or temporal realms, states, or the condition of passing through them" (Taylor and Winquist 2001). This concept is at the heart of my thesis – specifically, as it applies to individuals that exist in-between the realms of life and death, being both alive and dead whilst simultaneously occupying an indistinct middle-ground. Originating from the Latin word 'limen' (meaning threshold), the concept of liminality in cultural studies has become synonymous with the work of anthropologist Victor Turner. Part of my study develops some of his theories, applying them to the field of Television Studies. Turner was, however, expanding on the work of another anthropologist, Arnold van Gennep, and I begin this chapter with a brief review of the work of his predecessor. I do this partly for the sake of comprehensiveness but, most importantly, to incorporate into my study two specific elements of van Gennep's work which Turner chose not to stress – expressly what van Gennep referred to as "the pivotal nature of the sacred" (Gennep 1960, p.12), and a peculiar characteristic of funeral ceremonies.

In this chapter I will broadly trace the theoretical developments of liminality from van Gennep's initial work to examples of more recent uses of his and Turner's theoretical frameworks by modern scholars, identifying common characteristics which have become integral to the concept of the liminal persona. I will then apply these characteristics to the protagonists of my chosen texts, structurally positioning them within the text and in relation to each other in order to expose their liminal qualities. Having revealed their 'liminal credentials' here, I need not concern myself with repeating the exercise in the chapters that follow which, instead, focus thematically on how contemporary American television Science Fiction uses the

concept of liminality to explore aspects of human identity, specifically in relation to terminal illness, religion, trauma, and gender. This chapter ends with a brief historical overview of prominent liminal characters in television Science Fiction in which I suggest how these characters may be read as broadly emblematic of contemporaneous variables, movements and changes within American society.

A Brief History of Liminality

I)   Arnold van Gennep and Rites of Passage

Arnold van Gennep (1873-1957) is generally regarded as the first anthropologist to identify the significance of transitional rituals which accompany pivotal moments of personal change in people's lives. Coining a term which has since passed into popular vernacular to refer to these transitional rituals, van Gennep identified three distinct phases which together constitute what he referred to as the complete schema of 'rites of passage' (Gennep 1960)[25]. The first phase consists of preliminal rites wherein a subject belongs to/forms part of a particular realm or state. The second phase consists of liminal rites which refer to the subject's transition from this realm/state to another. Finally, post-liminal rites refer to the incorporation of the (now previously) liminal being into the new realm/state.

Elaborating on his tripartite paradigm, van Gennep noted that, although its presence is variable, the notion of the sacred is pivotal to rites of passage. In particular, Van Gennep details how the nature of the relationship between those within the liminal realm (what he refers to as 'the neutral zone') and those on either side is affected by notions of the sacred. Specifically, the territories on either side of the neutral zone appear sacred to whoever is in the zone, but the zone, in turn, is sacred for the inhabitants of the adjacent territories. Whoever passes from one to the other finds her/himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: s/he wavers between two worlds (Gennep 1960, p.18).

The idea of either side of the liminal/non-liminal realm divide perceiving the other as sacred is a recurring theme in my chosen texts and I will elucidate

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[25] Originally published as *Les Rites de Passage* in 1908.

further on this matter in Chapter Three. Suffice to say here that, applying van Gennep's theory, I have identified this trope as a prevalent constituent of the relationship between liminal and non-liminal characters. However, when it occurs in a cultural text/performance, rather than a social rite of passage, the emphasis on the sacred can be seen to shift towards favouring the pre- and post-liminal realms as sacred, rather than the liminal realm itself which is often conceptualised in negative terms, at least initially.[26] Also of note is van Gennep's discovery that, whilst one might expect rites of separation to be the principal component of funeral ceremonies (i.e. those that occur during the post-liminal period), it is actually transition rites that become most prominent. Unlike other rites of passage which favour the ritual phase that would appear most apposite to the nature of the ceremony being performed and its occurrence in one's life cycle (e.g. ceremonies celebrating birth and childhood favour preliminal rites, those celebrating initiations and marriages favour liminal ones), ceremonies concerning death favour liminal rites, not post-liminal rites as one might logically expect. Although the anthropological nature of van Gennep's work naturally focuses upon death ceremonies as performed and experienced by the bereaved and not on those of the deceased her/himself, I have observed that the affinity with liminality expressed through the rituals is mirrored in the fictional portrayal of human subjects who are (technically) dead or who are, colloquially speaking, "at death's door." Furthermore, understanding how death can be construed as a liminal condition suggests how Television Science Fiction is able to open up a discursive space where conventional wisdom suggests it would be impossible to do so. As I will demonstrate, these texts refute the existence of a life/death binary in favour of a continuum wherein one 'bleeds' into the other.

Although his work mainly focused upon non-Western tribal rituals, van Gennep's key contribution to the field of anthropology was the supposition that the tripartite schema of rites of passage is fundamentally universal. He also deduced that the three phases varied in importance depending on the nature of the rite of passage.

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[26] *Caprica*, perhaps more than any of my key texts, demonstrates how the power relationship inherent in the pivoting of the sacred can shift considerably within narratives featuring the unliving (see Chapter Four).

These two factors were pivotal in ensuring that van Gennep's work would prove highly influential within the field of cultural anthropology.

II)   Victor Turner: Liminality as Sociocultural Experience

The interdisciplinary nature of Victor Witter Turner's (1920-83) work ensured that his research (and, by extension, van Gennep's) has proven as significant outside the field of symbolic anthropology as it has within. Over the course of his career, Turner revisited the concept of liminality on countless occasions. It became a cornerstone of his research which he revised when necessary and from which he developed further concepts, such as that of 'communitas' (an unstructured community wherein all members are equal) which would, in turn, also prove influential within the field of cultural theory. This thesis will focus primarily on Turner's core work on van Gennep's theories regarding rites of passage which, for the purposes of my research, is noteworthy in several respects. What follows is a brief overview of Turner's development of van Gennep's work, emphasising those elements which I have identified as being particularly pertinent to contemporary American television Science Fiction (as suggested by my chosen texts). My reading of Turner is tempered by the fact that his research (especially his earlier work) focused on neophytic tribal rituals. To this end I have broadened my focus to concentrate on those characteristics which can be found within liminal subjects in general.

Although still adhering to the tripartite paradigm, Turner focused mainly on the concept of liminality, the middle stage of van Gennep's schema, and those who undergo the liminal journey. Turner noted how, during their liminal period, the human subject's social positioning is reconceptualised as being that of an outsider. In anthropological terms liminality denotes an "interstructural situation" (Turner 1967, p.93) and the liminal subject becomes structurally, if not physically, invisible. Further demarcating the liminal subject is a conspicuous symbolic affinity with death. As Turner notes:

> The symbolism attached to and surrounding the liminal *persona*
> is complex and bizarre ... The structural "invisibility" of liminal

personae has a twofold character. They are at once no longer classified and not yet classified. In so far as they are no longer classified, the symbols that represent them are, in many societies, drawn from the biology of death, decomposition, catabolism, and other physical processes that have a negative tinge. (Turner 1967, p.96)

Turner goes on to elucidate how one of these physical processes is menstruation. He states that menstruation is unfavourably regarded when it is conceived as the absence or loss of a foetus. This biological process (obviously restricted to the female body) creates a link between women and loss in a manner which makes a corresponding association between men and loss patently impossible. Perhaps this helps explain why the female body has traditionally been used to embody absence and a mere object for male desire whereas, a man, as the perceiving subject, embodies presence.[27] Furthermore, in addition to the symbolising of loss, the process of menstruation involves the dissolution of boundaries demarcating the interior and exterior of the human body and would, therefore, appear to be an isomorphic equivalent of the concept of liminality itself, which is often construed simultaneously as emasculating and threatening. As Dawn Heinecken asserts,"the boundaries of the female body are flexible, permeable, more easily threatened with invasion than the tightly contained male body; *at the same time* the very liminality of the female body is threatening, evoking anxieties about mortality" (Heinecken 2003, 137). This convergence of womanhood, penetrability and absence emerges as a recurrent theme in cultural representations of femininity, with the bodily processes involving loss often cited as a reason why this confluence. Although the shared sex of each of the female unliving protagonists in my chosen texts would appear to support this theory, in Chapter Five I draw upon the work of Judith Butler (Butler 1990; 1993) to question whether this kind of biologically essentialist argument is actually helpful or theoretically sound. Suffice to say here that, at least superficially, as far as the representation of unliving protagonists in American television Science

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[27] Cf. Laura Mulvey's Freudian-derived theory of why women are used to represent the threat of loss because, in regards to the phallus, the female body is a body that lacks (Mulvey 1975, p.6). Although Mulvey's argument is psychoanalytic in nature, and the theorising derived from Turner's work is biologically essentialist, I would argue that both explanations as to why women's bodies should so often be used to represent absence are not incompatible.

Fiction is concerned, there is a natural correlation between women and life/death liminality.

Turner's observation that the symbolism around liminality draws upon the biology of death is also significant as it highlights a fundamental aspect of the concept of liminality which appears to be so powerfully self-evident that it can often be indiscernible: the fact that liminality is as much about the end of the *pre*liminal as it is about the liminal journey itself. Furthermore, developing van Gennep's assertion that the rites of passage performed during death rituals are predisposed to favour the liminal phase of his tripartite schema, I would suggest that the inherently empathic relationship that exists between liminality and death is a mutual one. I propose that liminality is often as central to how death is perceived as death is to the concept of liminality, and that the use of liminal characters to explore the concept of death in television Science Fiction is a not only fitting but innately apposite.

Similarly, the liminal subject's intrinsically ambiguous condition whereby s/he is neither living nor dead, and yet also simultaneously both, opens up a subjunctive space which, as Turner has stated, exists "as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise" (Turner 1967, p.97). I maintain that it is this quality that makes liminal characters ideally positioned to contemplate and explore a diverse range of human identities, subjectivities and experiences and, by extension, the social environments to which they relate. Intrinsically resistant to the process of categorisation, unfettered by social status or position, liminal characters do not represent absolutes. They signify *possibilities*:

> Just as the subjunctive mood of a verb is used to express supposition, desire, hypothesis, or possibility, rather than stating actual facts, so do liminality and the phenomena of liminality dissolve all factual and commonsense systems into their components and "play" with them in ways never found in nature or in custom, at least at the level of direct perception. (Turner 1986, p.25)

Ironically, this innate subjunctive quality serves as a defining characteristic of the liminal protagonist, and their indeterminate status may be manifest in a variety of

ways. In my chosen texts, for example, it is made evident through terminal illness, metaphysical affinity, and mind/body schisms.

As a consequence of their boundless, potentially infinitely limitless nature, liminal characters are often perceived as dangerous and/or socially poisonous. Their lack of social 'reality' (which, in Turnerian terms represents 'anti-structure') is anathema to non-liminal subjects, whose sense of consistent 'selfhood' hinges upon a belief in their irrefutable presence in a social order. The unstructured existence of the liminal subject is, therefore, antithetic (and potentially polluting) to 'normal' society. This helps explain why liminal subjects are structurally invisible: acknowledging them would prove perilously paradoxical in a society founded upon a theory of structural cohesion. Ironically, it is the involuntary withdrawal from society that makes them perfectly suited to the act of observing it, commenting upon it, and even 'working through' problematic concerns and offering theoretical solutions.

The interstitial nature of liminal subjects manifests itself in a variety of ways, dependant on which aspect of personal identity is being ritualised/explored. Of particular note, however, is how politically-charged distinctions that appear static and axiomatic outside of the liminal phase are challenged, disputed and opposed within it. The most provocative examples of this type of engagement often involve gender and sexuality. Whereas in ritual these challenges are symbolic, they may manifest themselves through other means of representation within cultural texts.   In keeping with their unstructured existence, sexually liminal characters may be asexual, bisexual, possess characteristics of both sexes, or be entirely sexless. Whereas liminality facilitates an unfettered exploration of gender and sexuality (amongst other things), these attributes are traditionally considered absolute and unalterable in pre- and post-liminal spaces, conceptualising those who would challenge them as outsiders lacking social presence.

Complementing their lack of social status, liminal characters are often characterised by lack in general. This aspect of liminality led Turner to develop his concept of 'communitas.'   Favouring this Latin term to 'community,' "to distinguish this modality of social relationships from an 'area of common living,'" (Turner 1969, p.96). Turner hypothesised that communitas exists where social structure is absent and is populated by those who fall into the interstices of social structure, exist on its

margins, or occupy its lowest rungs. In other words, although it includes liminal subjects, it can also include those non-liminal individuals who have either rejected social norms ('drop-outs') or are rejected by the social mainstream (the 'under-classes'). Turner explained further inherent dissimilarities between liminality and communitas thusly:

> What I call liminality, the state of being in between successive participations in social milieu dominated by social structural considerations, whether formal or unformalized, is not precisely the same as communitas, for it is a sphere or domain of action or thought rather than a social modality. Indeed, liminality may imply solitude rather than society, the voluntary or involuntary withdrawal of an individual from a social-structural matrix. It may imply alienation from rather than more authentic participation in social existence. (Turner 1974, p.52)

The lack that partly defines the concept of communitas is adopted voluntarily by those who intentionally inhabit the margins of society but is merely circumstantial normalcy for those who are in some way socially inferior, or those liminal beings who occupy an interstitial zone. I would maintain that the narrative impetus of those cultural texts which feature liminal protagonists is often provided by an individual's need to reverse the structurally negative characteristic of possessing nothing, and that the prospect of (collective) communitas is made complex and problematic by their (individualised) liminal natures.

Turner eventually applied his theories to a wider array of social processes than those he had studied whilst formulating them. Expanding his research geographically, he also began to consider the historicity of the concept of liminality. Turner argued that liminality is a genuinely timeless, universal sociocultural experience which remains relevant as its parameters evolve, alter and even shift: "Yesterday's liminal becomes today's stabilized, today's peripheral becomes tomorrow's centered" (Turner 1974, p.16). Furthermore, in relation to the inherently endurable and adaptable quality of liminality, his arguments can be viewed as advocating the perceiving of popular culture as a site of considerable power and social influence:

> I would suggest that what have been regarded as the "serious"
> genres of symbolic action – ritual, myth, tragedy, and comedy
> (at their "birth") – are deeply implicated in the cyclical repetitive
> views of social process, while those genres which have
> flourished since the Industrial Revolution (the modern arts and
> sciences), though less serious in the eyes of the commonality
> (pure research, entertainment, interests of the elite), have had
> greater potential for changing the ways men relate to one another
> and the content of their relationships ... To be either their agents
> or their audience is an *optional* activity – the absence of
> obligation or constraint from external norms imparts to them a
> pleasurable quality which enables them all more readily to be
> absorbed by individual consciousness. Pleasure thus becomes a
> serious matter in the context of innovative change. (Turner
> 1974, p.16)

In addition to presciently promoting serious academic study of popular culture, Turner also unknowingly precipitated his research's influence on those working outside his own discipline by advocating interdisciplinarity, particularly between the social sciences and the humanities:

> This book is programmatic perforce because it strays beyond
> disciplinary frontiers. Its main imperfections derive from such
> incursive nomadism. But I would plead with my colleagues to
> acquire the humanistic skills that would enable them to live
> more comfortably in those territories where the masters of
> human thought and art have long been dwelling. This must be
> done if a unified science of man, an authentic anthropology, is
> ever to become possible. (Turner 1974, p.17)

In his later work, Turner was passionate in his advocacy of the arts as the locus wherein the "explanation and explication of life itself" was to be found (Turner 1982, p.13). The anthropology of performance, he argued, is a vital element of the anthropology of experience. Echoing his own definition of the concept of liminality, he maintained that those aspects of human subjectivity that are usually suppressed and obscured through everyday sociocultural experience are, in art, given form, voice and substance. Whereas Turner's belief in the artist's purity of expression, unhindered by cynicism or political agenda, could be viewed as somewhat naïve, his

conviction in the power of art to articulate opinions, feelings, experiences and even lives which often struggle to be seen or heard is certainly considered and convincing:

> By means of such genres as theatre ... performances are presented which probe a community's weaknesses, call its leaders to account, desacralize its most cherished values and beliefs, portray its characteristic conflicts and suggest remedies for them, and generally take stock of its current situation in the known "world" ... Artists have no motive for deceit or concealment, but strive to find the perfect expressive form for their experience ... Once "expressed" ... as works of art, readers, viewers, and hearers can reflect upon them since they are trustworthy messages from our species' depths, humanized life disclosing itself, so to speak. (Turner 1982, pp.11-15)

Turner himself acknowledged how his work correlated with his personal "voyage of discovery" (Turner 1982, p.7) which led him from established anthropological studies of ritual performance - such as those initiated by van Gennep - to the study of how symbolic anthropology finds expression in theatre and the arts in general. His journey, his advocacy of interdisciplinarity, and, above all, his pioneering work on communitas and - especially - liminality, are not only significant in and of themselves but also for catalysing further work within and outside the fields of anthropology and cultural studies.

III)   Liminality After Turner

The years following Turner's death in 1983 have seen his theories adopted, adapted and extended by countless other theorists and academics from a number of different disciplines in their attempts to understand and analyse a variety of social practices and cultural texts. Within academic discourses of performance, Turner's theories of anti-structure and communitas have, arguably, been the most widely disseminated. This is unsurprising considering that his later work was grounded in that area. Liminality, however, remains the most characteristic and identifiable Turnerian concept due in the most part to its intrinsically adaptive and accommodative attributes and, consequently, its employment in a wider array of discursive fields.

Turner took the theories he had formulated around the ritualistic practices of specific tribal cultures (notably the Ndembu tribe of Zambia) and applied them to the broader concept of 'advanced Western society.' Conversely, most subsequent academic work in this area has, in the main, focused upon reversing this propensity for generalisation and has, instead, attempted to situate liminality as an essential feature of specific practices, political ideologies and cultures. Robert Daly, for example, by locating Turner's work in studies of American literature and cultural criticism, suggests that the liminal existence of the early Pilgrim forebears ("stranded on that shoreline, no longer British, not yet American") remains entrenched within the American psyche (Ashley 1990, p.72). He asserts that not only do liminal scenarios frequently recur throughout American history, but that American culture repeatedly exhibits the need to address them, as well as a tendency for liminal awareness. Whereas Daly situated it as an innate cultural (nationalistic) attribute, Barbara A. Babcock suggests that liminality, alongside bricolage and multivocality, can be actively appropriated in order to structure a feminist approach to the study of cultural texts. Alternatively, its employment within those texts may function as "a deliberate critique of masculine structures" (Ashley 1990, p.95). Taking her cue from the object of her study, Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*, Babcock hypothesises that the act of repeatedly focusing on the 'in-between' functions as a form of feminist questioning, emphasising the artificially axiomatic nature of that which usually remains unsaid or unnoticed. By ensuring that "every level of narrative context or setting from the most distant to the most immediate ... [is] an interstitial space" (Ashley 1990, p.93), Woolf politicises the concept of liminality. Woolf emphasises the anti-structuralist potential of liminality by using it as a means of prising open a discursive space where, ordinarily, there is a tacit acceptance of the status quo. Woolf's use of liminality, therefore, highlights its potential to illuminate social malevolencies.

This propensity of Turner's to conceptualise the liminal as a wholly benevolent and beneficial condition has led some critics to argue that this tendency diminishes the incisive efficacy of his theorising. C. Clifford Flanigan, for example, argues that Turner's focus on the transcendental possibilities of anti-structure came to dominate his later work and his fixation on the cultural-affirmative aspects of myth and ritual proved detrimental as he failed to accommodate the deeply

subversive elements existing within the liminal stages of a number of them (Ashley 1990, p.53). Flanigan's assessment exemplifies a recurrent critique of Turner's work – specifically that his concepts of liminality, anti-structure and communitas betrayed his ideological predisposition towards apolitical conservatism. Seen in this light, one could argue that liminality is, ultimately, sociopolitically irrelevant as the liminal period is merely a temporary digression from social norms and traditional structure. Meanwhile, those transcendental possibilities of which Turner was so enamoured are mere mirages whose sole purpose is to help maintain the status quo through the facilitating of an inconsequential exploration of alternative sociocultural or political potentialities.

Although some critics have found these aspects of Turner's theories of liminality and anti-structure to be crude and far more politically conservative than they may initially appear, it cannot be denied that the majority of the work done regarding liminality over the past quarter-century has served as an exploration and deepening of the themes inherent in Turner's original paradigm, not as critique. Liminality has been identified as being an inherent and significant constituent in the works of literary giants such as Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne and H. G. Wells (Ketterer 2004, p.183), as well as more recent popular novelists such as Agatha Christie, Neil Gaiman and Philip K. Dick (Klapcsik 2012). Furthermore, Turner's work appears to be growing in popularity and liminality itself is becoming increasingly conspicuous in popular culture, the concept constituting the impalpable core of television programmes such as *Lost* (2004-2010), *Heroes* (2006-2010) and *Awake* (2012), movies such as *Twilight* (Catherine Hardwicke, 2008) and *The Terminal* (Steven Spielberg, 2004), and novels such as *The City and The City* by China Miéville (2009) and *The Liminal People* by Ayize Jama-Everett (2011). Meanwhile, Flanigan's critical claim that "the greatest limitation in ... Turner's otherwise extraordinarily insightful perspectives" is that he is an essentialist, offering his views "as truth, not as heuristic devices, but as descriptors of being" (Ashley 1990, p.57) actually suggests how one can move beyond those apparent limitations. I would argue that what Turner's concepts offer is, at the very least, a sound basis from which to commence a study of sociocultural texts and phenomena. As envisaged by Turner, liminality, anti-structure and communitas are useful *models* which can be appropriated (or, when necessary, discarded) in order to explore issues

of social or personal identity, deepening our understanding of human subjectivity. Most importantly, we must acknowledge the importance of the liminal in opening up a discursive space in the first instance, and the enormous potential of subjunctivity. As Jon McKenzie has argued, "the subjunctive mood of the 'as if' ... must be understood not in opposition to an indicative mood of 'it is', but as ultimately related to an *imperative* mood which commands 'it must be'" (McKenzie 2001, p.168). In order to fully appreciate Turner's concepts we must partly disassociate them from their structural anthropological origins and fashion them into broader theoretical paradigms. The sheer interdisciplinary breadth of research which uses Turner's work as a means of initiating study indicates that this work has already begun, but also that the full potential of Turner's work is yet to be adequately realised.

Liminality in the 21st Century

> "In human history, I see a continuous tension between structure and communitas, at all levels of scale and complexity." (Turner 1974, p.274)

Although this quote of Turner's refers specifically to communitas, it could just as easily apply to his concept of liminality. According to Turner, the sites of liminal engagement vary and shift over time but liminality as a transitional process involving individuals undergoing various life crises remains constant and universally applicable. I would add that, just as the boundaries of liminal engagement ebb and flow, so the social landscape shifts and alters and liminality as a means of observing, engaging with, and theorising solutions for social concerns and problems becomes correspondingly more or less relevant. One could argue that, had it not been for the particularly intense sociopolitical climate of the sixties and seventies, marked as they were by conflict within and between various social groups and communities and the impetus to understand them, Turner's theories of liminality and communitas may not have appeared to be as relatable - or become as influential as they have. Similarly, I would argue that trends in popular culture influence how character is conveyed and identity is rendered within cultural texts. As noted in the introduction, the concept of 'quality' has become a prevalent force within contemporary television. Part of what

defines quality television is the predominance of psychologically complex characters adopting ambiguous positions and viewpoints, often in socially indiscernible situations. Little wonder, then, that liminal characters are rife in contemporary televisual texts. As Turner asserts:

> Liminality itself is a complex phase or condition ... Ambiguity reigns; people and public policies may be judged sceptically in relation to deep values; the vices, follies, stupidities, and abuses of contemporary holders of high political, economic, or religious status may be satirized, ridiculed, or contemned in terms of axiomatic values, or these personages may be rebuked for gross failures in commonsense. (Turner 1986, p.102)

Turner's research eventually led him to hypothesise that the arts constituted sites of cultural exchange where liminality could best be utilised to give 'anthropology of experience' its fullest expression.[28] Of all the arts, Turner focused most intently on theatre. Although this was, in part, a choice borne of personal penchant (his mother was a repertory actress), his research also seemed to favour theatre as the art form most suited to explore social, cultural and political mores through its foregrounding of the liminal.[29]   He maintained that theatre had legitimated experimentalism to an extent where conventional, Aristotelian modes of representation could be challenged and discarded:

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[28] In his later work Turner distinguished between liminality 'as lived' through real-world rites of passage, and liminality 'as performed' in entertainment media and cultural texts, devising the term 'liminoid' to refer to the latter. I have chosen not to adopt this distinction for a number of reasons. Firstly, in the interests of clarity and simplicity as the similarities between the two terms far outweigh the differences. Secondly, I would argue that, the dividing line between 'real-life' and 'entertainment' has become much more tenuous since Turner first conceived of these differences. The distinction becomes increasingly arbitrary as, on the one hand, cultural texts display a greater tendency to readily embrace 'real world' concerns (as the following chapters will attest to) and, on the other, 'entertainment' becomes increasingly central to people's 'real' lives (as technology becomes increasingly portable, through the advent of multi-platform opportunities for engagement, and as social networking and virtual worlds continue to replace the 'real world' as spaces of social encounters).

[29] This conceptualising of the performing arts as sites of liminal engagement continues to this day. Indeed, one of the most prominent academic journals devoted to performance studies is called 'Liminalities' (www.liminalities.net).

> Theatre is, indeed, a hypertrophy, an exaggeration, of jural and
> ritual processes; it is not a simple replication of the "natural"
> total processual pattern of the social drama. There is, therefore,
> in theatre something of the investigative, judgemental, and even
> punitive character of law-in-action, and something of the sacred,
> mythic, numinous, even "supernatural" character of religious
> action. (Turner 1982, p.12)

Whereas the majority of television dramas are still perceived as being relatively
conventional (especially in comparison with the experimental theatre of which
Turner wrote), it cannot be denied that the decades since Turner wrote this statement
have seen television drama as an art form broaden and diversify in its means of
address. Indeed, the sheer number of genre and sub-genre designations has in itself
problematised the notion of genre theory within the field of television studies.
Assuming for the moment that televisual texts *can* be grouped together to facilitate
their study,[30] I maintain that television Science Fiction's inherent potential to
transcend Aristotelian conventions suggests a possible reason why the increase in
liminal characters in television drama is most prominent within this particular genre.
The relatively recent congruence between Science Fiction and 'Quality'/'Complex'
television narratives may suggest why this has been an especially noticeable
phenomenon during the past decade. However, although I maintain that the rise of
the unliving liminal protagonist is acutely historically specific, these characters do
have their antecedents within the genre. In the next section I demarcate and
highlight the genre's tradition of using liminal characters to explore aspects of
personal identity before turning my focus upon the more recent trend of featuring
unliving protagonists, illustrating the ways in which the latter differ demonstrably -
and can be considered a distinct phenomenon - from their liminal precursors.

A Brief History of Liminal Characters in American Science Fiction Television

Coupled with its proclivity for featuring narratives which revel in the traversing of
borders between differing states of being, Science Fiction television's innate generic

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[30] See Chapter Three.

predisposition to blur boundaries separating the known and the unknown provides bounteous opportunities for presenting narratives about liminality and for focusing upon characters who are themselves liminal. In this section, I present an overview of the more notable examples of these types of characters. I maintain that the specific nature of their liminality is often most effectually read alongside their sociocultural context and, to this end, this overview follows a chronological - rather than thematic – order. As the various *Star Trek* television series were the most prominent examples of American Science Fiction television and have dominated popular cultural imaginings of the years 1966-1969 and 1987-2005, there is a focus on the liminal characters to be found in these programmes in particular.

Arguably, the first character in American Science Fiction television that had a distinct liminal identity that not only manifestly influenced their own behaviour but which often impacted on an episode's narrative was Mr Spock (Leonard Nimoy) in *Star Trek* (1966-1969). As the first example of this type of liminal protagonist in a (relatively) successful TV series, it is, perhaps, unsurprising that this pioneer is also the most well-known, subsequently attaining iconic status both within the specialised annals of Science Fiction television and American pop culture, as well as in worldwide popular culture in general. It is my contention that the immediate impact of - and continued fascination with - this character indicates a keen interest by audiences in protagonists exhibiting atypical, ambiguous identities - traits which had hitherto been largely absent from similar examples of American Science Fiction series. Television programmes such as *Captain Video and his Video Rangers* (1949-1955), *Buck Rogers* (1950-1951) and *Flash Gordon* (1954-1955) had, like *Star Trek*, focused on the heroic adventures of space-faring protagonists. However, whereas they had chronicled the derring-do of noble humans protecting the universe from villainous alien 'others,' *Star Trek* offered a sympathetic portrayal of a protagonist who was himself, at least in part, the 'other.'[31] Half-human and half-Vulcan but never entirely accepted by either species, Spock was the archetypal outsider, destined to live alongside them but remain separate and detached and, therefore,

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[31] Even *The Twilight Zone* (1959-1964), a programme that flaunted its liminal credentials in its title, gravitated towards the simple human/other binary, whilst its anthological format precluded any sustained representation of potential hybrid protagonists.

ideally positioned to observe and comment upon both societies. Needless to say, by serving on board a starship populated by humans, Spock's observations naturally tended to focus upon the peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of humanity more than they did on the Vulcan way of life. Spock's function as social commentator was particularly significant in regards to the sensitive subject of racial identity. Indeed, as Wei Ming Dariotis has asserted, "Spock's quest to discover his true identity in the transgressive space between being human and Vulcan is what makes *Star Trek* an important piece of the public dialogue about race, both in the United States and internationally" (Geraghty 2008, p.64).

The fact that Spock's mixed-species heritage is often interpreted as a metaphor for mixed-race identity can be attributed to contemporaneous real-world developments. *Star Trek* aired during a time in which longstanding racial tensions that had, hitherto, been largely confined to the peripheries of the U.S. sociopolitical sphere finally erupted and took centre-stage. It was a flashpoint in the history of racial identity in America, with a rise in peaceful protesting coinciding with other, increasingly violent endeavours. As Tristram Riley-Smith has noted, "by the 1960s, black anger was evident in the extremist views of the Black Panthers and Malcolm X, and in the riots that flared up across the country when Martin Luther King was assassinated in 1967" (Riley-Smith 2010, pp.29-30). Aspects of Spock's personality can be read as a microcosmic distillation of what the race riots were writ large – a challenge to reconcile conflicting ideologies in order to create a unified sense of personal identity.

Whereas Spock was undoubtedly presented as dignified, moral and heroic, the portrayal was also of an inherently conflicted - almost wretched - figure. Hannah Pok has noted that, throughout his many appearances in the *Star Trek* franchise 'universe,' Spock's personal history is marked by an inability to create a unified identity for himself and, to this extent, he represents a variant on the 'tragic mulatto' stereotype (Pok 1999). Although, as the films which followed the cancelled TV series progressed and the character became accepted and even loved by his shipmates, Spock eventually ended up separating himself from his Starfleet 'family,' becoming a peace ambassador attempting to bring about 'reunification' between the Vulcans and the Romulans - conspicuously two races from the same species whose sense of unity suffered such a deep and apparently irreversible schism that they now

consider themselves to be two separate species (*Star Trek: The Next Generation* 5.8, 'Unification II'). It appears fitting that, in the 2009 franchise theatrical movie 're-boot,' attempts by the time travelling 'old' Spock (Nimoy) to prevent the destruction of the Romulan home planet results not only in the destruction of Vulcan at an earlier point in history (reinforcing the outsider status of his 'young' self [Zachary Quinto]), but also maroons his older self in the altered future. Thus he is cut off from the Enterprise crew of his own era and renders himself a lonely outsider for the rest of his days. As if in recognition of the outmoded and offensive nature of the 'tragic mulatto' myth, 'young' Spock is eventually revealed to be in a stable romantic relationship - an unexpected narrative development which the older/'original' Spock never experienced, and which appears to be a deliberate attempt to challenge the dated and stereotypical fate often befalling mixed-race individuals in popular culture. What *has* remained constant in the representation of Spock, from the original series right through to his most recent appearance in the movie *Star Trek: Into Darkness* (J.J. Abrams, 2013), is the way in which he is overwhelmingly defined by his liminality. By defining Spock almost wholly by means of his liminal identity, *Star Trek* propagates the idea that identity is an essentialist concept and this has become common practice, not only in the various *Star Trek* spin-offs, but also in succeeding representations of liminal protagonists in Science Fiction television more generally.

Despite unspectacular viewing figures upon their first airing, all three seasons of *Star Trek* were put into syndication in the 1970s and the programme's popularity increased spectacularly. The character of Spock, meanwhile, became a cult figure with Nimoy feeling obligated to name his autobiography *I Am Not Spock* (1975) in an (unsuccessful) attempt to distance himself from the character he had embodied and whose fame massively eclipsed his own. Therefore it is unsurprising that subsequent Science Fiction programmes began to feature similarly multifaceted and conflicted protagonists – many of whom possessed distinctly liminal identities. Aside from the titular cyborgs of *The Six Million Dollar Man* (1974-1978) and *The Bionic Woman* (1976-1978) (which I discuss in the next section), perhaps the most remarkable and prevalent examples were those that rendered the 'other' aspect of liminal identity as being animal (or animalistic). Heroes such as Peter Parker in *The Amazing Spider-Man* (1977-1979) and Jonathan Chase in *Manimal* (1983) were

forced to keep their chimeric true selves secret. Protagonists such as David Banner in *The Incredible Hulk* (1978-1982) and Eric Cord in *Werewolf* (1987-1988) were locked in a perpetual struggle with their own 'beastly' natures over their sense of personal identity. Liminality, as articulated through these characters, whilst still demarcating them as outsiders, possessed a new quality - imperceptibility. Spock's otherness was signalled by his almost demonic physical appearance, but these protagonists could appear 'normal' for the most part with their 'monstrous' selves hidden away until provoked/released. The effect of this change on these programme's narratives was twofold. Firstly, it imbued the protagonists with inner-conflicts which often had markedly catastrophic and visibly disconcerting consequences such as David Banner 'hulking out' and Eric transforming into the titular *Werewolf*. Even Dr Chase's deliberate 'man-to-animal' transmutations looked disturbingly painful. Secondly, it cultivated the paranoid suspicion that the threatening, potentially deadly 'other' could be anywhere, concealed within anybody. Moreover, the cause of many of these characters' liminal nature was often associated with an established Science Fiction menace, an invisible hazard that carried with it the threat of unnatural and painful mutation – radiation.

The fear of the loss of 'self' and the pervasive threat of radiation poisoning recalled the paranoid invasion narratives so popular during the height of the immediate post-WWII era. Indeed, the resurgence of these themes was far from coincidental as the period in which these programmes were produced (the late 1970s to the mid-1980s) featured a significant re-freeze in relations between the U.S. and the USSR which resulted in it being termed 'the second Cold War.' The years following the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 had witnessed a slight but noticeable easing of tensions between the two superpowers. However, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, coupled with the aggressive political rhetoric and confrontational foreign policy of the newly-elected President Ronald Reagan in 1980 (which was buttressed by politically similarly-minded new UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher), combined to destabilise the fledgling détente and revive lingering Cold War tensions. Once again, sociopolitical anxieties became literally 'embodied' in cultural narratives, with the more overt peril of 'red menace' invaders of 1950s B-movies transmuting into a less conspicuous blending of self/othered identities. As if in recognition of the on-going, worldwide and delicately unstable

balance of ideologies, the fundamental and irrevocable conversion from human to other (the quintessential and standard body-snatcher modus operandi), was reimagined as a lingering liminal state of being. The threat of constant struggle had replaced the fear of a single, traumatic and unalterable event.

It was, perhaps, only to be expected that so much of popular culture in the late 1970s/early 1980s was preoccupied with the perils of radiation since the threat of nuclear war was higher than it had been at any time since the Cuban Missile Crisis. In 1983, for example, there were numerous eminent military undertakings by both the U.S. (including the major exercises FleetEx '83 and Able Archer '83) and the USSR (notably their downing of Korean Airlines Flight 007). The prolonged regularity of such events ensured that sociopolitical anxieties engendered by such unprecedented displays of military force would directly (and indirectly) influence popular cultural narratives. This military and technological one-upmanship paralleled a battle for ideological dominance and neither was limited to the Superpowers' Earth-bound machinations – the USSR scored a significant symbolic victory when Salyut 1, the first space station in human history, was successfully placed in orbit in 1971. Never before had Science Fiction and sociopolitical fact appeared so closely aligned. The U.S.' shortcomings in the all-important 'Space Race' was coupled in the American popular imaginary with a proliferating fear of lethal radiation: the infamous nuclear Armageddon drama *The Day After* (1983) garnered over 100 million viewers on its initial broadcast (Anon 1989). Little wonder that dread of an unseen yet possibly omnipresent threat should infuse Science Fiction programmes in particular[32] - incidentally influencing the nature of the 'otherness' of liminal protagonists.

As both the 1980s and the Cold War drew to a close, and the associated threats of both Soviet supremacy and radiation dwindled, representations of the liminal protagonist became less shadowy and grotesque. Rather, they harked back to friendlier depictions, more easily identifiable as 'othered' and, therefore, less insidious. This was due, in no small part, to the establishment of a *Star Trek*

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[32] Other Science Fiction television texts which rode this paranoic wave included the British series *The Tripods* (1984-1985) and the American series *V* (1983-1985). *V* may not have focused on truly liminal characters (the invaders were disguised as humans but were wholly alien), but the emphasis on a hidden, grotesque self remained.

television franchise. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (henceforth *TNG*, 1987-1994), *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (henceforth *DS9*, 1993-1999) and *Star Trek: Voyager* (henceforth *Voyager*, 1995-2001) all continued to propagate the original programme's liberal humanist agenda, and featured liminal protagonists whose function was to facilitate discourses around human behaviour, as Spock had done. Each series featured prominent characters who were in some way both human (or humanoid) and 'other' to varying degrees. *Voyager*'s Chief Engineer, the half-Klingon, half-human B'Elanna Torres (Roxann Dawson), for example, was notable for her clearly hybridised facial appearance and an inability to reconcile her volatile Klingon temper with her contemplative human temperament, whilst fan-favourite Worf (played by Michael Dorn and who appeared regularly in both *TNG* and *DS9*) was entirely Klingon but had been adopted by humans at an early age and was, consequently, perpetually torn between honouring the customs of both cultures. While both Data (Brent Spiner), *TNG*'s resident android, and Odo (Rene Auberjonois), *DS9*'s shape-shifting Head of Security, both longed to be accepted by (and spent their lives emulating) humans, *Voyager*'s Seven of Nine (Jeri Ryan) was encouraged to reclaim the humanity of which she was deprived when 'assimilated' into the (cy)Borg collective as a child, though the permanent markings of cybernetic implants on her face suggested a lingering 'otherness.'

As with Spock, these liminal protagonists can all be read as cyphers through which we can discern *Star Trek*'s attempt to engage with pertinent contemporary sociocultural concerns and the various modes of liminality which these characters exhibit suggest which of these concerns they literally 'embody.' Though Vulcans and Klingons are usually portrayed as being diametrically opposite in temperament, they also exhibit identical characteristics which suggests their allegorical roles are similarly aligned. Most notably, both are innately violent species. Whereas Klingon society is outwardly brash and aggressive, with an inclination towards hand-to-hand combat with an array of fearsome blades and a reputation for being formidable warriors, Vulcans are conditioned from a young age to master meditative calming techniques in order to keep their inherent ferociousness in check. When situations cause the violent impulses of either species to become unrestrained (usually in battle for Klingons, and when the mating urge known as 'Pon Farr' manifests itself for Vulcans), they become near-unthinking, feral creatures. Additionally, both societies

are shown to be deeply spiritual with particularly strong significance placed on various rites of passage. In this manner, the representation of both species appears to pivot upon the problematic stereotype of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's 'noble savage' and this becomes especially alarming when one considers how *Star Trek* has a long-history of mapping real-world ethnicities and nationalities on fictional species – especially for a franchise that has continually prided itself on its humanist credentials. The *Star Trek* franchise's worrying tendency to problematise mixed-race (via mixed-species) identities remained a constant throughout its tenure on television and remains so to the present day as, despite its negation of the 'tragic mulatto' stereotype through 'young' Spock's blossoming romance with Uhura (Zoe Saldana), Spock's merciless beating of the movie's villain during *Star Trek: Into Darkness*' climax highlights the savagery that exists within this most noble of Science Fiction icons.

Needless to say, not all of *Star Trek*'s liminal characters can, have or should be read as representational substitutes for racial, ethnic or national categories. The franchise's differing approaches to *TNG*'s Data and *Voyager*'s Seven of Nine, for example, reveal a deep ambivalence towards the increasingly prominent role of technology in human society – particularly in relation to advances in biotechnology and technological human augmentation. Although I will address the figure of the cyborg and its importance as a direct forerunner of the unliving protagonist in a separate section, it is worth noting here that the visibly 'othered' Data who, despite his humanoid appearance, has yellow skin and eyes and is obviously a machine, is portrayed in overwhelmingly positive terms. This is in direct contrast with Seven of Nine whose biological nature is not immediately discernible (she is an attractive human female whose body incorporates Borg technology such as 'nanoprobes' but only a few visible implants) and who is consistently depicted as duplicitous, belligerent and ruthless. Her antiauthoritarian disposition contrasts greatly with Data's subservient nature, whilst he displays an open and child-like naivety as opposed to her astute and (seemingly) hard-hearted steeliness. Although Seven mellows emotionally, her technologically-enhanced body remains a continual obstruction to her becoming fully human (which, in *Star Trek* terms is conflated with 'humane'), as well as a site of fundamentally life-altering possibilities (the nanoprobes in her blood having destructive as well as healing properties). Read

against the sociocultural context of the years 1987-2002 (from Data's first to final appearance, with Seven of Nine's tenure on *Voyager* spanning four years in-between), the representations of these two characters suggest that technological advances during this period were treated with cautious scepticism and a hesitant anticipation of where these advances might lead. The general implication being that life-enhancing technological innovation was welcomed unequivocally so long as it remained conspicuous and easily understood, whereas invasive technologies would need to be strictly monitored and closely regulated. I'll return to the sociocultural relevance of the cyborg in the following chapter.

If the most prominent examples of liminal protagonists in Science Fiction at this time were to be found in the *Star Trek* franchise, by no means were they the only ones. *Babylon 5* (1994-1998) featured several whose complex, ambiguous personalities were emblematic of the programme's deft, intricate, and politically-charged narratives. During the course of the series, in an attempt to engender understanding and acceptance between humankind and an alien species (known as Minbari) in the aftermath of a war between the two, both a human named Sinclair (Michael O'Hare) and a Minbari named Delenn (Mira Furlan) use alien technology to transform themselves into human-Minbari hybrids. Whereas the latter's transformation exposes racially prejudiced behaviour in her own people, the former's narrative concludes with the revelation that, by travelling backwards through time, he becomes the progenitor of the Minbari, establishing that their species had never been 'pure' (which had, hitherto, been of paramount importance for Minbari) and revealing their prejudices to be not simply illogical but invalid. These two storylines are typical of the programme's overt allegorising of inter-species/racial/ethnic conflicts - Babylon 5, the titular space station, serving as a meeting point wherein numerous alien species attempted to resolve various disputes. The metaphorical relevance of the programme's representation of a kind of interplanetary United Nations was unambiguously evident as its tenure on television coincided with several significant real life conflicts which were occurring worldwide. These included civil wars in Afghanistan (1992-1996), Algeria (1991-2002), Georgia (1991-1993), Iraq (1994-1997), Sierra Leone (1991-2002), Somalia (1991-), and Yemen (1994). The shadow of the Yugoslav Wars (1991-1999), specifically the Croatian War of Independence (1991-1995) loomed especially large over *Babylon 5*.

J Michael Straczynski, made repeated references to parallels between certain conflicts depicted on the programme and the ethnic civil war in what had been known as Yugoslavia, stressing the way in which failure to address seemingly petty disagreements can often have disastrous consequences:

> "Wars are often fought for reasons that are relatively trivial in hindsight… When you look at what was Yugoslavia – OK, you're Croat, you're Serb, but you're in the same country. You've been there for centuries and suddenly one day, because a word changes, you're enemies and the person who was your next-door neighbour suddenly you want to kill." (J. Michael Straczynski, quoted in Killick 1997, p.51)

The casting of Mia Furlan as Ambassador Delenn also emphasised the centrality of an awareness of real-world politics to the programme. A successful Croatian actress who had controversially declined to take sides during the Croatian War, Furlan had emigrated to the U.S. in November 1991. Although relatively unknown to American audiences at the time, Furlan was an outspoken advocate for peace whose 'farewell letter' to her native country (in which she castigated fellow actors for their unwillingness to take a similar stand and support her) was published in the Serbian newspapers *Danas* and *Politika*, causing yet more controversy and further cementing her extratextual reputation as a politically-motivated individual. Throughout the show's narrative, Delenn's 'combined' racial identity remains a contentious and divisive issue, and the indeterminacy of her personal identity riles and aggravates both humans and Minbari. In a similar way to how Spock symbolised the engagement of racial identities in the U.S., Delenn personifies those contemporaneous conflicts, with Furlan's fame/infamy strongly reinforcing this interpretation.

The most notable of *Babylon 5*'s liminal characters, however, was John Sheridan (Bruce Boxleitner), who replaced Sinclair as commander of the station and became the programme's lead character. In a bid to avoid a massive explosion during a climactic showdown with an adversarial species known as the 'Shadows' who are hell bent on the subjugation of other species, he seemingly falls to his death – only to return to the station, apparently unharmed. It transpires that a being he

encounters whilst on the brink of death is able to revive him by sharing some of its life force. It is explained to Delenn (with whom he is romantically involved) that Sheridan is technically dead, perpetually only a hair's breadth away from expiring completely, and will eventually die before his time. From this point in the narrative onwards, Sheridan occupies a liminal space between life and death. Ironically, although this sets him apart from everyone else, it imbues him with enough authority and influence over his people to successfully unite them (along with other alien species in awe of his ability to bestride the realms of life and death) and lead them to victory in the war against the Shadows as well as a civil war on Earth. Like many Science Fiction programmes at this time – such as *The X Files* (1993-2002), *Millennium* (1996-1999), and *The Visitor* (1997-1998) – *Babylon 5* often implicitly or explicitly referenced religious tenets (especially those concerning angels or the apocalypse) and drew heavily on a popular understanding of millennialism. Drawing on these popular tropes, it utilised life/death liminality as an indicator of the messianic role that Sheridan fulfils in the course of the programme's narrative. In his straddling of the divide between life and death, Sheridan most obviously foreshadows the liminal protagonists of early twenty-first century television Science Fiction which form the focus of this thesis.

Unlike the 'new' liminal protagonists – the 'unliving' as I have termed them – Sheridan's liminal nature remains, in the main, a mere adjunct to the programme's central narrative. This is true for many of the liminal protagonists of twentieth-century television Science Fiction though, by no means, all (as *Werewolf*, for example, attests to). In the following section, I explain the specific methodology behind the process of selecting the four key texts that form the basis of this thesis' individual case studies. It is worth noting here, however, one general distinction between the liminal characters examined above and the 'unliving' – the former are 'liminal' in a generic understanding of the word whilst the latter are liminal in a truly Turnerian sense. True liminality pivots upon the existence of a pre- and post-liminal state, wherein the liminal stage is temporary, and contains an implicit evocation of the concept's origin as part of a sequential schema. General usage of the term, however, equates it with broader concepts such as fusing, intermingling, amalgamation or hybridisation. Even when there is a discernible pre-liminal period (Spider-Man before the radioactive spider bite, for example), there is no

corresponding post-liminal resolution (Delenn and Sinclair's transformations are irreversible, David Banner's condition ultimately incurable). Sheridan's prophesised and eventual passing is a notable exception, once again serving to herald the arrival of a different kind of liminal protagonist. It is to this new archetype, specifically the means by which we can identify it, that we now turn.

Boundaries, Interstices and Text Selection

Evidently, American television Science Fiction has a long association with characters who can be considered liminal (in the general sense of the word). Similarly, the associated genres of Fantasy and Horror have frequently featured half-human hybrids such as vampires (e.g. *Dark Shadows* [1966-1971], *Angel* [1999-2004], *The Vampire Diaries* [2009-]) and werewolves (*True Blood* [2008-201], *The Gates* [2010]), not to mention *The X Files*' myriad of monsters, biological freaks and alien hybrids. These characters have not been short of academic attention (as the various tomes on cyborgs, vampires and the existence of *Buffy* studies are testament to). However, my initial research into this area alerted me to - and led me to focus upon - a different kind of liminal identity.

The selection process began with a general survey of early twenty-first century American television Science Fiction and my realisation that a considerable number featured protagonists who would appear to be in a perpetual state of crisis. Further analysis revealed that these various crises often involved a protagonist undergoing some kind of physical or psychological 'split,' a struggle to maintain a unified identity, or acclimatise to a changed environment in which their sense of self had been challenged. Employing only these features as selection parameters to identify a particular trend, however, proved untenable due to the sheer number of texts in which these tropes appear – in addition to those programmes that I would eventually adopt as my key texts, the list includes offerings as diverse as *The 4400* (2004-2007), *Lost*, *Heroes*, the remake of (*The*) *Bionic Woman* (2007) and pretty much anything created by Bryan Fuller[33] (though his generic output may be more comfortably labelled 'Fantasy'). This list is by no means exhaustive and, having

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[33] Specifically *Dead Like Me* (2003-2004), *Wonderfalls* (2004), and *Pushing Daisies* (2007-2009).

already decided to focus exclusively on American texts, my decision was vindicated by a quick survey of contemporaneous British television Science Fiction which also displayed a marked tendency to foreground characters undergoing this kind of personal identity crisis, e.g. *Demons* (2009), *Life on Mars* (2006-2007), *Ashes to Ashes* (2008-2010) and even *Doctor Who* (notably the 'biological meta-crisis' that created a half-Timelord companion and a half-human Doctor, though one could argue that the regeneration process itself is an identity crisis made manifest).

This then led me to refine my selection further through the adoption of an even tighter thematic focus. It occurred to me that various aspects of human identity were being explored via the concept of liminality. Furthermore, liminality was being associated with entirely human (i.e. not technologically-augmented or biologically-hybridised) protagonists who were somehow alive and dead at the same time, existing simultaneously as both. There appeared to be enormous variance regarding these characters' association with the interstitial life/death realm(s) but, whereas previous work in this area has focused on creatures made liminal by virtue of their having died and then 'come back' (zombies, ghosts and vampires), I identified a cluster of characters who were technically dead but who had not, in effect, crossed the 'final threshold.' Additionally, some characters were still technically alive but had an intimate relationship with death by virtue of a predetermined fate, or their personality 'schism' resulted in their simultaneously being present/alive and absent/dead.

Complicating matters further was a recurring dichotomy between 'body' and 'soul,' between physical death and the cessation of consciousness. Many texts foregrounded the former whilst others very much opened up and explored a discursive space centred on the latter. In order to identify how the characters in these texts reconceptualise death (in either/both of its forms) and to extrapolate how these variant expressions relate to each other I assembled a list of six markers which hinge upon this idea of a life/death liminal identity, based upon my personal extrapolation of van Gennep and Turner's work in this area. The character selection criteria were as follows:

a) Protagonists are structurally 'invisible.'
b) They are symbolically linked with the biology of death.

    c) They are socially 'polluting.'

    d) They exhibit a tendency to problematise traditional notions of gender.

    e) They are driven by the desire to address their 'lack.'

    f) They are involved in an act of 'pivoting the sacred.'

Using this list as a means of selection, I was able to identify texts featuring protagonists that most clearly expressed innate life/death liminality – *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* (2008-2009), *Battlestar Galactica* (2003, 2004-2009), *Caprica* (2010), and *Dollhouse* (2009-2010). These then became my key texts and the following table illustrates how each fulfilled the selection criteria through their liminal human protagonists:

CHARACTER MARKER	SARAH CONNOR IN *TERMINATOR: THE SARAH CONNOR CHRONICLES*	LAURA ROSLIN, HEAD SIX & KARA IN *BATTLESTAR GALACTICA*	TAMARA ADAMA & ZOE GRAYSTONE IN *CAPRICA*	CAROLINE FARRELL/ECHO IN *DOLLHOUSE*
STRUCTURALLY 'INVISIBLE'	SARAH'S LIFE AND HER MISSION DEPEND ON HER ABILITY TO AVOID DETECTION BY THE AUTHORITIES AND THE TERMINATORS.	LAURA'S SURVIVAL RESTS ON THE FLEET'S ABILITY TO AVOID DETECTION BY THE PURSUING CYLONS. HEAD SIX IS UNSEEN BY EVERYONE EXCEPT BALTAR. POST-RESURRECTION, KARA IS PERSONA NON GRATA.	HAVING BEEN KILLED IN A TERRORIST BOMBING, TAMARA AND ZOE EXIST SOLELY AS CONSCIOUSNESS IN A VIRTUAL REALITY ENVIRONMENT.	EXISTING AS PART OF A GROUP OF 'ACTIVES' WHO ARE PROGRAMMED AND DE-PROGRAMMED IN A SECRET FACILITY, CAROLINE/ECHO IS KEPT (FIGURATIVELY AND LITERALLY) 'UNDERGROUND.'
SYMBOLIC LINK WITH THE BIOLOGY OF DEATH	TERMINALLY ILL, SARAH FIGHTS TO PREVENT MANKIND'S EXTINCTION, RELENTLESSLY PURSUED BY KILLING MACHINES WHOSE OUTWARD APPEARANCE HIDES GHOULISH METAL SKELETONS.	TERMINALLY ILL AND FLEEING FROM A GENOCIDAL ATTACK, LAURA ATTEMPTS TO LEAD HER PEOPLE TO A PROMISED LAND BEFORE SHE DIES, BOTH HEAD SIX AND KARA DIE THEN RETURN.	TECHNICALLY DECEASED, TAMARA & ZOE BECOME UNBEATABLE ASSASSINS WITHIN THE VIOLENT CONFINES OF 'NEW CAP CITY.'	ECHO IS IMPRINTED WITH VARIOUS PERSONALITIES INCLUDING ASSASSINS AND A RECENTLY DECEASED WOMAN. EACH 'WIPE' IS LIKE A DEATH AND EACH ACTIVE RETIRES TO SLEEP IN SUNKEN COFFIN-LIKE 'PODS.'

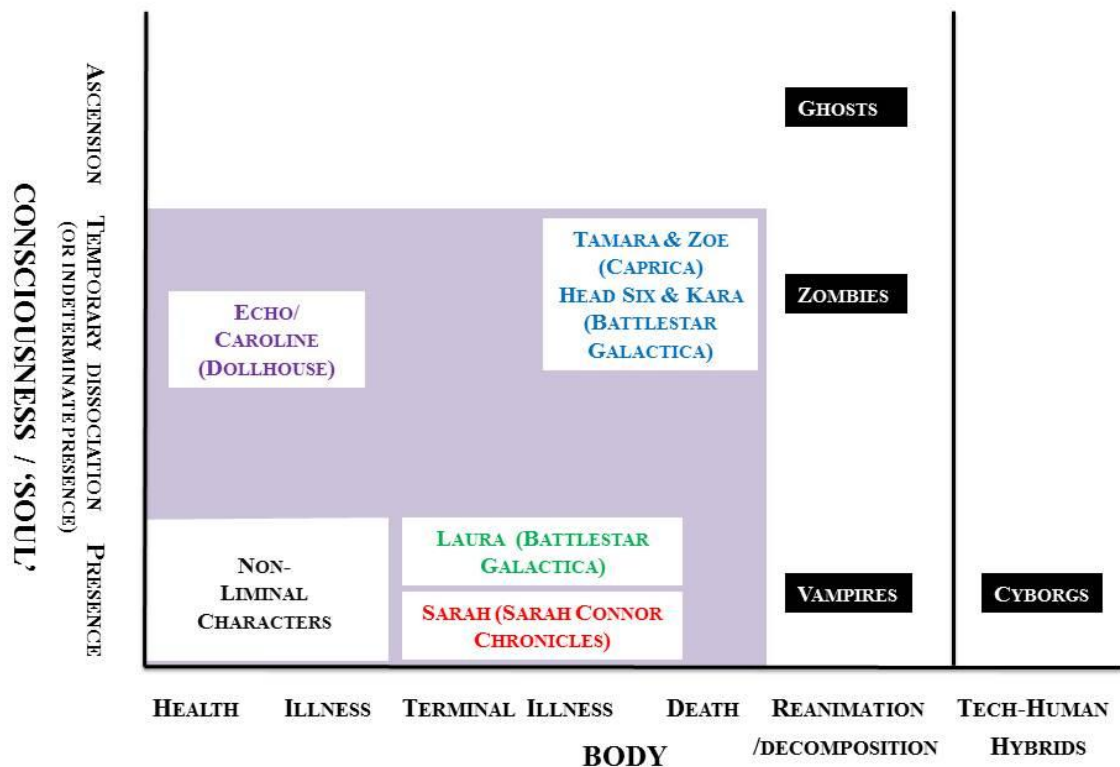| MARKER / CHARACTER	SARAH CONNOR IN *TERMINATOR: THE SARAH CONNOR CHRONICLES*	LAURA ROSLIN, HEAD SIX & KARA IN *BATTLESTAR GALACTICA*	TAMARA ADAMA & ZOE GRAYSTONE IN *CAPRICA*	CAROLINE FARRELL/ECHO IN *DOLLHOUSE*
SOCIALLY 'POLLUTING'	AS A FUGITIVE, SARAH IS CONSIDERED A MENACE TO SOCIETY. FURTHERMORE, SHE IS REPEATEDLY BRANDED A 'BAD' MOTHER (A DESCRIPTION WHICH SHE ACKNOWLEDGES IS ACCURATE).	HER PROPENSITY TO BASE DECISIONS ON RELIGIOUS BELIEFS RESULT IN HER BEING PERCEIVED AS A THREAT TO THE FLEET'S SURVIVAL. HEAD SIX IS THE ENEMY. KARA IS EMOTIONALLY UNSTABLE.	EVEN WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE VIOLENT VIRTUAL REALITY IN WHICH THEY NOW RESIDE, TAMARA & ZOE ARE CONSIDERED PARTICULARLY DANGEROUS AND DISCONCERTINGLY DEADLY.	DOLLHOUSE ACTIVES END UP THERE AS PUNISHMENT FOR TRANSGRESSING SOCIAL BOUNDARIES AND ARE THEN PROGRAMMED TO FULFIL ROLES PERCEIVED AS SOCIALLY REPELLENT E.G. ASSASSINS, PROSTITUTES.
PROBLEMATISING TRADITIONAL NOTIONS OF GENDER	SARAH'S 'HARD BODY' AND SURVIVALIST INSTINCTS ARE SET AT ODDS WITH THE DEMANDS OF HER NURTURING ROLE AS A MOTHER.	LAURA'S TOUGH PUBLIC PERSONA IS CONTRASTED WITH HER MORE RELAXED ATTITUDE IN PRIVATE OR, VIA FLASHBACKS, THE PAST. HEAD SIX IS BEAUTIFUL BUT DEADLY. KARA REJECTS TRADITIONAL FEMININITY.	INITIALLY A TERRIFIED 'DADDY'S GIRL' WHEN SHE LEARNS THE TRUTH ABOUT HER OWN INCORPOREAL EXISTENCE, TAMARA BECOMES A HARDENED KILLER – AS DOES ZOE.	ALTHOUGH CAROLINE IDENTIFIES AS 'FEMALE,' ECHO IS A PURELY MENTAL/EMOTIONAL BEING WHO JUST HAPPENS TO RESIDE INSIDE CAROLINE'S BODY.

CHARACTER MARKER	SARAH CONNOR IN *TERMINATOR: THE SARAH CONNOR CHRONICLES*	LAURA ROSLIN, HEAD SIX & KARA IN *BATTLESTAR GALACTICA*	TAMARA ADAMA & ZOE GRAYSTONE IN *CAPRICA*	CAROLINE FARRELL/ECHO IN *DOLLHOUSE*
DESIRE TO ADDRESS THEIR 'LACK'	SARAH'S OVER-RIDING AIM IS TO SAFEGUARD THE SURVIVAL OF HER SON, THEREBY CREATING A SOCIETY UNTHREATENED BY TERMINATORS, BRINGING TO AN END HER STATUS AS FUGITIVE AND THUS RE-CLAIM HER SOCIAL SUBJECTIVITY.	LAURA'S GOAL IS TO LIVE LONG ENOUGH TO FIND EARTH TO RE-HOME THE REFUGEE FLEET. HEAD SIX SEEKS RELIGIOUS AFFIRMATION THROUGH DOING GOD'S WORK. STARBUCK SEEKS REDEMPTION & PARENTAL FORGIVENESS FOR PAST SINS.	'TAMARA-A' TAKES IT UPON HERSELF TO CREATE A NEW IDENTITY TO REDRESS THE FACT THAT SHE DOES NOT, IN FACT, EXIST. "I'M ALIVE" SHE TELLS ONE OF HER VICTIMS (EVEN THOUGH SHE QUITE CLEARLY IS NOT). ' ZOE-A' 'DOWNLOADS' INTO A NEW BODY (TWICE).	KEPT IN A PERMANENT DOLL-LIKE STATE BY THE KEEPERS OF THE DOLLHOUSE, ECHO BECOMES SELF-AWARE AND VOWS TO DESTROY THE DOLLHOUSE AND RELEASE THE CAPTIVE 'ACTIVES.'
PIVOTING THE SACRED	DURING RARE QUIET MOMENTS, SARAH OFTEN REFLECTS WISTFULLY ON HER LIFE BEFORE, WHILST HER AIM IS TO SAFEGUARD A PEACEFUL FUTURE.	LAURA BECOMES A SACRED PROPHET TO HER PEOPLE. HEAD SIX IS GOD'S MESSENGER. STARBUCK BECOMES A MESSIAH FIGURE.	INITIALLY RESISTANT TO THEIR NEW EXISTENCE, ZOE & TAMARA'S CONTINUING SURVIVAL IS PERCEIVED AS MIRACULOUS BY THEIR PARENTS.	ECHO CAN BE REGARDED AS A NON-CORPOREAL 'SOUL' WHO MANIFESTS OUT OF NOWHERE AND EVENTUALLY LEADS MANKIND TO SALVATION.

Rigidly applying the selection criteria in this manner also helped to identify those texts which, whilst not adhering quite as strictly to the death/life liminality paradigm, demonstrate a noticeable tendency to feature many of the same concerns as those that do. The abundance of these thematically similar texts suggest that not only is the unliving liminal human a recurrent feature of contemporary television Science Fiction (e.g. Peter in *Fringe* [2008-2013], Dimitri in *Flash Forward* [2009-2010)], but also of television programmes which would not normally be considered to be generically similar (albeit in variant forms) – for example, those awaiting burial in *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005). This suggests life/death liminality is a concept capable of transcending generic boundaries, whilst also raising the question of whether the notion of generic boundaries actually serves any useful function in the first instance.[34]

Many of my chosen texts also feature a variety of more generically conventional hybrid-human liminal beings as supporting characters (such as 'Cameron' the Terminator [Summer Glau] in *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*). My focus, however, is on the unliving protagonist(s) of these programmes as there is a distinct lack of academic study in this specific area and these characters are worthy of study in and of themselves. Despite sharing common attributes with human hybrids, the wholly human subject exists in a significantly different structural-symbolic register - as the following illustration demonstrates:

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[34] I address the problematic issue of genre more fully in Chapter Three.

ASCENSION

TEMPORARY DISSOCIATION
(OR INDETERMINATE PRESENCE)

PRESENCE

CONSCIOUSNESS / 'SOUL'

GHOSTS

TAMARA & ZOE
(CAPRICA)
HEAD SIX & KARA
(BATTLESTAR
GALACTICA)

ZOMBIES

ECHO/
CAROLINE
(DOLLHOUSE)

LAURA (BATTLESTAR
GALACTICA)

NON-
LIMINAL
CHARACTERS

SARAH (SARAH CONNOR
CHRONICLES)

VAMPIRES

CYBORGS

HEALTH   ILLNESS   TERMINAL ILLNESS   DEATH   REANIMATION   TECH-HUMAN
/DECOMPOSITION   HYBRIDS

BODY

HUMAN LIFE/DEATH LIMINAL ZONE

Although the various characters that form the foci of my research all occupy similar positions within what I have termed the human life/death liminal zone, the texts explore the issue of human identity through a variety of ways. Occasionally, texts may share a discernible concern with one particular aspect such as gender (*Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* and *Dollhouse*) or trauma (*Battlestar Galactica* and *Caprica*). I have, however, decided to use one text as a primary focus in each chapter. Although each chapter's principal text has been chosen as it is, in my opinion, the one which most clearly demonstrates an engagement with the aspect of human identity under review, what binds these texts together more than anything is their analysis of subjectivity through their use of the concept of liminality.

One particular category of liminal being has consistently attracted a great deal of scholarly interest over the past thirty years – the cyborg. In the next chapter I will incorporate this figure into television Science Fiction's 'liminal lineage.' Like

other liminal beings (such as those discussed in the previous section), the cyborg's status as a partly human subject serves to problematise the concept of personal identity and accentuate their psychological complexity. *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* features one such protagonist, but the programme's main focus is an equally psychologically complex human character. To this end, the programme serves as an exemplar of the shift from traditional liminal constructs to increasingly prevalent unliving liminal characters, and as an appropriate starting point in the following chapter for a detailed and focused study of liminal identity in contemporary American television Science Fiction.

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Chapter Two

New Liminality, New Language, New Life: Terminal Illness, Subjunctivity, and the Lacanian Imperative of *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*

Introduction

In this chapter I examine how *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* (2008-2009) attempts to convey the experience of living with a terminal illness by depicting it as an inherently liminal condition. I look at how this concept echoes configurations of terminal illness by both medical professionals and the terminally ill themselves, and how the resulting/emergent discourses intersect with wider anxieties regarding contemporary subjectivity. I argue that exploring the programme's employment of the familiar Science Fiction trope of time travel reveals how it creates a subjunctive narrative space which closely resembles those experienced or created by cancer patients (as detailed in recent medical anthropological research). I examine how the diseased body at the heart of *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* can be read as emblematic of what could be seen as 'an American sociocultural corpus', and suggest a possible reason why liminal narratives and subjunctive spaces may have a particular resonance for a post-9/11 audience. Finally, I examine the role of psychiatry in *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* and how adopting a psychoanalytic approach reveals a distinctly feminist address within the text. I begin, however, by examining how the programme negotiates established discourses around technology, humanity, and the complex relationship that exists between the two. These discourses find expression in well-established academic explorations of the figure of the cyborg, and its role in Science Fiction film and television.

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Advanced Technology and Liminality: The Cyborg as Social Cipher

> When claims about the epistemological neutral status of nature
> and its rigorous separation from society are challenged by the
> existence of…ambiguous, technologically created entities –
> neither alive nor dead, both dead and alive – moralizing runs
> wild. (Lock 2002, p.41)

This assertion was made by Margaret Lock in relation to what she refers to as 'patient-cadavers'[35] and stresses how, considered in light of the widespread belief in an individual's inherently holistic human identity, the insertion of 'artificial' technology into a 'natural' human body is an act of great personal (and sometimes familial) significance, often challenging social norms and significances. I would argue that the blending of men (or women) with machines generates contentious figures, imbued with social, political, cultural or even religious meaning. Furthermore, as an essentially 'unnatural' entity, I would argue that the cyborg can never simply 'be' - its very existence signals some *intent*, and its presence understandably invites the question of "why?" What is the cyborg *for*? Therefore, the presence of a cyborg in a fictionalised narrative is, in itself, an invitation to question its inclusion, and what it represents.

Although most academic work on the cyborg has focused on cinematic representations, televisual antecedents exist in *The Six Million Dollar Man* (1974-78) and *The Bionic Woman* (1976-78), two of the most popular Science Fiction programmes of the 1970s. They may not have featured the earliest depictions of the cyborg but they have, arguably, become two of the most recognisable. This is, in part, due to their being indelibly linked with the era in which they first appeared – the mid-1970s being a flashpoint for several radical social and cultural forces in the U.S. Most notably these included second-wave feminism and what could be seen as mounting popular technophilia fuelled by unparalleled advances in technoscience. With their remarkable physical and technological prowess, protagonists Steve Austin (Lee Majors), an astronaut, and Jaime Sommers (Lindsay Wagner) can be read as physical embodiments of an attempt to deflect fears of the United States' trailing

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[35] Patients who are kept alive through biomedical technologies such as artificial ventilators.

behind Russia in scientific matters in general (and, despite their earlier success in putting the first man on the moon, the 'Space Race' in particular). They also represent the optimistic belief in the essentially beneficial and life-enriching nature of emergent technologies. Explaining the initial conceptualising of the character of Steve Austin, the producer (and occasional writer/director) of both programmes, Harve Bennett, noted that he "took this fascinating character, a cowboy with a bionic capability, and said, 'How would he be? What will he do? How can he help us?'" (Gross 2011, p.114). It is apparent that, for Bennett at least, the technological possibilities represented by emergent cyborg identities, were not just positive, they were needed. Given the sociopolitical climate at that time, perhaps this is unsurprising. Austin and Jamie projected a healthy, wholesome and potent image of the U.S., in direct opposition to the corruption and disappointment associated with the scandal and embarrassment of Watergate and the Vietnam War.

Despite the initial disgust felt towards the bionic implants by their protagonists, by emphasising the beneficial effects of bionics both programmes attempted to promote an optimistic outlook of human enhancement. Indeed, Steve and Jaime's life-saving bionic surgery raises the possibility that technology may even facilitate a means of evading death itself. In this manner, the narratives of *The Six Million Dollar Man* and *The Bionic Woman* attempt to constrain potentially disquieting discourses around life/death liminality, whilst promoting positive discourses regarding the relationship between technology and humanity. However, both programmes fail to articulate a consistently optimistic discourse regarding the interplay between technology, the human body and personal subjectivity. Rather, they suggest the existence of rather more complex and negative interchanges between these concepts that lie just outside the confines of the narrative. As Tricia Jenkins notes:

> In an impassioned speech to a senator, Jaime explains that since
> receiving her bionic implants, she has continually feared the loss
> of her humanity, but the senator's attempts to lock her in a
> human zoo suggests that politicians operating out of fears about
> national security run an even greater risk of losing their
> humanity as they jeopardize the civil liberties of others.
> (Jenkins 2011, p.101)

The fear of losing one's humanity is at the heart of cyborg narratives. As J. P. Telotte (1991; 1992; 1995; 1995a) has persuasively maintained, these narratives use the figure of the cyborg to explore our understanding of both the possibilities suggested by emergent technologies and the effect they have on notions of human identity and contemporary subjectivity. Furthermore, 'naturally' inherent human attributes are interrogated and often revealed to be essentialist assumptions. Films such as *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982), *D.A.R.Y.L.* (Simon Wincer, 1985) and *Robocop* (Paul Verhoeven, 1987) suggest how we can never be sure where the line dividing the 'real' and the 'artificial' lies, whether it even exists in any real sense or if there is only a spectrum of different permutations. Various forms of liminality are mapped onto this machine/human construct, which then enable metaphorical meditations on topics such as race, gender and sexuality. In this way, human identity is repeatedly redefined, with each new subjective facet expressed through the corporeality of the cyborg.

Despite the success of cyborg movies at the cinema, this success did not translate to particularly noticeable presence on television in the years after 1978 (when both *The Six Million Dollar Man* and *The Bionic Woman* ended their original runs). The prohibitively large production costs involved in realising these characters 'realistically' and convincingly would undoubtedly have been one reason for this relative dearth. But this period also coincided with an increased general awareness of cloning and genetic engineering and this concept appears to have hijacked the collective public imagination previously centred upon cyborg, seemingly rendering technologically-enhanced figures as obsolete and archaic in comparison.[36] Clones and genetically-engineered individuals often shared many of the cyborg's distinguishing features such as super-strength, heightened physical senses and/or amplified intelligence. Representing them on a small-screen budget, however, would have been considerably easier as cost savings could be made in the areas of make-up and special effects (physical and computer-generated). These figures

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[36] The birth of 'Dolly,' the world's first successfully cloned mammal, at the University of Edinburgh in 1996 made front-page headlines all over the world and escalated the pre-existing discourse around the possibilities, dangers and ethical considerations of genetic engineering – particularly in relation to humanity.

appeared in programmes such as *The X-Files* (1993-2002), *Stargate SG-1* (1997-2007), *Dark Angel* (2000-2002) and *Andromeda* (2000-2005). Although the threat of ethically questionable uses of technology continued to feature in many of these texts, the conflicting dichotomy of (wo)man/machine was replaced by a more easily discernible struggle between good ('moral superhero' types such as Max [Jessica Alba] in *Dark Angel*), and evil ('super soldiers' in *The X-Files*, *Stargate SG-1* and *Andromeda*).

The *Star Trek* television franchise frequently featured clones and genetically-enhanced characters - notably Dr Julian Bashir, one of the protagonists of *Deep Space Nine* (1993-1999). However, the franchise also frequently featured the Borg, a cyborg species created through the unwanted annexing and invasive technological 'upgrading' of various other species, which quickly became iconic adversaries. Their popularity did not only help cement the popularity of 'modern' *Star Trek* at a time when it looked as though it was destined to remain in the shadow of its far more feted forbearer, but the Borg became the most high-profile and recognisable examples of the cyborg in any media since *The Terminator* (James Cameron, 1984). First appearing in *The Next Generation* (1987-1994) episode 'Q Who?' (2.16), the Borg are intent on 'assimilating' all other species whose 'biological and technological distinctiveness' they consider worth adding to their own 'collective.' All traces of individuality are erased and subsumed within a central 'hive' mind which is administered/regimented by a single individual, the Borg Queen, who directs the 'drones' in a way that most effectively guarantees the Borg's objectives. Coolly effective and unemotionally single-minded, they are mostly portrayed as an unstoppable 'force' (singular) of nature, rather than a collection of individual combatants. Their popularity escalated with each of their appearances in *The Next Generation*. Consequently they appeared (however briefly) in each subsequent *Star Trek* television series, as well as the theatrical release *Star Trek: First Contact* (Jonathan Frakes, 1996).

The Borg are, in many ways, representative of the archetypal cyborg figure in that they encapsulate the ambivalent relationship between (wo)man and machine – a fear of the erosion or loss of our essential humanity, versus the desirability of a life of physical and mental perfection. Although the Borg's cadaverous pallor and

zombie-like behaviour might suggest an emphasis on the former at the expense of the latter, the addition of a beautiful, blonde and statuesque Borg named Seven of Nine (Jeri Ryan) to the cast of *Star Trek Voyager* part-way through the series' run complicates matters somewhat. The fact that 'Seven' proves to be an invaluable member of the crew due, in part, to her past experiences with the Borg collective, indicates how technological enhancement can be enormously beneficial. As Justin Everett has noted, as well as having their origins in the cyberpunk movement of the early 1980s, the emergence of the Borg is representative of a similar rise in academic, medical and social discourses regarding posthumanism. Furthermore:

> Recent advances in cybernetics – in particular the introduction
> of artificial limbs that respond to nerve impulses and are
> approaching the full functionality of their biological
> counterparts… testify that we have begun to proceed in this
> direction. (Browning and Picart 2009, p.80)

It cannot be denied, however, that texts featuring cyborg narratives are rarely (if ever) wholly positive in their treatment of looming posthumanism and the human/machine dichotomy mostly creates a narrative 'tension' which is used to explore the ramifications of the melding of (wo)man and machine.

Drawing upon Jean Baudrillard's theories of 'overexposure' in the postmodern world, Telotte argues that cyborgs embody fears of the loss of those qualities that distinguish us from machines through their 'obscene' visibility. By foregrounding the cyborg body, narratives accentuate what is lost – a sense of self. Ethereal human subjectivity is obfuscated or even obliterated by the overwhelming physicality of the cyborg. As Telotte states:

> [Cyborgs] reflect not only the hopes and fears that cluster
> around the expanding role of robotics and artificial intelligence
> in our culture but also a growing awareness of our own level of
> artifice, of constructedness, of how we often seem controlled by
> a kind of internalized program not so different from the sort that
> drives the artificial beings' that abound in our films – and,
> perhaps, of how the films that detail these anxieties assist in our
> construction. (Telotte 1991)

Telotte goes on to examine the character of Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton) as she appears in the first two films of the *Terminator* franchise. He notes how, in response to the threat posed by the imminent apocalypse and the mass-production of Terminators it heralds, she transforms herself into what we might call a simulation of a cyborg. The soft and nurturing, fleshy body of the over-emotional waitress of the first film is replaced by a hard, muscular, unsmiling and emotionally-detached warrior in the sequel. In other words, Sarah redefines herself to the extent where she seems more machine than human. Similarly, her alarming physicality (exacerbated by her attire) marks her out as an almost freakishly conspicuous presence and, despite her incarceration, she fulfils the criteria for Telotte's concept of the exposed public body.

Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles, however, offers a radically different depiction of Sarah Connor (now portrayed by Lena Headey). The programme features a traditional cyborg named Cameron (Summer Glau) whose particular form of liminal identity is recurrently compared with Sarah's single-minded dedication to her mission, helping to define and consolidate the latter's sense of personal subjectivity. However, Sarah's character is also defined through recourse to a different form of liminality. Unlike traditional cyborg characters, she is depicted as a purely human subject, whilst still existing in a boundary realm between life and death, simultaneously straddling both (supposedly mutually exclusive) extremes. Far from being an overtly physical and highly conspicuous presence within the narrative like Telotte's cyborgs (or her own cinematic equivalent), the Sarah Connor of the television *Chronicles* is forced to hide from society and adopt a completely new identity. Indeed, the survival of both Sarah and her son is indelibly linked with concealment, living privately, and strictly adhering to social norms (or appearing to, at least). This then begs the question: if the public body is replaced by one whose precarious existence often relies upon being as invisible as possible, what does this say about human subjectivity, and what thematic concerns does the character of Sarah Connor embody now?

"Am I like a time bomb? Am I just going to go off someday?"[37]
 Embodying Liminality Through Terminal Illness

Uttered by Sarah after her actions within a restricted area in a nuclear power plant have exposed her to a high level of radiation, the sub-title quote above reveals her fear of developing the cancer which, according to Cameron (who has foreknowledge of Sarah's fate since travelling from the future), will eventually prove fatal. In the episode wherein these events occur, the link between Sarah's illness and the wider threat of nuclear annihilation is deftly reinforced and underpins the idea that mankind's survival is allied to Sarah's (as she is John's protector and he will eventually be humanity's saviour). I will return to this correlating of the private and the sociocultural in the next section. What I want to examine here is how Sarah's sentiments emphasise the perilous uncertainty of her situation in a manner which, despite being articulated through rhetoric that may at first sound histrionic, is frequently expressed by the terminally ill. For example, musing on his own cancer experience, Arthur W. Frank hypothesises:

> During my embryonic development, some of the cellular
> processes went wrong. Perhaps they went wrong in a way that
> would produce testicular cancer no matter what else happened to
> me. Perhaps this cellular time bomb was waiting for some stress
> or some virus or some combination of toxins we don't
> understand yet. (Frank 1991, p.87)

Although Sarah's unique experience of the uncertainty of terminal illness is conflated with (and magnified by) the artificial (and clearly fictional) process of time-travel, it is expressed within the text in a manner which echoes the documented experiences of real persons with cancer such as Frank, and the common element between both fictitious and factual portrayals is, I would argue, their liminal nature. Indeed, the six markers I identified in Chapter One as the defining agents of contemporary life/death liminal identity (structural invisibility, symbolic links with the biology of death, social pollution, problematising of traditional gender roles, the

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[37] Sarah Connor in *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* 2.2, 'Automatic for the People.'

drive to address a lack, and involvement in the act of pivoting the sacred) reappear time and again (in variable combinations) in autobiographical accounts of the cancer experience. Caryl Sibbett, for example, relates how she "was plunged into a betwixt and between space of risk, suspense and timelessness with a heightened emotional engagement with death and paradoxically life" (Sibbett 2004, p.2) and identifies key aspects of liminality including limbo and stigma as being central to her experience.

Before examining liminality and the depiction of terminal illness in *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, and how the former can be seen as an appropriate concept with which to attempt to convey the experience of the latter, I'll provide contextual information for the *Terminator* franchise which will be beneficial to an understanding of my analysis.

Though it encompasses a myriad of media platforms (including books and video games), the *Terminator* 'universe' is known primarily through the enormously commercially successful movies which chronicle the ongoing battle between an artificial intelligence-controlled machine network called 'Skynet', and resistance forces under the command of a man named John Connor. They fight for the survival of the human race against Skynet's army of cyborg assassins, which are known as Terminators.

The first film, *The Terminator*, opens with a sequence set in a post-apocalyptic future where humanity faces extinction but where the defeat of Skynet is imminent. In an attempt to avoid its own destruction, Skynet sends a Terminator (Arnold Schwarzenegger) back in time to kill John Connor's mother, Sarah , before he is born, thereby preventing the resistance from ever being founded. With the fate of humanity at stake, John has sent a soldier named Kyle Reese (Michael Biehn) back to protect his mother and ensure his own existence. His mission is a success and, though the victory costs Reese his life, Sarah survives. Newly-emboldened and with foreknowledge of the future, she prepares for the impending apocalypse. She is also pregnant with Reese's child, who is, of course, John Connor.

The sequel, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (James Cameron, 1991), sees Skynet once again attempting to alter the future by changing the past – this time by sending a more advanced Terminator, the T-1000 (Robert Patrick), back through time to kill John as a boy in 1995. By this point, John (Edward Furlong) is living

with foster parents whilst Sarah is being held in a hospital for the criminally insane, having been arrested for terrorist attacks against a laboratory developing cutting-edge AI technologies, attempting to convince others of the existence of the time-travelling Terminators. During the course of the narrative, Sarah and John are reunited, defeat the evil Terminator and destroy all remaining Skynet-created technology (including a reprogrammed Terminator sent back to help them). The film ends with Sarah and John driving away into an unknown future, believing that they have prevented the creation of Skynet and the resulting apocalypse. Sarah's active determination to prevent Judgment Day in *Terminator 2* contrasts directly with her passive acceptance that "a storm is coming" in the final scene of the first *Terminator* film and upholds the idea that the character is imbued with a greater degree of agency in the sequel, and that her apparent victory is testament to this realisation of female empowerment.

Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines (Jonathan Mostow, 2003), however, reveals that Judgment Day (the day on which Skynet becomes self-aware) has merely been delayed, not averted. The film follows a similar narrative trajectory to *Terminator 2*, though with the character of Kate Brewster (Claire Danes), an old school acquaintance of John's (and his future wife), replacing Sarah Connor, and joining him and a reprogrammed Terminator (Schwarzenegger again) to fight Skynet's latest assassin. Once again, both Terminators are destroyed though John (now portrayed by Nick Stahl) and Kate are unable to prevent Judgment Day and can only take refuge in a military base as Skynet is finally born and initiates a nuclear holocaust. The events of the latest film in the series, 2009's *Terminator: Salvation* (McG, 2009) take place exclusively in the post-apocalyptic future.

The character of Sarah Connor is absent from the third and fourth films, having been unceremoniously dispatched off-screen after the events of *Terminator 2*. The spin-off television programme *The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, however, through the use of time travel (a narrative device evidently well-established in the *Terminator* universe) reinstates the character by altering the established timeline. The programme's narrative begins after the events of the second film with Sarah and John, having adopted the surname Reese in order to evade the authorities, making a reasonably successful attempt at living 'normal lives,' with Sarah even engaged to be

married. At this point, the narrative diverges from the canon established in the movie franchise as Skynet sends a Terminator back through time to 1999 not 2004 as depicted in *Rise of the Machines*. Once again, the future John Connor sends back a protector, Cameron (a reprogrammed Terminator who becomes another of the programme's protagonists). Cameron brings Sarah and John forward in time to 2007. When Sarah becomes frustrated by the fact that she now has less time to prepare John for the events of Judgement Day, Cameron reveals that the time lost as a result of their time-travelling is immaterial - as Sarah would have died during that period, anyway.

Once Sarah becomes aware that she has - or will develop - a terminal illness, she occupies an undefined mid-zone between life and death and the act of travelling beyond the moment of her own demise (which, due to the nature of her death, still seems inevitable) places her in a kind of subjunctive space within which she is able to experience events denied to her in the alternative timeline. She can, therefore, be seen to, literally, 'embody' the concept of liminality. In Chapter One I proposed that liminality is often as central to ideas of how death is perceived as death is to the concept of liminality, and that the use of liminal characters to explore the concept of death is a not only fitting, but apposite. This is certainly true of *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* which is permeated by the spectre of death and impending extinction. Terminators are presented as the physical manifestation of the threat of death, the scourge of humanity, and the programme consistently reinforces this idea by repeatedly depicting them stripped of fake skin and musculature, revealing their ghoulish and macabre metal endoskeletons. During the course of the programme's two-season run, countless individuals - including two main characters[38] - meet their demise. All these factors contribute to the programme's narrative focus on death, but it is through Sarah's terminal illness that it most directly and eloquently deals with the question of what it means to face one's

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[38] By 'main characters' I mean those played by actors whose names appeared alongside those of Headey, Thomas Dekker and Glau, the 'stars' of the programme (after the on-screen title "Starring"). By this measure, although both Leven Rambin and Stephanie Jacobsen appeared in ten episodes apiece and received on-screen credit at the beginning of each of those episodes, Jacobsen was consistently credited as a 'guest star' (unlike Rambin whose name appeared alongside the series regulars) and, therefore, is not considered a 'main character' for my purposes here.

own extinction and the liminal concept of existing between the realms of life and death. As Frank has noted:

> Illness is an opportunity, though a dangerous one. Critical
> illness offers the experience of being taken to the threshold of
> life…From that vantage point you are both forced and allowed
> to think in new ways about the value of your life. Alive but
> detached from everyday living… (Frank 1991, p.1)

In other words, critical illness offers an opportunity for reflection and self-assessment. This would indicate the need to objectify one's experience, resulting in a process whereby the person with cancer engages in an act of narrativising their own life, casting themselves as the main protagonist. Jackie Stacey, reflecting on her past experience of the disease, whilst theorising the broader sociocultural significances of cancer, acknowledges how she shared this tendency:

> As the distance between the initial diagnosis and my present
> state of relatively good health grows, my memories of the
> experience become more muddled, but the narrativisation of
> certain events increasingly solidifies… Present self has begun
> to connect to past and future selves through narrative structures
> that have placed a meaning where there had suddenly been only
> confusion… Although it is not yet over, the whole episode can
> now be represented in a series of narratives. (Stacey 1997, p.7)

Indeed, within the field of medical anthropology, narrative analysis has become well established as a means of examining the subjective experience of those who suffer chronic illness and cancer. In *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, Sarah's awareness of how her terminal illness somehow re-defines her sense of self by placing her in a liminal state appears to be indicative of how many real persons with cancer feel, according to a growing number of reports in this field. For example, in a study of perceptions of the outcomes of treatment of cancer of the colon, the authors noted that the experiences of the patients who participated in the study were best understood under the rubric of liminality:

> We believe that all cancer patients enter and experience
> liminality as a *process* which begins with the first manifestations
> of their malignancy. An initial acute phase of liminality is
> marked by disorientation, a sense of loss and of loss of control,
> and a sense of uncertainty. An adaptive, enduring phase of
> suspended liminality supervenes, in which each patient
> constructs and reconstructs meaning for their experience by
> means of narrative. This phase persists, probably for the rest of
> the cancer patient's life. The experience of liminality is firmly
> grounded in the changing and experiencing body that houses
> both the disease and the self. (Little, Jordens et al. 1998,
> p.1485)

The Sarah Connor Chronicles can be seen as adhering to the cancer narratives experienced or constructed by real persons with cancer. Studies such as Kimberly Thompson's 'Liminality as a Descriptor for the Cancer Experience' (Thompson, Kimberly 2007) report how the immediate impact of the cancer diagnosis often results in sufferers identifying themselves as 'cancer patients' regardless of the time since treatment, and the presence or absence of persistent or recurrent disease. Likewise, Sarah's cancer is referenced throughout the entire series – despite the fact that it is never actually diagnosed. The continuing trauma of having been diagnosed with a malignancy, even when the illness is in remission, is another recurrent theme in autobiographical accounts of the cancer experience. A typical example can be found on a blog entitled *I finished my PhD and all I got was cancer* where the blog's anonymous author (she refers to herself as 'The Graduate') relates how she's "had an urge since being given the 'all clear' to change everything in my life…The world seems a strange and scary place" (Graduate 2011).

The study on colon cancer and liminality also indicates that persons with cancer experience a state of variable alienation from social familiars which is expressed as an inability to communicate the nature of the experience of the illness, its diagnosis and its treatment. Similarly, Sarah expresses her true feelings only in voiceover – an auditory representation of an internal monologue. Although she finally confides in Charley Dixon (Dean Winters), her ex-fiancé, towards the end of the series, she does this only through necessity as she succumbs to the fear that she may not survive her illness and is compelled to choose a new protector for her son.

Sarah's sense of social isolation is compounded by her status as a fugitive, and by her past experience of being incarcerated for vocalising her fears for the future. It is significant that, once Sarah learns about her illness, she breaks her engagement and, whilst John and even Cameron the Terminator go on to develop social ties in their new lives, she does not. Sarah occupies a truly liminal space from which she witnesses 'life', but remains separate from it.

It is evident that the cancer experience is central to *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* through Sarah's engagement with the disease and its effect on her personal identity. However, by re-fashioning the established *Terminator* franchise narrative and situating Sarah in a liminal zone within her own timeline, the programme also adopts certain tropes associated with the cancer experience, internalising and absorbing them, reframing the narrative itself to echo Sarah's own personal experience. Consequently, cancer becomes much more than merely part of the protagonist's story arc. As Frank notes:

> The stories that ill people tell come out of their bodies. The body sets in motion the need for new stories when its disease disrupts the old stories. The body, whether still diseased or recovered, is simultaneously cause, topic, and instrument of whatever new stories are told. These embodied stories have two sides, one personal and the other social. (Frank 1995, p.2)

I will now examine what Frank refers to as the 'social' side of *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles'* cancer narrative to address the question of what Sarah's liminal status might represent in a societal context, and what the text itself suggests about life and, particularly, death in contemporary America.

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"We're all out of our time. We're all lost."[39]
 Indiscernibility, the Subjunctive Self and the Diseased American Corpus

Despite Donna Haraway's contention that cyborgs represent an opportunity to
formulate subject positions that move beyond the confines of traditional notions of
gender (Haraway 1991), the work of countless other theorists has indicated a
predominance of unmistakably gendered cyborgs in recent American Science Fiction
literature, film and television (cf. Tasker 1993; Jeffords 1994; Larson 1997; Carrasco
2008). These include the hypermasculine warrior,[40] the idealised paternal
protector,[41] and the sexually-alluring yet monstrous female.[42] I will examine the
topic of liminality and gender more fully in Chapter Five but it is relevant here
because of how this gendering of cyborg characters has been understood as an
attempt to address (and often redress) contemporary sociopolitical anxieties. For
example, the aggressively 'muscular' foreign policy of the Reagan administration
finds its cinematic counterpart in the hulking macho cyborgs of the 1980s whilst the
socially-responsible, environmentally-aware 'new man' of the 1990s finds
expression in nurturing and benevolent technologically-enhanced (pseudo)father-
figures, and the stridently independent, über-confident 'modern' (i.e. 21st century)
woman is demonised as a twisted, domineering and unnatural automaton. All these
readings are filtered through the distinctively technological nature of the cyborg
characters. It is what sets them apart from the other characters, making them unique
and, therefore, suitable as discernible thematic signifiers. Although gender is by no
means less significant in *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, I'd argue that,
though very much in evidence, the association between gender and technology is
subordinated by an identifiably feminist discourse which moderates the impulse to

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[39] Sarah Connor in *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* 2.14, 'The Good Wound.'

[40] For example, the eponymous characters featured in *The Terminator* and *Robocop*.

[41] For example, the Model 101 Series 800 (Arnold Schwarzenegger) in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*
or 'Bishop' (Lance Henriksen) in *Aliens* (James Cameron, 1986) and *Alien³* (David Fincher, 1992).

[42] For example, the T-X (Kristanna Loken) in *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* and the Borg Queen
(Alice Krige/Susanna Thompson) in *Star Trek: First Contact* and *Star Trek: Voyager* 5.15/5.16,
'Dark Frontier,' 6.26/7.1, 'Unimatrix Zero,' and 7.25, 'Endgame.'

overlay covert sociopolitical agendas on to gender-identifiable cyborg figures. In place of this traditional association, the text promotes an interwoven link between (female) gender and a progressive form of personal psychoemotional self-expression (which I will examine in the next section). Despite this 'uncoupling' of gender and technology as the primary leitmotif, the text remains sociopolitically relevant by focusing on an alternative, but no less significant, aspect of contemporary human identity in relation to its environment – physical health and personal subjectivity.

Whereas *Terminator* films revolve around fights and climactic show-downs (where the fighting is sporadic and narrative resolution relatively swift), *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* is a text about prolonged *struggle*. Over the duration of thirty-one episodes, Sarah and her 'family' face numerous challenges, confront several Terminators and human foes, travel extensively around Mexico, the Western and South-Western United States, are repeatedly injured, and observe the death of a host of supporting characters. We witness numerous scenes of plotting and strategising. Whereas the films show us distinct battles within self-contained (though linked) narratives, the *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* saga features several overarching storylines which intersect and overlap, many of which are not resolved by the end of the series. The finale (2.22, 'Born to Run') even establishes a brand new narrative strand[43] which expands on the scope of the series, introducing (and re-introducing)[44] potential new protagonists. Not only must Sarah and company prevail, they must *endure*. The imperative to endure not only parallels Sarah's cancer experience;[45] it is also complicated by it. Despite the fact that the

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[43] John and Catherine Weaver travel forwards in time and encounter an altered future in which humans continue to battle against Skynet, but where this act of time-travelling has resulted in John's absence from the established timeline and his effectively being erased from the history of the future war.

[44] Allison Young, previously revealed to be the human on whom Cameron's appearance was based and whom Cameron erroneously believes herself to be when she 'glitches' (in 2.4, 'Allison from Palmdale') appears briefly at the climax of this episode (once again played by Summer Glau).

[45] Again, parallels can be drawn not only between Sarah's cancer experience and her fight against the inescapable menace of the relentless Terminators, but also with real-life cancer experiences. Frank, for example, notes that "illness is not a fight against an other, but it is a long struggle…struggling with cancer must displace fighting against it" (Frank 1991, p.89), while Susan Sontag has written extensively on military metaphors in medicine and, significantly, cancer and its treatment as a form of warfare (Sontag 1991, specifically pp.65-67).

illness (real or imagined) lies within Sarah's body (or consciousness) and is thus invisible to anyone else, and despite her best attempts to keep its physical, mental and emotional effects hidden, its presence and its potential effects and *affects* are consistently evoked and realised through the recurrence of portents of sudden death,[46] potential contagion,[47] and the latent dangers of medical procedures or remedial internment.[48] Sarah's desire to conceal her cancer (especially from her son) is problematised by the conspicuous anxiety its existence engenders. As Havi Carel asserts of illness in general:

> The healthy body is transparent, taken for granted. We do not stop to consider any of its functions and processes because as long as everything is going smoothly, these are part of the bodily background that enable more interesting things to take place ... It is only when something goes wrong with the body that we begin to notice it. Our attention is drawn to the malfunctioning body part and suddenly it becomes the focus of our attention, rather than invisible background for our activities. (Carel 2008, p.26)

As it is never determined which part of her body is/will become cancerous, it is the cancer itself – rather than the affected body part – that becomes the focus in this text. The crucial irony in this, of course, is that, as the cancer remains undiagnosed and medically undefined, technically, it is inexistent. Indeed, the only indication of the nature of Sarah's illness occurs when she places Charley's hand on her breast in order to feel a lump which she assumes is the cancer she has been dreading, but it transpires that she is mistaken and what she believes to be a

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[46] Almost every major and supporting character that dies in the programme is killed off quickly, unexpectedly and, often, traumatically. For example, Andy Goode (Brendan Hines) in 1.5, 'Queen's Gambit,' Riley Dawson (2.17, 'Ourselves Alone'), Jesse Flores (2.19, 'Today is the Day: Part Two'), Charley Dixon (2.20, 'To the Lighthouse'), and Derek Reese (2.21, 'Adam Raised a Cain').

[47] Notably the episode 'Automatic for the People' which revolves around a nuclear power station and features two scenes where Sarah is exposed to dangerous levels of radiation. From here on in, Sarah must live with the possibility that these events have 'triggered' her cancer.

[48] As seen in episodes such as 'The Good Wound' where Sarah is seriously injured, kidnaps a doctor and has life-threatening surgery (pointedly, performed in a mortuary); and 2.16, 'Some Must Watch, While Some Must Sleep,' in which Sarah hallucinates she is an inpatient at a sleep clinic where the health professionals have a nefarious secret agenda.

malignant tumour is, in fact, a transmitter previously implanted without her knowledge ('To The Lighthouse'). Thus, the inherently liminal nature of Sarah's terminal illness is further complicated by the ambiguity of its existence. In this manner, it evokes diseases other than cancer; specifically, those which are medically unsubstantiated, and socially and politically controversial – those illnesses which, in Joseph Dumit's words, "you have to fight to get" (Dumit 2006). These illnesses – including the two that form the focus of Dumit's study, Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) – have particularly imprecise and variable symptoms, which result in speculative or notional diagnoses and are, consequently, nebulously and contentiously defined. Unable to gain recognition for their illness in the robustly bureaucratic U.S. healthcare system, sufferers find that these diseases are unrecognised as such, and they themselves 'invisible' by association. Like Sarah, they are both ill and not ill, simultaneously present and absent. Validation can only be granted through official institutions, and the lack thereof relegates them to an interstitial existence which, in a society *dependant* on institutions means a form of social non-existence. Their persistent attempts to gain recognition as sufferers of a genuine illness by unresponsive and disinterested institutions such as hospitals, insurance companies or federal social security often culminates in their being misdiagnosed as mentally ill – or, Dumit colloquially asserts, as "just plain crazy" (Dumit 2006, p.584). Similarly, as a fugitive, Sarah Connor is forced to adopt a subject position outside institutionalised society. When she is obliged to abandon her interstitial positioning and is placed within an institutional context as herself,[49] her sanity is invariably questioned. I will examine the relationship between liminal identity and mental health in the final section of this chapter.

In his piece 'Come on, people… we *are* the aliens,' Dumit appropriates a term from a member of an on-line newsgroup for people with CFS (itself reminiscent of Turner's concept of 'communitas'), and refers to "host-planet rejection syndrome" (Battaglia 2005, p.231). This recalls both the structural invisibility and the 'socially

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[49] Though Sarah interacts with the outside world on a regular basis, she always assumes an alias in order to do this. Her fugitive status means she must adopt a more socially acceptable ('healthy') persona in order to 'pass' in normal society. Whenever she is recognised as her true self, she is considered 'mad, bad and dangerous to know'.

polluting' attributes which I have previously identified as characteristic of contemporary life/death liminal identity. Clearly, I am not proposing that every viewer of *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* associates the text with the plight of people with CFS, MCS, terminal illnesses in general or cancer in particular, but I would maintain that contentious discourses around illness abound within a broader sociocultural context than their specialised natures may suggest - especially from the perspective of a British viewer.[50] As Stacy Takacs has noted:

> The personal and the political are inescapably intertwined in
> contemporary US social life. It is not just that the discourse of
> the personal overdetermines the operation of the political,
> delimiting what can be said to matter. It is that the body, the
> home, and the family constitute sites where the macropolitics of
> the state become localized. (Takacs 2011, p.431)

For example, so widespread was the U.S. media and public furore that resulted from the publication of Elaine Showalter's *Hystories* (in which she disputes the legitimacy of various twentieth-century phenomena including medically indeterminate ailments such 'Gulf War Syndrome' and CFS), that it is referred to extensively both in Dumit's article and in the introduction to the paperback edition of *Hystories* itself, in which Showalter reveals the vehemently negative (and often violent) responses it prompted (Showalter 1997).

In comparison to Telotte's cyborgs with their 'public bodies', the structural invisibility and social indiscernibility of the diseased body represents a significant shift in how liminal bodies are represented in contemporary TV Science Fiction. The liminal essence can no longer be identified through outwardly visible indicators of advanced technology or inhuman mechanical constituents. Nor does a protagonist's liminal quality afford them special abilities such as superior physical prowess, evidenced through spectacular feats of strength and agility. The defining markers of life/death liminality are hidden within the body, imperceptible to the

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[50] Whereas the National Health Service has provided publicly funded healthcare and become a subtly integral and relatively uncontroversial part of life in Britain since its founding in 1948, the establishment of an American 'equivalent' (by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act in 2010) has been an especially widely debated and divisive development in political and medical arenas, as well as in U.S. media and sociocultural spheres generally.

naked eye, often technically non-existent, though the persistent threat of the defining agent takes root, germinates and grows in a manner akin to the tumour which instigates Sarah Connor's cancer narrative, consistently reasserting its 'presence' throughout the entire series, but which also remains undiagnosed and undetected. In contrast to the high visibility of the cyborg's prodigious displays of superhuman-like powers, the cause of life/death liminality is more likely to weaken the subject, both physically and structurally, foisting upon them an essential and inescapable form of invisibility. If, as Telotte argues, the 'obscene visibility' of the physicality of the cyborg obfuscates traditional human subjectivity and accentuates the loss of a sense of 'self', then the opposite occurs when the physicality of the liminal subject becomes indeterminate, undefined or imperceptible. Far from being subsumed by the physical, their incorporeal existential 'humanity' is fundamentally accentuated. If cyborg narratives highlight anxieties regarding robotics, artificial intelligence and threat of erasure of the distinction between man and machine then these 'new' liminal narratives move beyond these fears[51] to cast light upon the inherently traumatic and transient nature of human existence, and the corresponding need for acknowledgment and recognition. The fear of inflicted insignificance and potential obsolescence has persisted. Only now the desired aim is not to vanquish the external threat of a potentially dehumanising technology, it is to endure the struggle of living life as human, not least within our own fragile and ephemeral bodies, to give our lives purpose, to gain recognition, to *matter*. Needless to say, these anxieties are encapsulated in narratives of terminal illness in general, Dumit's 'illnesses you have to fight to get', and cancer narratives in particular for, as Susan Sontag has stated,

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[51] The transition of anxieties around the cyborg 'other' to the fallibility of 'being human' is skilfully encapsulated in season two of *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* in which it gradually emerges that Jesse and Riley, human resistance fighters from the future are not fugitives fleeing a hellish future as we are led to believe, but are actually on a mission to 'terminate' John's relationship with Cameron which they consider deeply problematic, a threat to their future success in the fight against Skynet, and (possibly) sexually perverse. Conversely, the season finale reveals that the murderous and supposedly 'evil' advanced model Terminator who has replaced the real Catherine Weaver as head of the powerful Zeira Corporation technology company has travelled back in time in order to assist the Connors and give them a technological advantage. Finally, it is suggested that the biggest threat to the Connors' lives is Daniel Dyson, the son of Doctor Miles Bennett Dyson (the original inventor of the neural-net processor which leads to the development of Skynet) who perished during Sarah's assault on – and eventual destruction of – his lab at Cyberdyne HQ (as seen in *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*).

cancer - more than any other illness - is "(thought to be) a death sentence…it is felt to be obscene – in the original meaning of that word: ill-omened, abominable, repugnant to the senses" (Sontag 1991, pp.8-9).

Though the focus of Dumit's study is on the difficulty faced by persons with MCS and CFS on gaining medical recognition for their illness (i.e. to make themselves 'seen and heard'), rather than any resulting existential personal subjectivity, it provides further consolidation of the close association between illness and liminality. It recalls Little's study which indicates how the initial diagnosis positions a person with cancer within a phase of "acute liminality" whereby they experience the overwhelmingly disconcerting threat of their own death:

> Acute liminality represents a discontinuity of subjective time, in
> which powerful forces operate to change perceptions of time,
> space and personal values. It resembles the singularities in space
> (such as "black holes") which Hawking (1988) writes about,
> within which time and space no longer obey the familiar rules
> that we expect of them. (Little, Jordens et al. 1998, p.1492)

In a similar way, Sarah's intrinsically ambiguous condition whereby she can be seen as neither living nor dead - and yet simultaneously both - opens up a subjunctive space which, in Victor Turner's words, exists "as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise" (Turner 1967, p.97) . Compounding Sarah's subjunctive positioning is, of course, the fact that her own timeline has been disrupted by the act of travelling beyond the point of her death. Once she becomes aware of how she now exists in a temporal space she was never meant to experience, her sense of estrangement intensifies and her narrative subsequently explores the possibilities facilitated by her change of situation, despite the unavoidable consequences that await her – what she refers to as her 'fate.'

Barbie Zelizer, looking at the 'About-to-Die' moment in visual media, notes:

> The subjunctive voice offers an apt way of depicting the
> difficult topic of death. It allows us to recognize its finality
> while facilitating the inclusion of possibility, contingency, and

> even the illogical conclusion of its postponement. Visual
> images using the subjunctive voice to address death are thus
> possibly easier to view. (Zelizer 2004, p.165)

Zelizer argues that media representations of the 'about-to-die' moment reached an unprecedented level in the days following the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Images of collapsed buildings and actual dead bodies, despite being available, were – in the main – notable by their absence, whilst images portraying *imminent* death and destruction became commonplace. Furthermore, a hierarchy of subjunctivity became apparent as early images of people jumping from the Twin Towers were swiftly replaced by those of 'second-order' about-to-die moments such as aircraft *about* to hit the World Trade Center. Despite the inevitable outcome of all these images, it is notable that those which were considered most acceptable were those that offered greater subjunctive scope. *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* is a cultural text in which the doomed protagonist is re-positioned within her own time-line and relocated into a liminal space wherein she is granted similar subjunctive latitude. Whilst a fictionalised cancer narrative portrays an 'about-to-die' moment, its suspension (through narrative tropes such as time travel) results in one of Zelizer's 'second-order' moments.

In this manner we can read the construction of subjunctive narratives as attempts to engage with the concept of dying without necessarily engaging with the distressing truth of its logical outcome (death and the loss of self). *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* may be understood as a text of 'prolonged subjunctivity' and, along with other recent notable examples of American television programmes which employ narratives of temporal displacement, such as *Lost* (2004-2010) or *Flash Forward* (2009-2010), as an attempt to facilitate a sustained meditation on the prevalent discourses around death and dying in a post-9/11 society. Whereas cultural texts which deal directly with death, trauma and terminal illness risk being viewed as crass, insensitive or exploitative, transferring such narratives and couching them within other generic conventions obfuscates traumatic elements, possibly making them easier to witness.

The idea of deciphering cultural and political meaning through representations of the body adheres to philosophies of social constructionism

advocated by theorists such as Frank and Bryan S. Turner (Turner and Rojek 2001; Turner 2008). These postulate that, contrary to naturalistic conceptualising of the body as biologically defined and pre-social, the body is, in fact, the receptor rather than a generator of meanings, whilst associated sociocultural and sociopolitical connotations are mapped on to the body. This would certainly correspond to the titular body at the centre of *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* which, as I have demonstrated, can suggest a range of familiar subject positions for the potential audience. Indeed, as the sheer volume of academic treatises which focus upon her make abundantly clear, Sarah Connor's body has been repeatedly 'read' and 'deciphered' in relation to her social, cultural and political function(s).[52] However, these readings have invariably focused on the character as featured in the first two *Terminator* films and the sum of this work creates an identifiable academic consensus which advances an interpretation of Sarah as a problematic and conflicted figure who combines feminist behaviour with patriarchal advocacy. The final part of this chapter suggests how *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* goes some way to unscrambling the mixed messages associated with the figure of Sarah Connor, reaffirming her importance to the *Terminator* franchise by recourse to a schema which draws upon practices strongly associated with the concept of liminality.

Deciphering "Just Plain Crazy":
Liminality, Therapy and the Lacanian Psychoanalytical Imperative

In this final section, I propose that *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, by placing Sarah at the centre of the text and utilising the comparatively extensive narrative space afforded by its lengthier running time, provides more measured consideration and development of the character than that found in the films. Furthermore, it exploits the concept of intimacy associated with the televisual medium in order to focus upon the unspectacular, 'un-cinematic' process of psychotherapy. The programme utilises this sense of intimacy to enrich the

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[52] In addition to the work of J.P. Telotte (1992), Christine Cornea (2007), and Yvonne Tasker (1993), see Susan Jefford's 'Can Masculinity be Terminated?' in Cohan and Hark (1993), and A.S. Kimball (2002).

character and introduce a more personal associative theme to the concept of gender than traditional sociocultural anxieties around the dehumanising effects of technology.

Musing on the cancellation of *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* in a self-penned article on the Science Fiction website IO9 in 2009, the programme's showrunner, Josh Friedman noted:

> I go to my therapist twice a week and often we just talk about television… My therapist is Swiss German and a Freudian as well as a psychooncologist and an art therapist. When she watches Sarah Connor she doesn't see robots and Skynet and John Connor, she sees cancer dreams and death fetishes and the psychological damage done by the absent and perfect father. (Friedman 2009)

Friedman then goes on to reveal the anxieties that the narratives of certain television programmes engender in him – and how his therapist assists him in allaying these fears by psychoanalysing their significance. I'd argue that *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* actively encourages a similar process of psychoanalytic analysis as a method for understanding the programme's underlying narrative - and that this imperative is made manifest both through allusions to recognisable psychodynamic tropes, notably dream analysis, as well as by the foregrounding of psychotherapeutic practices. Furthermore, I maintain that this focus allows the programme to develop a feminist agenda previously absent from the *Terminator* franchise, with the movies' problematic depiction of Sarah Connor specifically, and women in general. Exploring the idea that language not only affects one's subjective experiences, but creates one's own reality, *The Sarah Connor Chronicles* suggests how Sarah may be able to re-articulate her own narrative so that she is not purely defined by her role as the protector of a male saviour ("The Mother of all Destiny"[53]), and it goes some way to disentangling the oft-muddled meanings expressed through the complex character of Sarah Connor.

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[53] "The Mother of all Destiny" was the tag-line used over images of Lena Headey as Sarah Connor on promotional materials for the launch of *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* in January 2008. It has subsequently been adopted by fans of the franchise as a way of referring to the character, and as

In an early season two episode (2.6, 'The Tower is Tall but the Fall is Short'), what promises to be a routine covert surveillance mission in a psychotherapist's office effectively places psychoanalysis at the heart of the narrative for the remainder of the series. Initially, this propensity manifests during the supposedly 'fake' therapy sessions which Sarah, John and Cameron attend in order to gain access to Dr Boyd Sherman (Dorian Harewood), a family psychologist who, they have been led to believe, will have an important role to play in the fight for humanity's future (though it is unknown whether this will be as a help or a hindrance). As the therapy sessions continue, it becomes increasingly evident that, whilst their initial reason for partaking in the sessions was purely strategic, both Sarah and John begin participating for real. John's attempt to work through his trauma end in failure as he is unable to confess to the murder he committed and he remains haunted by his actions. Sarah, on the other hand, overcomes her initial misgivings and her engagement with psychotherapy yields much more positive results.

Sarah's use of psychoanalytic therapy as a way of coming to terms with her (often violent) actions and the extraordinary situation in which she finds herself echoes showrunner Friedman's attempts to gain insight into his own subjective experiences through his TV watching, and Sarah's frequent chronicling of her own dreams and nightmares assists in affiliating the concepts of psychoanalysis and narrative. This narrativising is both diegetic (as in the scenes depicting Sarah's meetings with Dr Sherman), and non-diegetic (through Sarah's voice-over).

Film and television texts are often understood in terms analogous with the language used in psychoanalysis – they are 'read,' 'symptomatic' of wider social concerns and, often, even 'ripe for analysis.' The close correlation between psychoanalysis and film is unsurprising when one considers how the emergence of the former was contemporaneous with the birth of the latter (though the use of psychoanalytic theory as a methodology for the study of film did not gain traction until the early 1970s). Integral to (and often conflated with) this approach – specifically, film as a 'mirror' for the spectator's ego - is an emphasis on the oneiric

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the web address of a *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* fansite – www.motherofalldestiny.com (now defunct).

elements of a text. In 'The Relation of the Poet to Daydreaming,' Sigmund Freud claimed that wish-fulfilment, an integral constituent of the process of dreaming, is fundamental to the pleasures of popular culture (Thompson, James M. 1990, p.122-131), and the association of cinema (frequently referred to as a 'dream palace') with the act of dreaming has informed much psychoanalytic film theory ever since, notably the work of Christian Metz (for example, Metz 1982).

Though televisual texts are often discussed using similarly psychoanalytically-inflected language, theorists of popular culture have, more often than not, shied away from applying direct psychoanalytical methodologies to the study of television, maintaining that the specifics of film and television viewing are widely divergent. Marshall McLuhan, for example, explicitly stated that "the mode of the TV image has nothing in common with film or photo" (McLuhan 1964, p.272). However, these assertions are customarily based in qualitative judgements wherein watching television is depicted as an inferior, passive act of cultural consumption as opposed to the high-minded pleasures afforded by actively engaging with the sublime art of cinema (and not even 'art cinema,' necessarily). However, these assumptions usually rely on conventional models or theories of television spectatorship such as Raymond Williams' principle of televisual 'flow' (Williams 1974 [1990]) or, more recently, John Ellis' proposition that, whereas cinemagoers 'gaze' intently at the screen, television viewers merely 'glance' (Ellis 1992). I will return to these concepts in the conclusion, where I will consider the bearing that 'liminal narratives' have on traditional approaches to the study of television. Suffice to say here that, whereas I have no doubt that some television viewing can be considered in terms akin to those identified by Williams, Ellis et al., to claim that all – or even most – television programmes are consumed in this manner fails to consider a multitude of variables. These attitudes presuppose a gross homogenisation of audiences, reading positions, programme genres, media platforms, specifications of technology, and peripheral activities. To this end, I propose that, just as psychoanalytic theory can be a fruitful and rewarding approach to the study of certain examples of selected cinematic genres (Horror, Science Fiction, and musicals, for example), the same is true of certain kinds of televisual texts. Moreover, as with film spectatorship, it is possible to understand the act of

television watching as a form of communal 'dreaming,' with psychoanalysis as a valid and effective method of deciphering the various symbols, tropes and myths with which we are presented.

Fundamental to Freudian psychoanalytic theory, the process of deciphering is consistently presented as essential practice for understanding oneself and one's relationship to the external world, and this line of thought is present throughout *The Sarah Connor Chronicles*. The codes that need decrypting are presented as symbolic dream sequences such as one in the episode 'The Turk' (1.3) in which Sarah, anachronistically present in a room full of pioneers of nuclear arms, attempts to assassinate them all. The 'pioneers' are then revealed to be Terminators, suddenly and unexpectedly appearing before her in their familiar robo-skeletal form, employing their superior fire-power to assassinate her instead. Without explicitly stating as much, certain markers in this sequence strongly indicate how it should be 'read'. For instance, the fully-clothed, old-fashioned, and traditionally paternal buttoned-up appearance of the exclusively male scientists is set against Sarah's contemporary, stripped-down ensemble, including the tight vest which augments her female figure. The overtly sexualised imagery of the 'exposed' Terminators' weaponry, which dwarfs that of Sarah's, along with her reference to them as "these fathers of our destruction" and the sheer impossibility of success in the face of such overwhelming odds all point towards Sarah's fears of her 'lack' of agency, control, and physical power in a patriarchal environment destined to bring about humanity's total annihilation.

Sarah's dreams feature prominently throughout both seasons, and, during one of their therapy sessions, the significance of dreams is made explicit in an exchange between Sarah and Dr Sherman:

> Sarah: I came to you for help in understanding my dreams.
> Dr. Sherman: Well, the problem is, without knowing the details
> of your life, I'm not sure what I can tell you, beyond generalities.
> I can tell you that dreams tend to mirror the central conflict in
> the dreamer. (2.9, 'Complications')

The act of dreaming and the process of interpreting dreams becomes a prominent theme – but even more noticeable is the persistent gendering of both these activities.

They are associated exclusively with female characters, whilst all the male characters, apart from Dr Sherman himself, reject them as irrelevant and nonsensical. At one point, Sarah becomes preoccupied with working out the link between her dreams regarding the missing body of a deactivated Terminator and a message left in blood by a dying resistance fighter from the future that Sarah herself discovered whilst sleepwalking. John, however, dismisses Sarah's theorising that it "means something… it's all connected" by telling her she is simply "tired" and "sick." Despite the off-hand belittling of the importance of dreams and psychotherapeutic interpretation by John and, later, by John's uncle, Derek (Brian Austin Green), these are later shown to provide Sarah (and other female characters) with a means of evading traditional (that is, patriarchal) conceptions of normalcy, advancing instead the possibility of an alternate, feminist subjectivity. Sarah's belief in the interconnectedness of these diverse elements will prove to be correct when part of the dying resistance fighter's message guides her to investigate Dr Sherman, through whom she discovers the reconciliatory and interpretative capacities of psychotherapy.

The centrality of dreams and dreaming to the narrative of *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* is indicated through a variety of other ways (including the programme's constant allusions to *The Wizard of Oz*,[54] a film which, essentially, revolves around an extended dream sequence) but is made most explicit in the episode 'Some Must Watch, While Some Must Sleep.' This episode features two parallel narratives. In the first, Sarah has admitted herself into a sleep clinic in an attempt to cure the insomnia which has afflicted her since she murdered a (possibly innocent) security guard at a factory with suspected links to Skynet in a previous episode (2.13, 'Earthlings Welcome Here'). In the second, which appears to be a recurring nightmare of Sarah's, she is being held hostage, drugged and tortured by the dead security guard. The episode is peppered with frequent references to dreams and dreaming, whilst Sarah's hospital roommate dreams of being burned alive - shortly before this exact scenario occurs. The most audaciously shocking and surreal

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[54] These include the Connors' adoption of the surname of the original novel's author, Frank L. Baum, as one of their aliases, Sarah's reading of the book – John's favourite as a child - to a young boy in their protection (2.5, 'Goodbye to All That'), and Sarah's nicknaming of Cameron as 'Tin Man' and Cameron's subsequent revelation that she understands the reference (1.2, 'Gnothi Seauton').

moment, however, occurs towards the end of the episode when Sarah uncovers a link between the sleep clinic and Skynet moments before John is murdered by a Terminator, and Sarah herself is shot in the head and dies. It is only at this point that it becomes apparent that the 'sleep clinic' storyline has been a dream, the gunshot administered by Sarah to the security guard was not fatal, and her 'nightmare' is actually reality. The episode parallels, then interchanges (and, by extension, equates) the importance and significance of events in imaginary/dream and 'real' realms. Furthermore, Sarah's closing voiceover serves to complete the narration she began at the start of the episode, repeatedly recalling the gender-biased connotations in John's earlier dismissal of Sarah's belief in the power and relevance of dreams, and giving emphasis to their liminal qualities:

> Midnight is the witching hour - if you believe that kind of thing, and most people won't admit it if they do. Midnight is the time when a door opens from our world into the next and we are visited by dark spirits of the shadow lands… The demons come after midnight in the first three hours of the new day when we are alone and vulnerable, deep asleep and hopeless… A spirit sits on a man's chest. She is strong, beautiful. She is here to steal his children. She is here to steal his future. He is paralyzed. The terror in him will burst his heart if he cannot control it. She is a Night-Mare, a demon-woman, the oldest and most enduring story told by man. The witching hour is controlled by witches. She is a bad dream.

Aptly, the association between dreams and psychoanalysis is present from the very origins of feminist approaches to popular culture. This is particularly evident within the tradition of psychoanalytic film theory. Originated in the 1970s by scholars such as Laura Mulvey,[55] psychoanalytic film theory has, arguably, become the principal school of feminist film criticism. Admittedly, the usefulness of psychoanalytical film theory has repeatedly been called into question in the years since. Scholars such as Noël Carroll have indicated that, even examples of a genre such as Horror - whose association with psychoanalysis appears to be so deeply

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[55] Most notably by Mulvey's seminal article 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' originally published in *Screen* 16.3 Autumn 1975 (later included in Mulvey 1989).

entrenched that it has become almost axiomatic - aren't *all* suited to this methodology (Carroll 1990). I would contend, however, that the sheer number of references to – and scenes depicting – psychiatry (and allied concepts such as dreams and 'death drives')[56] indicate that this is a text which is not only steeped in psychoanalytical indicators, but that the recurrent associative gendering suggests it is a text which attempts to articulate a discourse around sexual politics which can be deciphered by recourse to psychoanalysis.

'The Tower is Tall but the Fall is Short,' the episode that introduces the character of Dr Sherman is, I would argue, the one which most clearly expresses what I refer to as the programme's 'feminist agenda.' In light of this, I now offer a brief case study of the episode in order to demonstrate how the programme links the concepts of dreams, psychoanalysis and the articulation of a feminist discourse.

The episode begins with a voiceover by Sarah:

> My father slept with a gun under his pillow. There was no pill
> for his sickness, no medicine to ease his mind. He left blood,
> and sweat, and part of his soul in a foreign land. My father never
> talked to me about the war he fought. He never talked to anyone.
> Ever vigilant, ever silent… I never thought I'd follow in his
> footsteps.

This monologue immediately introduces certain thematic concepts which recur throughout the episode and which – through psychotherapeutic practices – become intimately connected: language, communication, and subjectivity.

Soon after this introductory voiceover, two scenes focus on a Terminator who has replaced Catherine Weaver (Shirley Manson), the owner of a powerful and influential technology company, and its inability to communicate effectively with both the real Catherine Weaver's daughter, Savannah (Mackenzie Brooke Smith), and with an Artificial Intelligence created by her company. Both scenes continue the theme of the fragility and potential misappropriation of language. The Terminator

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[56] Although it was cut from the aired version, Sarah's original opening monologue for the pilot episode began "I will die. I will die and so will you. Death gives no man a pass." This was to be heard over the opening visual of a road surface at night, illuminated only by the headlamps of a car as it drove into the darkness (Friedman 2009). Needless to say, this sequence can almost be read as a *literal* 'death drive.'

fails in its attempts to communicate with Savannah as it has no idea how to talk to a child. Meanwhile, attempts to run a battery of tests on the AI are unsuccessful as it uses a sequence of images to express itself, and neither the Terminator nor Weaver's (predominantly male) employees can decipher its messages. Dr Sherman is employed to help the Terminator form a connection with Savannah as the girl's uneasiness around 'Weaver,' and their palpably dysfunctional relationship, is beginning to arouse suspicion. Sherman enjoys some measure of success by encouraging the Terminator to draw upon (or mimic) maternal instincts (despite the little girl's instinctive fear of her mother's uncanny replacement). He also manages to get Savannah to verbalise her inner feelings. This success leads to Sherman being introduced to the AI – with whom he again succeeds, and the inference is that the 'talking cure' is an unmistakably successful technique.

The Sarah Connor Chronicles' evangelising of the talking cure as a successful method of resolving interpersonal conflicts, uncovering personal concerns and enabling relational communication is indicative of the programme's interest in exploring psychoanalytic elements beyond a superficial engagement with generalised Freudian theories. Indeed, the programme methodically engages with a pointedly Lacanian comprehension of the Symbolic as a specifically language-based stage in the development of personal identity (cf. Lacan 1988).[57] And, through repeated references to the power of language to affect subjectivity, it advances the idea of psychoanalysis as a way of potentially (re)creating the external world. Notably, this potentiality is associated with – and only fully comprehended by – female characters. For example, when Jesse, newly arrived from the future, is reunited with Derek, her old lover, she lets him believe that she is merely AWOL from the war and in need of a place to rest. Although it is later revealed that she has her own personal mission, she also intimates that she has had enough of the endless fighting[58] and the militaristic lifestyle forced upon her, and that she craves a different life. What is

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[57] It is, perhaps, unsurprising that the programme engages with a specifically Lacanian rendering of Freud's theorising as the latter has often been considered inherently misogynistic; the notion of 'penis envy,' in particular, indicating the psychoanalyst's own propenstity towards phallocentricism.

[58] This suggestion is corroborated in Jesse's final episode when it is revealed that she miscarried Derek's baby whilst on a mission.

significant is how she expresses this desire in the following exchange (which occurs as she and Derek lie in bed together, having just slept together for the first time since they both left the future):

> Jesse: Is there a word for what we just did?
> Derek: A word?
> Jesse: For what we just did.
> Derek: I can think of a few, yeah.
> Jesse: Can you?
> Derek: You wanna hear 'em?
> Jesse: No. I want a new one.
> Derek: Is this your way of getting rid of me?
> Jesse: You'll be gone soon enough.
> Derek: What do we need a new word for? I'm pretty sure if I use one of the old ones you'll still do it with me.
> Jesse: I might choose to misunderstand.
> Derek: The old words.
> Jesse: I have a new life, Derek. I want new words.

Read in Lacanian terms, Jesse's equating of her new life with a new vocabulary reveals a desire to enter a different symbolic order. Meanwhile, her reply to Derek's coarse presumption that she would still have sex with him if he decided to deny her those 'new words' and continue using the old ones suggests a gender-based split between the existent patriarchy and a possible new regime. Similarly, whereas John is unable to avail himself of the possibilities for self-empowerment afforded by psychoanalysis, Sarah eventually embraces them and demonstrates a similar psychologically-grounded aspiration for "new words" as that expressed by Jesse. Sarah's closing voiceover, played over a montage of other characters attempting to make sense of their relationships with other people, or their own histories, initially appears to disregard gender-specific disparities and reinforce the impossibility of self-expression: "Like my father, war's wounds have bled me dry. No words of comfort. No words of forgiveness. No words at all." However, once Sarah's monologue ends we see that she is in Dr Sherman's office, attending a therapy session, despite the fact that the mission is over and there is no strategic reason for her to be there. Although she does not answer him when he asks her to tell him why she is there, the fact that she is there at all offers hope that she may, through

undergoing psychoanalysis, eventually 'find the words.' Sarah and Jesse's goal of escaping the confines of a patriarchal language system recalls their interstitial positioning in regards to other social phenomena - specifically, their status as (time-displaced) fugitives. Furthermore, despite the fact the two women never meet, they both experience Turner's concept of 'communitas,' well outside the boundaries of 'normal' (i.e. male-dominated) society, even if that experience is not a shared one.

John may have dismissed Sarah's belief in the importance of dream analysis as affectations of a 'tired' and 'sick' woman (in much the same way that she was seen as 'just plain crazy' by the patriarchal establishment when her warnings of the coming apocalypse resulted in her stepping outside the confines of sanctioned discourse and being incarcerated during the events of *Terminator 2*), but the end of the episode leaves us hopeful that she may have found a viable outlet for her own discourse.

The inherent misogyny of the clinical medical establishment within the fictionalised *Terminator* 'universe' echoes Dumit's 'illnesses you have to fight to get' and their socially-, medically- and legally-liminal sufferers. Drawing on extensive medical reports, Lesley Doyal has noted that these institutions often disparage female patients disproportionately in relation to male patients, denying them the opportunity to make themselves heard and placing them at the mercy of male doctors (Doyal 1995, p.217). The on-going narrative of the *Terminator* franchise consistently places Sarah Connor in a similar situation but *The Sarah Connor Chronicles* allows Sarah a level of agency (through liminality) hitherto denied her cinematic counterpart.

Although the programme is not a text that engages with sexual politics overtly, its representation of a patriarchal society's persistent (if inadvertent) attempts at destroying its own future in order to maintain present military supremacy and contrasting this with one woman's fight to prevent that future from happening can be read as a provocative, even pugnacious, attempt to redress the *Terminator* films' problematic and uneasy representation of women in general, and Sarah in particular. *The Sarah Connor Chronicles* suggests that Sarah may be able escape the confines of her 'destiny' within a militarist, nihilistic patriarchy by embracing the possibilities of personal emancipation through psychotherapy and can be read as an

attempt to re-articulate the history of the *Terminator* franchise, symbolically (as well as physically) rescuing Sarah from her 'fate' in the established patriarchal timeline of the films and allowing her to fashion her own narrative, a new life, with new words.

Conclusion

As persons with cancer narrativise their experience of the illness, so these narratives inspire - and provide possible templates for - fictional representations of similar liminal experiences. Though it may be somewhat disconcerting - and upsetting - to contemplate, real-life cancer narratives (and those of terminal illness in general) are easily adaptable as a basis for fictionalised dramatic narratives, providing a pre-determined (and, therefore, emotionally engaging) narrative arc and extensive potential for personal/character development. Indeed, storylines wherein protagonists develop a terminal illness and embark on an emotional journey from diagnosis to death constitutes all or part of the narrative of a wide array of film and television programmes.[59] Unsurprisingly, these texts usually fall under the genre of 'melodrama' and, as a narrative that frequently focuses upon the Connor 'family' (albeit a somewhat less traditional one than usual), melodramatic elements are clearly detectable in *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*.

However, Sarah's cancer experience is intensified and rearticulated through the recognisably 'sci-fi' trope of time travel. This physically relocates her into a liminal 'zone' in much the same way that her illness functions metaphorically. Echoing the phenomenon of remission, Sarah is afforded a temporary reprieve – from both the death and destruction wrought by Terminators in their ceaseless pursuit of John Connor, and what would have been the imminent consequences of

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[59] Such is the preponderance of these narratives that an exhaustive listing is not only outside the scope of this thesis but, in all likelihood, impossible. Suffice to say, early examples include at least ten filmed versions of Alexandre Dumas, fils' novel *The Lady of the Camellias*/*Camille* (1848) as well as several filmed versions of the opera *La Traviata* which is based upon the same source material, and *Dark Victory* (Edmund Goulding, 1939). More recent examples include the films *Terms of Endearment* (James L. Brooks, 1983), *Beaches* (Garry Marshall, 1988), *Steel Magnolias* (Herbert Ross, 1989), *Shadowlands* (Richard Attenborough, 1993), *Stepmom* (Chris Columbus, 1988), *The Family Stone* (Thomas Bezucha, 2005), the television adaptation of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (2003), and the programmes *The Big C* (2010-2013) and *Battlestar Galactica*.(2003, 2004-2009).

her undiagnosed illness (i.e. her own death). Nevertheless, in a similar manner to how remission can never be equated with being entirely cured, *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* consistently presents reminders of Sarah's fate through episodic narratives which feature potentially carcinogenic domains or carriers. These include the nuclear power station in 'Automatic For The People,' Cameron's cancer-stricken acquaintance (2.11, 'Self Made Man'), and the nuclear energy source that gives Cameron 'life' and which is directly referenced as a possible source of Sarah's cancer ('Born to Run'). The irony in the latter, of course, being that Sarah's continued physical proximity to Cameron is something she must endure as she needs Cameron's assistance to fight for mankind's future, despite her own dislike of both the Terminator itself and its relationship with John. In effect, Sarah's efforts to ensure humanity's continued existence is (literally) killing her and any attempt to seek medical assistance from the social or medical institutions is fraught with danger and would, in all likelihood, result in the failure of her mission. Though *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* is not an explicitly political text, the implied notion of witnessing a society's inadvertent attempts at destroying its own future in order to maintain present stability can be read as a provocative, even pugnacious, attempt to redress the *Terminator* films' problematic and uneasy representation of women. All four films represent women as either vengeful she-devils (the T-X) or agents for the patriarchy, whether as soldiers, supportive wives or the mother of a male saviour.[60] *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, on the other hand, advances the possibility that Sarah may choose to embrace her liminal nature (as fugitive, time-traveller, someone who straddles the death/life divide), capitalise upon her interstitial existence and reject the limitations imposed upon her by the structures of patriarchy.

Death is also present through the constant referencing of the coming apocalypse by those human characters that have travelled back in time in an attempt to prevent it from occurring in the first place (notably Derek, Jesse and Riley). It is, however, the perpetual presence of the Terminators themselves that haunt the

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[60] Cf. Christine Cornea, 'Figurations of the Cyborg in Contemporary Science Fiction Novels and Film' in Seed 2005, pp.275-287.

protagonists (and, because of her condition, Sarah most of all) with the spectre of impending death.

By continually stressing the importance (if not the superiority) of the human over the inhuman, the text itself can be read as participating in an attempt to maintain the delicate and precarious remissive condition wherein Sarah's (inescapable) illness has yet to debilitate her, and the (equally unavoidable) human genocide by the Terminators appears preventable.

In *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, 'authentic' humanity is repeatedly emphasised over 'deviant' technology. The problematic relationship between authenticity and artifice, literally and seamlessly embodied in the figure of the cyborg, is also crucial to *Battlestar Galactica*, a text which forms the focus of my next chapter. *Battlestar Galactica* problematises this distinction even further by depicting the dividing boundary between human and cyborg as being so indistinct that it is, ultimately, meaningless. Supposedly mutually exclusive identity binaries such as human/machine, authentic/inauthentic and physical/incorporeal are subsumed within an expansive liminal space which the programme appropriates in order to investigate an important facet of contemporary American subjectivity: religion.

Chapter Three

Prophets, Angels and Messiahs in Space: *Battlestar Galactica* and New Generic Frontiers

Introduction

Battlestar Galactica (2003; 2004-2009), like *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* (2008-2009), is based on an existing Science Fiction franchise. Unlike *The Sarah Connor Chronicles* however, the new *Battlestar Galactica* does not continue the narrative from the original series (1978) or even that programme's sequel, *Galactica 1980* (1980). The programme has, instead, been 'reimagined' for a contemporary audience with the story starting anew. Apart from the basic premise and certain character designations, the new *Battlestar Galactica* is, arguably, as radically different from its source material as a programme could be whilst still remaining similar enough to its predecessor to warrant use of the same title. Whereas the original series eschewed any form of direct social, cultural or political commentary, the reimagined series engages with such concerns directly. Much has already been written about how the programme skilfully facilitates a prolonged and sensitive consideration of the events of 9/11 and the traumatic aftermath of the 'War on Terror' (see, amongst others, Edwards, Gavin 2006; Pearson, Roberta 2007).[61] However, I would suggest that part of the reason why *Battlestar Galactica* has become such an acclaimed example of Science Fiction is the unprecedented way in which it puts religious concerns, as well as its (more widely-documented) political ones, firmly at the centre of its narrative. Furthermore, I would argue, the uncommonly skilful manner in which this is achieved is partly why the show has gained widespread mainstream recognition and praise usually denied television programmes within the Science Fiction genre. Respectable media outlets such as *The New York Times* (Hodgman 2005) and *Rolling Stone* (Edwards, Gavin 2006)

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[61] The amalgamating of trauma, death and grief after an act of terrorism became the compelling focus of *Caprica* (2010), a spin-off from the new *Battlestar Galactica* which I examine in the next chapter.

have given the show praise hitherto denied similar programmes. *The National Review* proclaimed *Battlestar Galactica* to be "a shining, distant star in the outer reaches of niche cable, [it] burns with a combustive mixture of political turmoil and human drama that is as achingly real and relevant as anything on television" (Suderman 2006), whilst *Time* magazine pronounced *Battlestar Galactica* to be, in its opinion, the best show on television; "Laugh if you want, but this story of enemies within is dead serious, and seriously good" (Poniewozik 2005). All these favourable reviews point out how the programme articulates a profound understanding of certain aspects of the social, political and religious climates of contemporary America. Yet, the importance and significance of *Battlestar Galactica*'s exploration of religion has received little academic attention when compared with studies concerning the programme's engagement with politics, race and gender.

In this chapter I examine how *Battlestar Galactica* facilitated a credible and critically-lauded engagement with a specific religious tenet which had hitherto been considered well outside the remit of television Science Fiction. This tenet is the possibility that religious belief may be predicated on actual preternatural truths, rather than myth or simple faith. In the *Battlestar Galactica* universe, it is inferred that 'God' exists and actively influences human (and Cylon) history. This embracing of spirituality, mysticism, the supernatural, and the metaphysical is at odds with the more conventional elements of cognitive estrangement that are also at work within the programme, and I contend that it is this dichotomy that provides *Battlestar Galactica* with its overriding narrative enigma regarding the existence of a 'higher power' (whether it be God or *the* Gods). This begs the question of how it is possible that the programme manages to be an exemplar of the Science Fiction genre whilst simultaneously presenting a narrative that hinges upon elements usually considered outside the parameters of Science Fiction television. In turn, this represents a challenge to the established concept of genre and the belief that traditional genre theory remains a useful methodology for the study of cultural texts.

In order to address all of these questions, this chapter is divided into four parts. In the first I introduce Suvin's theory of cognitive estrangement – commonly regarded as a useful and trusted method of divining whether texts can or cannot be

defined as 'Science Fiction' in the traditional sense. In order to determine what is 'new' or innovative we must establish what is considered conventional. Therefore, in part two, I present a brief overview of religion in television Science Fiction. Having ascertained what may be recognised as a conservative approach to the topic, in part three, I consider how one might interpret *Battlestar Galactica*'s approach as unusual, innovative or radical by examining the programme's treatment of religion in general, and how three liminal characters bolster and develop the text's engagement with Christian theism in particular. Finally, with recourse to Suvin's theory, I examine how the programme's engagement with the metaphysical aspects of religion makes ascribing *Battlestar Galactica* a straightforward generic designation problematic.

An Enduring Theory: Science Fiction as Cognitive Estrangement

> Science Fiction television has tended to be an under-analysed, and under-theorised area of academic study. Perhaps one of the reasons for this is that it eludes neat classification. (Creeber, Miller et al. 2008, pp.26-27)

Whereas it is true that most genres present problems of definition to some extent, Science Fiction has been particularly resistant to easy categorisation. As I have discussed in the introduction to this thesis, serious attempts at defining Science Fiction began in the 1940s and have continued ever since, with a vehement disagreement or radically different interpretation for every achieved consensus or agreed viewpoint. However, attempts by certain theorists have gained more traction than others and, perhaps, none more so than those by Darko Suvin. To this day, Suvin's *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* remains tremendously influential in many ways. It is notable for being one of the first books on the theory of Science Fiction written by an esteemed academic. Furthermore, it was published by a respectable publisher, and dealt not only with 'high' literature but also 'paraliterature' (even if, as the label suggests, Suvin's attitude to such works was somewhat disparaging). The most remarkable thing about Suvin's book, however, would prove to be its enduring legacy as a method of approaching, defining and studying Science Fiction narratives.

Suvin argued that what defines Science Fiction as a genre is the way its texts operate via a process of 'cognitive estrangement' (Suvin 1979, p.4).[62] This process involves presenting a setting or situation which is mysterious, extraordinary, strange, and bordering on the apparently impossible – what Suvin called a strange fiction or 'novum.' However, this novum is portrayed in a way that is recognisable, unexceptional, customary, and 'explainable' by way of genuine scientific theory. This results in a duality wherein a Science Fiction narrative renders the fantastic as 'normal' (or, at least, a version of normality). Events may occur in a world which is patently unreal but this world also operates along familiar lines, adhering to recognisable laws of science and nature. The act of cognition does not, however, mean Science Fiction narratives simply proffer a straightforward reproduction of the real world. Instead, they present us with *interpretations*. In the alternate realities of Science Fiction texts, moral, ethical, social, cultural and political normalcies may be radically different from those to which we are accustomed in 'real' life. By presenting us with these alternatives to our own realities, Science Fiction opens up a discursive space between the real and imagined worlds, encouraging us to appraise and analyse the former ('what is') by measuring it against the latter ('what might be').

According to Suvin, non-cognitive estrangement occurs when a text does not explain the presence of the novum. Unlike texts featuring cognitive estrangement, they do not attempt to use science and scientific theory in order to explain the differences between the world depicted in the narrative and that of the reader/viewer. Consequently, these imagined worlds lack the 'reality' of those created through the process of cognitive estrangement and the 'unreality' of the fiction takes priority over processes of cognition and verisimilitude. Therefore the discursive space generated by comparing two distinct but 'believable' realities (which arises from a reading of a text of cognitive estrangement) is absent, and the text is incapable of providing moral, ethical, social, cultural or political commentary in the same manner as texts of cognitive estrangement. Suvin identifies non-

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[62] Although popularised in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, Suvin's coining of 'cognitive estrangement' in regards to Science Fiction dates back to a symposium at the 1968 annual conference of the American Modern Language Association, entitled 'Science Fiction: The New Mythology.'

cognitive estrangement in folk tales, fairy tales and myths – 'unreal' genres that deal primarily in practices which transcend known science and what is often referred to as 'Fantasy.' In these narratives any type of event can occur, any sort of environment is possible and characters are capable of any kind of action or feat because the narrative itself is patently impossible. According to Suvin, this type of narrative arises when the novum remains unexplained or unexplainable. Thus, the presence of the novum in itself does not guarantee that a text is Science Fiction.

According to Suvin's theory, narratives that feature core aspects of Christianity such as theism and the performing of miracles are texts of 'non-cognitive estrangement' since these phenomena cannot be explained scientifically. 'Faith' – that is, belief in the absolute truth of theism - is, arguably, the main tenet of Christianity and faith is essentially reliant upon an absence of proof. Therefore, by Suvin's definition at least, Science Fiction – constructed, as it is, through means of cognitive estrangement – is fundamentally incapable of engaging with theistic Christianity in any way other than sceptically (or else it becomes something other than Science Fiction). Attempts to engage fully with the spiritual/supernatural aspects of religion and allow them credence would, in Suvin's view, be anathematic to the genre.

Suvin's theory has endured for decades and has become one of the most oft-applied within the discipline of Science Fiction studies – even if his elitist attitude towards 'paraliterature' has been deemed problematic (see, for example, Luckhurst 2005, p.7). As Clute and Nicholls assert, "while Suvin's definition would find few who agreed with all of it, it is challenging and has perhaps been the most useful of all in catalysing debate on the issue" (Clute and Nicholls 1993 [1999], p.313). Suvin's theory has been adapted by several others with a similar interest in defining Science Fiction. Most of these agree with his theorising – albeit to varying degrees. Carl Freedman, for instance, addressed the contentious matter of Suvin's perceived over-reliance on cognition at the expense of estrangement by reinterpreting the 'science' part of Science Fiction not as incontestable scientific theory but as that which is scientifically plausible – what Freedman terms the "cognition effect" (Freedman 2000, p.xvi). However, Freedman argues that this scientific plausibility, despite its evident imaginariness, must still be credible, and dismisses the "irrationalist

estrangements" of Fantasy and Gothic literature (Freedman 2000, p.xvi). Even China Miéville, who questions the view that Science Fiction and Fantasy can be methodologically separated and straightforwardly categorised as two separate genres, admits to 'submitting' to "the most powerful current in SF scholarship," accepting the "concomitant heuristic efficacy of the SF/fantasy distinction" (Bould and Miéville 2009, pp.231-233).

Another notable scholar who continues to develop Suvin's theories, specifically in relation to Fantasy and Utopian fictions (i.e. those which are *not* Science Fiction), is Marxist critic and academic Fredric Jameson. Jameson argues that Fantasy, with its emphasis on spiritual beliefs, supernatural experiences and the contradictory and challenging forces of good and evil, as well as its refutation of any regular or rational justification for these incidents or phenomena, undermines its capacity to connect with significant issues or debates (Jameson 2005). Science Fiction on the other hand, Jameson affirms, is able to do this owing to the way it is constructed through cognitive estrangement. Jameson's theorising, however, goes beyond merely reiterating Suvin's own theory since Jameson places greater emphasis on the importance of Science Fiction as a method of *comprehending* our own reality, not just as a way of envisaging alternatives:

> The apparent realism, or representationality, of SF has concealed another, far more complex temporal structure: not to give us "images" of the future… but rather to defamiliarize and restructure our experience of our own *present*, and to do so in specific ways distinct from all other forms of defamiliarization… [T]he present - in this society, and in the physical and psychic dissociation of the human subjects who inhabit it - is inaccessible directly… Elaborate strategies of indirection are therefore necessary if we are somehow to break through our monadic insulation and to "experience", for some first and real time, this "present", which is after all all we have. (Jameson 2005, pp.286-287)

Patrick Parrinder's reading of Suvin ultimately differs from Jameson's in that he focuses upon the novum - specifically how narratives in which the novum is most credibly rationalised by reasoned cognition (i.e. those that endeavour to

establish a framework of genuine science or scientific theory to explain the estranged constituent) are those in which Science Fiction most successfully realises its potential. According to Parrinder, the texts that emphasise cognition are also those that are the most sociopolitically relevant and, therefore, most successfully satisfy Science Fiction's remit. Initially adopting a position similar to that of Jameson's, Parrinder argues that "a literature of cognitive estrangement not only facilitates an imaginative 'escape' from, or transcendence of, the given social environment, but also sows the seeds of dissatisfaction with that environment, and of the determination and ability to change it" (Parrinder 1980, p.72). However, Parrinder then argues that texts which most effectively highlight the apparent similarities between the imagined world and ours are noticeably more successful examples of the Science Fiction genre than those that don't (or those that do so to a lesser degree). Parrinder's position suggests a closer adherence to the meticulous cognitive process prescribed by Suvin's original theory than Jameson and, particularly, Freedman (with the latter's advancement of the relatively nebulous "cognitive effect"). Therefore, if one adopts Parrinder's approach, the incompatibility between Science Fiction and Christian theism is even more pronounced.

Considering how minimally these variants on Suvin's original theory regarding the comparative importance of the processes of cognition and estrangement in Science Fiction diverge and differ, it strongly suggests that his concept is fundamentally sound. Furthermore, Suvin's standpoint appears to be an intermediate one - positioned between those of theorists who insist Science Fiction demonstrate a high degree of technological and scientific accuracy, and those who are more forgiving of 'woollier' explanations. It is for this reason that I return to Suvin's theory, rather than those of subsequent theorists and their modified versions, for a working definition of Science Fiction.

Despite the triumph of Suvin's theory over a number of alternatives and derivatives, there is a long (and distinguished) history of Science Fiction texts engaging with religious and spiritual matters. As Peter Krämer points out:

> The majority of the most popular science-fiction films since the
> late 1970s have been successful with all-encompassing family
> audiences, and most of them have achieved this by dealing with

> questions of global import and, quite frequently, by playing
> heavily on mythic and religious resonances. (Krämer 2010,
> pp.102-103)

Not only have some of the most critically acclaimed Science Fiction films of the past thirty-five years engaged with religion and spirituality, often relying on audiences' assumed familiarity with specific concepts, themes and iconography, but many of these movies are also considered to be 'classics' of the Science Fiction genre.[63] Even when some of those disappointed at the box office, such as the American version of *Solaris* (Steven Soderbergh, 2002), they were generally well received by critics and eagerly studied by academics. Yet, according to Suvin's theory of cognitive estrangement, these movies do not actually qualify as Science Fiction. As the next section demonstrates, there is a corresponding lineage of Science Fiction television that also engages with religious and spiritual matters although, as I will prove, these texts lean more towards cognitive estrangement as a method of 'explaining away' the metaphysics associated with these concepts.

Never the Twain?: Christian Metaphysical Theism meets Science Fiction

> Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely
> between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for
> his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of
> government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate
> with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people
> which declared that their legislature should "make no law
> respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free
> exercise thereof," thus building a wall of separation between
> Church & State.

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[63] For example, during 2009 and 2010, popular Science Fiction magazine *SciFiNow* ran a monthly feature wherein ten Science Fiction films were chosen as contenders for the accolade of "Greatest Ever Sci-Fi Film." These included *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968), *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977), *ET: the Extra Terrestrial* (Steven Spielberg, 1982), *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (James Cameron, 1991) and *The Matrix* (Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski, 1999). The religious/spiritual trappings of all these movies (such as the presence of Christ figures and/or prominent spiritual themes) have been debated in countless popular, critical and academic discourses.

This passage, taken from Thomas Jefferson's letter to the Danbury Baptist Association in 1802 (quoted in Jefferson, Oberg et al. 2009, p.258), is famed for making explicit the Constitution's stance on the relationship between the U.S. government and religion – specifically, how the two are separate and how the latter should, in no way, hold sway upon the former. However, the present existence of organisations such as Americans United for Separation of Church and State (AUSC) and The Freedom from Religion Foundation (FFRF, motto: 'Protecting the constitutional principle of the separation of state and church') suggests that, two hundred years later, this remains a contentious issue. This is, in fact, unsurprising as, despite the fact that the concepts of religious freedom and a belief in a secular state were part of its founding principles, religion continues to play an inordinately significant part in the everyday lives of a large proportion of Americans. Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean note how "in 2004, 94 per cent of Americans said they believed in God, 63 per cent said they belonged to a church of some kind, and 44 per cent attended a weekly church service" (Campbell and Kean 2006, p.106).

The apparent overwhelming religiosity of the United States has, however, always co-existed alongside other viewpoints and perspectives which have challenged the continued relevancy of religion. Arguably the most significant of these is radical theology. Gaining prominence in the 1960s, radical theology questions the essential validity of organised religion, the existence of religious metaphysical phenomena, and whether the concept of 'God' is relevant to modern life. Radical theology originates from the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Lutheran Pastor executed during the Second World War. Focusing on the perceived incompatibility of science and religion, Bonhoeffer argued that man had outgrown his dependence on God and, with the aid of rational thought, could function and prosper without the need for religion in the modern world.

Bonhoeffer's writings, which first appeared in English in 1953, intrigued many American theologians and were eagerly consumed and debated. The most well-known advocate of Bonhoeffer's theories was preeminent theologian Harvey Cox, whose best-selling book on radical theology, *The Secular City*, was published in 1965. Cox argued that, ironically, the greatest force for secularisation had been Christianity itself. Having convinced believers that humanity did not need the

enormous array of different pagan Gods it was, he argued, only logical that they would eventually dispense with the need to believe in *any* God or supernatural agent. Not only is the book representative of its time but, because of its popularity and resulting accessibility to the country's academics, it also became very influential. As Allitt notes, "in the mid-sixties every intellectual who didn't have a handy copy of Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media* in his or her back pocket had *The Secular City* there instead" (Allitt 2003, p.74).

Particularly relevant to this thesis is Cox's analysis of the interplay between monotheism, polytheism and atheism as this interaction is at the heart of *Battlestar Galactica*. Furthermore, academics such as Thomas Altizer and William Hamilton, similarly influenced by Bonhoeffer, published a raft of books expounding the theory that technology had replaced religion and this perception of both concepts as mutually exclusive forces is central to *Battlestar Galactica*. Characteristically, however, *Battlestar Galactica* actively subverts this notion by representing the Cylon antagonists as spiritually (and monotheistically) devout, whereas the human protagonists are marginalised polytheists, spiritually ambivalent, or keenly irreligious.

Despite the predictions of Bonhoeffer et al., the United States remains a demonstrably religious country - and overwhelmingly Christian. Despite the popularising of other religions, and the growth in the number of Americans who consider themselves irreligious, 79.5% of the U.S. population identified as Christian in the recent *Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population* (PewResearch 2011). Furthermore, the controversial subject of the division of church and state has, once again, become subject for very public debate – spurred on, in part, by the visibility afforded by the growth of mass media and, especially, social media to increasingly provocative anti/pro-religion groups. In addition to attempts by the AUSC and the FFRF to promote greater separation of church and state, the vociferously homophobic, anti-Semitic and anti-Catholic Westboro Baptist Church has gained a level of notoriety hitherto unknown in the U.S. for such an ideologically extreme group. Meanwhile, the presidency of George W. Bush coincided with a noticeable increase in religiously-inflected (particularly Christian) political rhetoric, especially after the events of September 11, 2001. As Justin Remes has stated:

> Scholars, journalists, political theorists, and others have noted
> the extent to which evangelical religious traditions shaped the
> policies of George W. Bush, particularly in his dualistic
> worldview, his belief in divine providence, and his resistance to
> science (including evolutionary theory, anthropogenic global
> warming, and stem cell research). (Remes 2010, p.1)

Remes' final observation is especially noteworthy as it alludes to the struggle between Christianity and science which Cox et al. had foreseen. This remains a significant feature of contemporary American religiosity, especially in regards to its portrayal in popular culture. It has had particular ramifications for Science Fiction television, specifically in how spiritual matters have been framed and represented.

As befits a phenomenon that remains central to the lives of millions of Americans, religion - Christianity specifically – has endured as a significant feature in American popular culture. This is borne out by the sheer number of academic publications centred upon the depiction of religion in popular cultural fictions generally (e.g. Ostwalt 2003), or Science Fiction literature (Kreuziger 1986), and Science Fiction film (e.g. Martin and Ostwalt 1995; Mitchell and Plate 2007) in particular. These works investigate a diverse range of religious tropes and subject topics, from representations of the apocalypse as prophesised in the book of Revelations (Brasher 1998) to the predominance of Christ-like figures (Skelton 2006), or fictionalised belief systems which can/should be read as proxies for Christianity (Grimes 2007). Corresponding themes in Science Fiction television, however, have received relatively little attention – and what little there is often originates from Christian publishers such as Brazos Press (e.g. Bertonneau and Paffenroth 2006), or those whose books focus primarily on theology rather than media, such as Baylor University Press (Winston 2009). Even taking into account the general lack of television scholarship (as discussed in the Introduction), in comparison to the vast amount of attention afforded Science Fiction film and literature, this dearth of attention by media scholars is astonishing.

It is clearly well outside the scope of this thesis to provide a detailed history of how American television Science Fiction has engaged with and represented religious matters over the past sixty years or so. To this end, I have decided to

concentrate my focus on those programmes which can be said to have had the greatest impact – both popularly and critically. Just as *Star Trek*, arguably the most popular and critically-acclaimed Science Fiction franchise in television history, provided a useful framework for my survey of liminal characters in Chapter One, I will once again use it for a similar purpose here. The programme's almost-50 year history has reflected both a general approach to religious matters in American television Science Fiction, and also broader historical engagements with religious and spiritual matters within American culture in general. It therefore provides an opportune starting point for my brief historical survey of religion in American television Science Fiction.

On the 8th of September, 1966, five months to the day that the infamous 'Is God Dead?' issue of *Time* magazine hit American newsstands,[64] *Star Trek* began airing on American television. As befitting a programme which has primarily become known for the way in which it endeavoured to deal allegorically with the thorny question of what it is to be 'human,' and the overriding social and political concerns of the day,[65] matters of religion and spirituality recurred throughout *Star Trek*'s three-season television tenure.

Star Trek first engaged with religious themes in the episode 'Where No Man Has Gone Before' (1.3) in which a crewman aboard the Starship Enterprise is transformed by a strange barrier of energy into a superhuman being and announces that he has become a God. This is, of course, a boastful exaggeration and the viewer is never in any doubt of that but the crewman's declaration establishes that the concept of 'God' (or, more accurately, 'Gods') exists within the *Star Trek* narrative universe. The titles of episodes such as 'This Side of Paradise' (1.24) and 'Journey to Babel' may reference Biblical concepts but that is where their religious associations end. 'Who Mourns for Adonais?' (2.2), on the other hand, directly posited the question: what if the Gods were real? Here, the God in question is the Ancient Greek God Apollo, whom the Enterprise crew members encounter in outer

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[64] The April 8, 1966 issue of *Time* magazine gained instant notoriety as it became the first time the magazine did not feature a photograph or drawing on its cover. Instead, three words in red on a black background starkly asked the controversial question 'Is God Dead?'

[65] See Chapter One.

space. Although Apollo and his ilk were worshipped as gods on Earth, they are – in reality – only aliens whose advanced technologies make them appear as gods to those who are technologically inferior. Erich von Däniken's *Chariots of The Gods* (the sub-title of which asked 'Was God an Astronaut?') proposed a similar theory – namely, that religions are the result of encounters between early humans and extra-terrestrials. Published a year after this episode was broadcast, its popularity resulted in it becoming a multi-million copy bestseller, and *Star Trek* itself would revisit the idea of false gods several times both in the original series and its various spin-offs.

Whilst 'Who Mourns for Adonais?' tackled the concept of false Gods in a very direct manner, 'The Apple' (2.5) explored the same idea through narrative steeped in allegory. The planet on which the episode's narrative unfolds is Gamma Trianguili VI and the 'God' is actually a serpent-shaped super-computer called Vaal which relies on the planet's native inhabitants to bring it food which it metabolises for energy. In return the 'Feeders of Vaal' (as they refer to themselves) are granted immortality in a veritable paradise. However, when the Enterprise orbits the planet, Vaal begins to drain the ship's energy and the crew eventually destroys the machine, robbing the natives of their 'God' and their 'God-given' immortality. The 'apple' of the title is scientific reason and technology – the antithesis of belief. Although the Feeders of Vaal are oblivious to its true nature, it is this state of unawareness that allowed them to live their idyllic lives. This blissful ignorance, however, is an anathema to the irreligious Enterprise crew and, against their own 'Prime Directive,'[66] they reduce the natives' religion to a pile of rubble, confident that they have bestowed a greater gift – that of scientific knowledge and a secular existence.

Over the course of 79 episodes not one of the Enterprise crew members expressed an inclination toward any form of organised religion but, time and again, episodes extolled virtues often associated with traditional Judeo-Christian belief. Despite *Star Trek*'s strong secular humanist overtones, and despite whatever theological debates were raging in the media during the mid- to late-1960s, the programme tended to endorse values and principles compatible with archetypal

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[66] In each incarnation of *Star Trek*, the United Federation of Planets' exploration, defence and diplomacy arm (Starfleet) has, as its general order number one, a 'Prime Directive' which states that Starfleet members must not interfere with the internal politics or social order of non-Federation species.

Judeo-Christian values, even if the programme was sceptical of the religions wherein these values originated.

Star Trek was also not beyond directly referencing the Christian faith and Jesus Christ in particular. In the episode 'Bread and Circuses' (2.25) the Enterprise crew encounters a group of persecuted 'Sun' worshipers. It is only at the story's end that crewmember Lieutenant Uhura (Nichelle Nichols), who had been monitoring communications emanating from the planet, reveals that this group are actually worshippers of the 'Son' and are, in fact, the planet's equivalent of early Christians. Despite the sensitive portrayal of the origins of a Christian-like belief system, it is notable that it is depicted as a historical event and there is not a hint of any mystical or metaphysical elements. Also, of all the Enterprise's bridge crew who could have worked out the nature of the planet's true religion and the parallels with Earth's history, it is the black, female crew member who 'gets' the reference. Religion, it seems, is the domain of 'the other' in *Star Trek*: usually this means beings that have knowledge of religion or a spiritual sensibility from a different planet, but when the narrative requires it be one of the human bridge officers,[67] the role is assigned to the one who is already marked outwardly as being different to the others (who, in this episode, are all white males).[68] By the time of its cancellation in 1969, *Star Trek* had, therefore, featured several narratives with religious or spiritual aspects, but each was treated with a high degree of scientific scepticism.

Stephen Powers, David J. Rothman and Stanley Rothman state that a Hollywood trend towards irreligiousness in the mid-1960s led to a decrease in Jewish and Christian narratives,[69] despite the fact that the majority of Americans still

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[67] It would be highly improbable for Spock (Leonard Nimoy) to be the one to make the connection between the 'Son' worshippers and the early Christians on Earth as, although the character is half-human, it has already been established that his upbringing was identical to that of any fully-Vulcan child.

[68] The half-Japanese, half-Filipino character of Hikaru Sulu (George Takei) is entirely absent from this story.

[69] Although Powers, Rothman and Rothman conceptualise 'Hollywood' as a film industry, they also point out that "the moviemakers certainly did not win [the ideological battle within Hollywood] by themselves. They were joined by the creative television elite and other groups" (p.213). We can, therefore, comfortably include other areas of the entertainment industry (notably television) in their definition of 'Hollywood.'

maintained that religion was an important aspect of their lives (Powers, Rothman et al. 1996, p.120). When religion was featured, they argue, it was mocked for being little more than an archaic convention, hopelessly irrelevant to modern life, and religious belief an indicator of a character's alienation from the realities of the 'real' world. Although this trend did not preclude the presence of religious figures such as clergy on American television in the following years, as Robert J. Thompson has pointed out, these characters' religiosity was usually no more than a gimmick, a way of putting a new spin on established generic formulas – usually melodramas and crime series, such as *In the Beginning* (1978), *Father Murphy* (1981-1984) and *The Father Dowling Mysteries* (1989-1991). In these programmes, religion is an occupation more than a calling, and any supernatural or metaphysical phenomena are entirely absent.

Despite the demonstrable nature of American television programmes' tendency for keeping clergy firmly rooted in naturalistic narratives, this does not mean that the mystical side of religion has been completely overlooked. Programmes such as *Highway to Heaven* (1984-1989) and *Touched by an Angel* (1994-2003), both of whose narratives featured angels bringing hope to troubled people, were popular – if not critical – successes. However, these programmes were given to melodramatic excess and were obviously intended to be viewed as non-naturalistic Fantasy. Needless to say, they also relied on a high degree of suspension of disbelief, and elements of non-cognitive estrangement.

The success of programmes reliant on audiences' acceptance of the existence of supernatural beings such as angels ties in with the resurgence of the 'New Age' movement during the late 1980s and 1990s. Advocating a holistic view of mind, body and soul, new ageism – like *Star Trek* – had its roots in the 1960s. But whereas the sense of wonder in *Star Trek* had been fuelled by the technological advances of the age (and, especially, the interest sparked by advances in space travel), new ageism harked back to the hippie counterculture, with its emphasis on alternative medicines, personal therapy and environmental concerns. It also promoted concepts such as monism and pantheism, and interest in alternative spirituality such as oriental mysticism, paganism and witchcraft. The original *Star Trek*'s rejection of such ideals which seemed so forward-thinking and radical in the

1960s now looked outmoded and unfashionable in the context of its pre-millennial spin-offs. However, *Deep Space Nine* (1993-1999) and *Voyager* (1995-2001) also exhibited an, albeit limited, willingness to diverge away from the original series and *The Next Generation* (1987-1994), its direct successor, in how they dealt with religious matters. Whereas neither programme went as far as to offer a wholehearted endorsement of organised religion, they both displayed a more tolerant approach to spiritual matters. *Deep Space Nine*'s representation of the (alien) Bajoran religion included a strong element of doubt regarding its origins (to anyone other than the Bajorans themselves, the 'prophets' in the 'Celestial Temple' are just wormhole aliens), but it remained an important aspect in the seven-year story arc from start to finish and was usually portrayed in harmless, rather than sinister, terms. Between them, *Deep Space Nine* and *Voyager* had a number of main characters who, during the course of the series' runs, displayed religious leanings. However, like Uhura in the original series, all these characters were 'othered' in some way. For example, Voyager's second in command, Chakotay (Robert Beltran), a Native American, was a great believer in the mystical nature of his people's belief system and these beliefs provided the basis of many of his storylines, especially during the programme's first two years. But, although other crew members occasionally expressed an interest in his religion, these associations never lasted beyond a single episode and Chakotay's spirituality often appeared to be his only defining trait. Coincidentally or not, it is significant that, as his spirituality became less pronounced, Chakotay's screen time in the series diminished. Indeed, it could be argued that Chakotay's inclusion in the programme was simply a faddish nod to the increasing awareness of the alternative spiritualities so beloved of New Ageism.

Only one episode of the entire *Star Trek* franchise explicitly pitted religion against science and concluded that there may actually be a tangible supernatural element to religion. In 'Sacred Ground' (*Voyager*: 3.7), Captain Janeway (Kate Mulgrew) attempts to appease some unseen angry 'Gods' who (allegedly) have the power to save one of her crew who is lying comatose after being hit by an energy field guarding a sacred shrine on an alien planet. After undergoing a series of gruelling physical tests, a sub-dermal device implanted inside Janeway identifies a physiological change within her that suggests inducing a similar change within the

stricken girl will cure her. For some unknown reason the treatment fails and Janeway, trained scientist and committed sceptic, is told that it is not science that will save the girl, but faith. Finally, however, Janeway manages to overcome her own disbelief, the crewman awakens and, although the doctor attempts to persuade her that there was a rational, scientific explanation for why the original treatment failed, after all, the look on Janeway's face as she exits the sickbay in the final scene suggests that she isn't so sure. The ambiguity of the last scene is unique in the history of *Star Trek* and the importance of it being the captain who undergoes a minor religious conversion cannot be underestimated. She is, after all, the main character - and the one which the audience is expected to trust, respect and admire. The next time Janeway encounters an apparently spiritual dilemma, however, her scepticism has been reinvigorated and she resolutely refuses to accept a supernatural explanation for the situation she finds herself in (3.7, 'Sacred Ground'). Needless to say, she is proven correct.

Despite an outwardly more tolerant attitude toward religion in the 1990s, the *Star Trek* saga is resoundingly humanist. Its ideology when it comes to spiritual matters may not be entirely consistent (which is not surprising considering the franchise spans four decades), but it cannot be denied that all but one of its 700 or so episodes fit Suvin's theory of cognitive estrangement through their rejection of metaphysical possibilities and unwavering devotion to rationality and reason. In the *Star Trek* universe God really is dead and belongs to an ancient, less enlightened age. Faith exists but is harmless, outdated, misguided and irrelevant at best - or, at worst, insidious, constraining and dangerous. Any apparent supernatural aspect of religion is fraudulent and reports of remarkable miracles just stories, explained away by futuristic science.

Running concurrently with *Deep Space Nine* and often compared to it because of their similar premises (both programmes feature space stations in neutral territories wherein the shows' protagonists attempt to broker peace between various alien species), *Babylon 5* (1994-1998), confronted the issue of religion head-on. Early episodes hinted at the 'unknowable' nature of one particular species, the Vorlons. The second season finale even featured a sequence in which the space station's resident Vorlon, Kosh (Ardwight Chamberlain/Jeffrey Willerth), finally

emerged from his 'Encounter Suit' to reveal himself to be an angel (Joshua Patton) whom everyone present perceived to belong to their own species (2.22, 'The Fall of Night').   This transcendental moment would later be undercut as the truth about the Vorlons became apparent as the series continued. Reminiscent of so many *Star Trek* episodes, the Vorlons (and their nemeses, the 'Shadows') were actually ancient aliens whose tampering with the development of the universe's younger species has resulted in their appearance being associated with familiar mystical religious figures. Despite tantalising suggestions of the sanctity of certain characters in the *Babylon 5* universe, they are all eventually portrayed as mundane alien entities that only appear as God-like to less advanced species. This was also the case in *Stargate SG-1* (1997-2007) and its various spin-offs. Indeed, the *Stargate* franchise excelled in demystifying godhood by aping *Star Trek*'s usual approach and portraying the series' main villains, the Goa'uld and, later, the Ori, as technologically superior aliens masquerading as Gods. However, the early 1990s also saw the launch of a Science Fiction programme which would engage with the supernatural, the mystical and the mythical in a much more direct manner and whose popularity eclipsed even that of the contemporaneous *Star Trek* series – *The X-Files* (1993-2002).

 First broadcast on the 10th of September 1993, *The X-Files* quickly developed a cult following and was soon attracting viewing figures that guaranteed a second season. By 1996, it had become a worldwide success and a bona fide popular culture phenomenon. The series' dominant story arc may have concerned alien conspiracy, but the programme's sensibility was steadily and irrefutably bolstered by an even more prevalent collective social phenomenon particular to that time – millennialism.

 Millennialism in its purest religious sense refers to an element of a narrative regarding the end of the world in Christian tradition, principally described in the biblical book of Revelation wherein, after a prolonged period of conflict, discord and struggle, the Earth and its inhabitants are torn asunder during a terrifying apocalypse. At this time, according to the bible, Satan will reap havoc which, in turn, will result in the Second Coming of Christ and the end of history as he brings about a new Heaven and Earth. Despite the overblown theological implications of such an

occurrence, sociological surveys revealed that 62% of Americans were unequivocal in their belief that Jesus Christ would return (Brasher 1998, p.283).

The increasing popularity of 'New Ageism' and a resurgence of interest in 'old' beliefs (such as paganism and witchcraft) and customs (divination, mediumship) around this time could be read as a reaction to the imminent day of reckoning. New Age practitioners were assumed to be in search of something they could have faith in ('I want to believe' as the poster in the office of *The X-Files'* Fox Mulder [David Duchovny] reads). *The X-Files* appropriated millennial unease and combined it with the fear of alien intrusion, prophesying that the 'newness of life' mentioned in apocryphal texts was not to be the metaphoric creation of a new human paradise, but the actual creation of new life – an oft-mentioned human-alien hybrid. In the 1990s of *The X-Files* it is not just the end of the second millennium that is being lived out, but the final days of humanity. Judgment day is to be feared, not welcomed, and the only way of avoiding it is by finding – and understanding – the "truth" ("the truth is out there" being one of the programme's most popular catchphrases). The New Order, its portents and harbingers, must be resisted and human – not supernatural – agency must triumph if we are to survive. The feature film spin-off was even subtitled *Fight the Future*.

I would suggest that *The-X Files* owed as much of its success to its uplifting message that, despite the nefarious dealings of politicians and extra-terrestrials alike, mankind can and will regain control of its own destiny, as much as it did to the constant thrills and chills engendered by the programme's parade of real-world and supernatural bogeymen and its roster of sociopolitical (and theological) scares. In *The X-Files*, the truth *is* ultimately revealed (9.19, 'The Truth') and, by this point in the narrative, even the series' resident sceptic, Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) has seen enough proof to make her "believe." What enables the programme to allow this proof to become manifest to both Scully and the viewer is its own hybrid nature because, as much as the programme deals with such Science Fiction staples as spaceships and aliens, it also incorporates generic elements from other fantastical genres and styles such as Horror, Fantasy, even slapstick comedy and pastiche. This 'grab bag' approach to genre (which works because of the show's reliance on an episodic 'monster of the week' format as much as an overriding story arc) allows

The X-Files to escape the prescriptive confines of cognitive (and even those of non-cognitive) estrangement.

In the years following the demise of *The X-Files* in 2002, there was a glut of fantastical television programmes with religious themes or pronounced spiritual concerns. These programmes, which included *Dead Like Me* (2003-2004), *Carnivàle* (2003-2005), *Joan of Arcadia* (2003-2005), *John from Cincinnati* (2007) and *Saving Grace* (2007-2010), had varying degrees of popular success but were, arguably, among the most critically acclaimed of the 2000s. All of these programmes involved dysfunctional families and/or broken individuals who were all, in some way, living in the shadow of personal tragedy (death, debilitating accidents, alcoholism) or even a national disaster (the Great Depression). It is, of course, tempting to attribute these traumatic narratives to 'post-9/11' unease, much has been written on this subject, and this is a theme which I will explore in the following chapter. What is notable here is the way in which, like *The X-Files*, these programmes present a 'turn' to religion as a means of dealing with secular catastrophes. Unlike *The X-Files*, however, they rely solely on non-cognitive estrangement in order to engage with the spiritual and are not, therefore, Science Fiction in the Suvinian sense.

During this same period, 'proper' (i.e. Suvinian) Science Fiction television experienced a fairly fallow phase, both commercially and critically. This included the most recent television iteration of the *Star Trek* franchise, *Enterprise*. Resolutely irreligious and mired in the same Humanism which had been a staple of the franchise since 1966, *Star Trek* had never seemed more ahistorical or less sociopolitically relevant. The programme's complete lack of interest in religion, especially, seemed positively perverse at a time when interest in religion in the US was extremely high (buoyed by an increased awareness of alternative philosophies to Christianity resulting from the New Age movement and the events of 9/11 etc., as well as by the Christian origins of millennialism).

In 2005, the *Star Trek* franchise faltered and finally ended its television tenure with the undignified cancellation of *Enterprise*. Meanwhile, *Battlestar Galactica*, an old television show that had run for only one solitary season in the late 1970s, had been 're-imagined' with a prominent religious narrative and quickly

became the most high-profile Science Fiction show since *Star Trek*. But whereas, in *Star Trek*, Zeus, Apollo, Athena et al were just aliens masquerading as Gods who were ultimately unmasked by enlightened humans, *Battlestar Galactica* posited that they were, indeed, Gods. However, their status as such is called into question by the monotheistic Cylons, with their devotion to the "one true God," and the resulting philosophical conflict lies at the heart of this programme which forms the following case study.

Exploring Liminal Space(s): *Battlestar Galactica* and Religion

In the years between the original *Star Trek*'s premiere in 1966 and the demise of *Enterprise* in 2005, television Science Fiction had become much more prevalent, with television schedules comparatively awash with high-profile Science Fiction programmes vying for the attention of viewers, critics and academics alike. Despite the *Stargate* television franchise's impressive longevity (1997-2011), the programme that replaced the *Star Trek* franchise as the most critically-acclaimed and academically scrutinised Science Fiction saga on American television was *Battlestar Galactica*. Much of the praise afforded the programme focused upon its deft allegorical handling of the 'War on Terror.' However, *Battlestar Galactica* also puts angels, prophets and Christ figures at the very heart of a Science Fiction narrative – a genre which, as I have demonstrated in the previous section, rarely engages with the supernatural and metaphysical aspects of religion. Furthermore, I would argue that the religious persecution of human Colonists at the hands of their robotic adversaries, the Cylons, is fundamental to the programme's ongoing narrative.

  Battlestar Galactica's narrative is centred upon the Cylon's jihad to eradicate their human creators. The Cylons accept that God created humankind but believe it to be an imperfect creation - one that is immoral, corrupt, intrinsically wicked, and which has essentially squandered the gift of God's love and His gift of individual souls. The Cylons believe that God directed humanity to create *them* as the ideal entity in order that they should take the place of the defective humans and become, fundamentally, the next generation of God's children. The Cylons believe themselves to be mankind's offspring and that, as children, they cannot achieve full

adulthood until their parents have died. Therefore, the Cylons must obliterate their 'parents' so that they may develop and mature. This intent manifests itself in planet-wide nuclear holocausts which, for the human Colonists, necessitate an evacuation from the twelve colonies they call home, instigating a search for the home of the lost thirteenth tribe - a mythical planet called Earth.

The Cylons are monotheistic and, therefore, regard the human Colonists' polytheistic worship of the Lords of Kobol as profoundly sacrilegious. The Cylons claim to know the humans' scriptures better than the Colonists themselves do but, unlike the humans, they do not believe in the literal truth of the Sacred Scrolls (2.7, 'Home: Part 2'). They acknowledge that the Lords of Kobol existed but they do not accept their divinity. The Lords of Kobol are recognisable to audiences as Greek Gods (Athena, Apollo and Zeus are all mentioned by name), whilst the Cylon's 'God' is analogous to that of Judeo-Christianity.

In addition to the programme's premise, *Battlestar Galactica* also featured striking examples of Christian iconography in its marketing material (most famously a mock-up of Leonardo da Vinci's painting of The Last Supper with cast members in the place of Christ and his disciples) and it is clear that audiences were encouraged to view the programme as one that engaged fully with religion and spirituality, through its prominent and persistent foregrounding of religious iconography, tropes and themes. *Battlestar Galactica* may be immediately recognisable as a Science Fiction text by virtue of its setting and genre-specific trappings, but the text's willingness to engage with the supernatural and metaphysical aspects of religion in an affirmative manner, represents an obvious way in which the programme positions itself apart from most previous Science Fiction television programmes which frequently portrayed religion as a fraudulent belief system. *Battlestar Galactica* fits into this pre-existing lineage whilst simultaneously challenging its paradigmatic parameters through its depiction of religion as a tangible yet supernatural phenomenon, and this apparent paradox is worth investigating.

Battlestar Galactica's origins are almost as old as *Star Trek*'s and, just as the success of *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977) had facilitated the return of *Star Trek*, so the increased interest in Science Fiction encouraged other production studios to enter the fray, including Universal who launched their own version of a

Star Wars-style space saga, *Battlestar Galactica* (1978-1979). Despite what is often assumed from the original *Battlestar Galactica* series' curtailed run (one season plus 10 episodes of short-lived spin-off *Galactica 1980* which aired the year after the parent show ended), the programme was phenomenally popular with some estimates suggesting that up to 65 million viewers watched the pilot episode when it was first broadcast on September 17, 1978 (Horn 2003). Despite a drop in ratings over the course of the season, the ratings remained healthy and the programme was only cancelled because it was decided that making the show had become prohibitively expensive. It was, however, critically reviled. Critics who praised the newer version often dismissed the original for the lack of serious attention it paid to its own premise. Relentlessly upbeat, the series' family-friendly tone ensured that the realities of war and the hardships faced by war-ravaged refugees were never fully addressed. The programme preferred to stick to the episodic narrative model favoured by the original *Star Trek* (a different adventure with different aliens on different planets each week with the events in one episode rarely impacting on those in another).[70] The show's lack of interest in the bleak subject matter suggested by its premise could, however, be read as indicative of most mainstream television programmes at that time, which favoured escapist material above more serious fare - the most popular television shows of the late 1970s being *Happy Days* (1974-1984), *Laverne and Shirley* (1976-1983) and *Three's Company* (1976-1984) (Nielsen Media Research 1997).

That the re-imagined version was made at all is surprising when one considers how many failed attempts there have been to bring *Battlestar Galactica* back to the screen, most notably those by original cast member Richard Hatch (who would eventually join the reboot), and renowned director Bryan Singer (BridgeCommander 2012). It is significant that all the failed attempts involved using the original cast and reviving the original story with minimal alterations, whilst the new *Battlestar Galactica* utilises only some aspects of the original whilst jettisoning most others. We can, therefore, safely assume that the success of the new show in gaining funding and support (of the studio, the network, the critics and the viewers)

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[70] I address the differences between the episodic nature of 'series' and arc-heavy 'serials,' and the ramifications for liminal narratives, in this thesis' conclusion.

resulted, in part, because of these changes and it is apparent, by comparing the old and the new, that many of these changes were undertaken in order to make the series more relevant to a modern audience. Some of these changes reflect social and cultural developments over the past twenty-five years. For example, the changing role of women in society is reflected in the newer series featuring female fighter pilots and politicians as main characters whereas the original series featured just three women who were all secondary characters, one of whom died early in the series run. The most crucial change, however, was in how the programme portrayed religion and, most importantly in regards to Suvin's theory of cognitive estrangement, how the text engaged with the metaphysical and supernatural elements of religion.

The original series' creator and producer, Glen A. Larson, had initially envisaged a programme that would consist of a series of morality tales. *Adam's Ark*, as the programme was originally titled, borrowed heavily from Larson's Mormon beliefs and these were still evident once he had adapted his initial premise and created *Battlestar Galactica*. The Latter Day Saints movement's *Book of Mormon* describes how, unknown to the scattered tribes of Israel, another tribe existed on a different continent – not unlike the apparently 'mythic' lost colony of Earth in Larson's programme. Also, the show refers to a planet called Kobol, on which all human life originated (before the colonies were scattered). The Mormon *Book of Abraham* states the nearest celestial body to where God resides is the similarly-named Kolob. Both the concept of the 'lost' thirteenth colony and of Kobol being the birthplace of mankind is retained in the re-imagined *Battlestar Galactica* but, whereas these two ideas marked the extent of any serious religious engagement within the original series, the entire narrative of the new programme is underpinned by a conflict of religious beliefs. Whereas the 'Gods' of the 1970s show are ultimately revealed as advanced space aliens (very much in the *Star Trek* mould), the new *Battlestar Galactica*'s approach to religion in general and God(s), in particular, is much more complex.

Battlestar Galactica is, I would argue, unique in the way it portrays the villains, rather than the series' human protagonists, as monotheistic, practicing an Abrahamic-like religion whilst the humans themselves practice a polytheistic

religion unlike those practiced by the majority of the programme's intended viewership. Regarded with contemporary Western sensibilities, the programme actually presents audiences with villains whose religious beliefs are ostensibly Christian, whilst those of the human 'heroes' are pagan. To obfuscate matters further, as the series progresses, the human characters' flaws come to the fore and they are often portrayed unfavourably compared to some of the Cylons who are gradually revealed to be complex and, often, very moral characters. Furthermore, we gradually learn that many of the 'human' characters are actually Cylon sleeper agents who are frequently unaware of their true nature. Even when they gain this awareness they rarely revert to their 'programming' and usually attempt to carry on with their lives as normal, desperately clinging to their humanity. Although the first sleeper agent to be unmasked, disillusioned with the Colonists' inclination towards infighting, eventually sides with her own species, another of her model (there are multiple copies of all 12 'models') falls in love with a human, bears his child, and sides with the Colonists. As the series progresses, it becomes increasingly difficult to differentiate between 'good' and 'bad' characters.

Matters of audience identification are complicated further by the fact that, despite the Cylon's recognisably Christian-like religion, the narrative is set in motion by an act of terrorism which they perpetrate and which is portrayed in a way that recalls the events of 9/11. This act then connects the Cylons with a particular view of fundamentalist Islamism prevalent in popular discourse in the years following September 11. But this association is itself destabilised later in the series when the human protagonists, under Cylon occupation on a new home planet, revert to terrorist tactics of their own – including suicide bombing. Meanwhile, the Cylons' intentions in occupying 'New Caprica' are, in fact, honourable and they arise from a civil unrest amongst the Cylons which has led one faction to convince the others that the attempted genocide of mankind was a dreadful error, that co-existence with the humans is the only way forward and this, in fact, is God's true plan. Their methods for creating this equilibrium, however, are extreme and, to the viewer, uncomfortably reminiscent of all too familiar reports of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and the West's 'War on Terror' - incarcerating people in detention centres, indefinitely retaining them without charge, and torturing them for

information about groups of insurgents. Such 'switching' of real-world analogues for both the Cylons and the humans, refracted through the prism of spirituality, confounds any simple reading of *Battlestar Galactica*'s handling of religious parallels. This 'prism' is undoubtedly Christian as the text is steeped in Christian allegories (which I will go on to discuss in further detail) but, at various points in the narrative, both Cylons and humans can be read as either moderate or extremist, Christian or Islamic, and any attempt to decisively conflate one group's belief system with a real world equivalent is doomed to fail.

Whereas the U.S. has always been a religious country, one cannot imagine the comforting central tenets of religious belief being more in demand or, indeed, more in question than after the events of 9/11. Any television programme purporting to engage with the 'big questions' of human existence and human experience which avoided any serious engagement with spirituality would have appeared to be outdated and irrelevant. This, coupled with the spiritual guidance and consolation sought by many during this time of bewilderment and grief which followed in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, may have made *Star Trek*'s secular humanism a very unappealing prospect, whereas consolation might be found in being able to share these experiences and feelings of either the bewildered, alienated Cylons, or the bereft, forlorn crew of *Battlestar Galactica* (both groups seeking succour in religion). As one might expect, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 led to a surge of interest in Islam in general and the Qur'an in particular. U.S. sales of translations of the Qur'an rocketed in subsequent months (Sabry and Saleh 2007). However, this is also true of sales of the Bible (Pohl 2001). The increase in the importance of religion to the everyday lives of Americans appears to have been precipitated by the events of 9/11 and this may help explain why such a hitherto steadfastly successful bastion of secular humanism as the *Star Trek* franchise seemingly lost its appeal in the following years (cf. Mahan 2005).

With such a high percentage of the population regarding themselves as religious, spirituality seems central to many aspects of American life – not least popular culture. As Joel W. Martin asserts, "[American] popular culture, even though it may present itself as thoroughly secular, continues to wrestle with Christian claims, symbols, and expectations" (Martin and Ostwalt 1995, pp.8-9).

However secularised American culture may sometimes appear, religion will often infringe upon supposedly nonreligious narratives. If, according to Suvin, true Science Fiction must repress any form of engagement with the supernatural or metaphysical aspects of religion, then *Battlestar Galactica* embodies a form of the 'return of the repressed' and, it would appear, a most welcome one.

In the *Battlestar Galactica* universe, God exists. Or *the* Gods exist. Or both the Cylon's 'one true God' *and* the Colonists' pantheon of Gods all exist. In an audacious (and, I would argue, triumphant) move on the part of the creators of the programme, despite the unknowable nature of God/s, the existence of *some* kind of omniscient being is one of the very few unquestionable truths in this universe. The nebulous quality of this truth fits perfectly with the programme's engagement with liminality in general, such as the in/humanness of the Cylons, for example.

One of the ways in which the 'truth' of the existence of some kind of higher power is verified is by the fulfilment of religious prophecies as the Colonists are guided towards Kobol by visions experienced by President Laura Roslin (Mary McDonnell). Meanwhile, the traitorous Doctor Gaius Baltar (James Callis) appears to be under the protection of a higher being, his wild guesses continually proving to be correct and repeatedly saving him from being unmasked as a fraud. Most resonant of all is how apparently miraculous phenomena occur with no rational explanation, the most persistent example being Baltar's 'visions' of Number Six (Tricia Helfer), his Cylon lover who sacrificed herself to save him during the initial attack on Caprica. Despite having the memories of Baltar's lover, Head Six's actions and speech suggest that she may be an altogether different entity that is adopting an appearance that Baltar will find familiar. Baltar is 'visited' by this version of Number Six ('Head Six')[71] numerous times and he initially attempts to explain her away through rational explanation. At various points, he interprets her existence as a Cylon computer chip implanted in his brain or a symptom of his growing psychosis. However, his first theory is discredited when no evidence of a

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[71] Referred to as 'Head Six,' 'Messenger Six,' 'Virtual Six' or 'Angel Six' in fan discourses in order to distinguish her from other iterations of the same model (the numerous monikers reflecting her ambiguous characterisation and the mystery regarding her real/unreal status). I prefer 'Head Six' as it favours neither a predominantly spiritual ('messenger'/'angel') nor a secular technological ('virtual') explanation, as well as signifying (possibly divine) superiority to the other iterations.

chip in his head can be found, and the latter when she makes a prediction (regarding the birth of a messianic child) which comes unerringly true, and which Baltar himself could not possibly have known or prophesised (2.7). Once he accepts all logical (or cognitive) explanations are inadequate, we witness an exchange between the two of them:

> Baltar: Who – or what – are you ... exactly?
> Head Six: I'm an angel of God sent here to protect you ... to
> guide you ... and to love you.
> Baltar: To what end?
> Head Six: To the end of the human race.

The scene ends with them embracing and Head Six raising her eyes heavenward. The episode itself ends at this point and, like Baltar, we are left with no reason to doubt the veracity of these words. However, it is the final scene of the series that most forcefully advocates a reading of the entire text as one which not only allows for the possibility of metaphysical agency, it all but confirms it. Set 150,000 years after the events seen in the rest of the series, it features Head Six and 'Head Baltar.'[72] Whilst walking through recognisably present-day Manhattan, both characters reflect upon how history is a sequence of events which repeat over and over again. When Head Six makes reference to "God's plan," Head Baltar chides her with "You know it doesn't like that name" (4.20, 'Daybreak: Parts 2 & 3'). Although this final exchange instils a sense of mystery in the viewer (what, then, is 'it' – and why does it not like to be referred to as 'God'?), the presence of both characters on modern-day Earth, looking identical to how they looked during *Galactica*'s era (even down to wearing the same clothes they wore in the pilot episode) and seemingly invisible to those New York residents around them, most definitely indicates spiritual agency at work.

Battlestar Galactica's prominent focus on spirituality and metaphysics creates dissonance between the text and any attempt to overlay Suvin's framework upon it. I would argue that *Battlestar Galactica* embraces the concept of liminality

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[72] 'Head Baltar' is a character that mentally plagued Baltar's original Cylon lover once her memories had been downloaded into a new body and she had became known as 'Caprica Six,' in the same way that Head Six had plagued Baltar.

so that its narrative incorporates elements of both cognitive and non-cognitive estrangement without definitively favouring either. It is simultaneously rooted in the scientific (or, at least, the pseudoscience of scientific extrapolation), whilst embracing the seemingly irrational and superstitious qualities of religion. This duality is achieved and bolstered not only through the programme's inclusion of metaphysical tropes, but also through its portrayal of three distinctly liminal characters – President Laura Roslin, 'Number Six' (in all her various guises but, especially, as 'Head Six'), and Kara 'Starbuck' Thrace (Katee Sackhoff). Indeed, it is the skilful representation of spiritually complex characters that, above all else, facilitates *Battlestar Galactica*'s deft handling of religion, which, in turn, gives these characters nuance. As C.W. Marshall and Matthew Wheeland assert:

> The theological dimension of *BSG* polarizes characters. It distinguishes them from each other, and allows for the exploration of a variety of dimensions implicit in the relationship of creator and creation. *BSG* does not present a blanket view on religious matters, but offers viewers a rich tapestry in which degrees of faith and differing doctrinal positions are treated sympathetically and sincerely. (Potter and Marshall 2008, pp.100-101)

Like Sarah Connor (Lena Headey) in *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, President Laura Roslin attempts to fulfil her goal of ensuring the survival of humanity (Sarah via ensuring the survival of her son, Laura through finding a new home for her people) whilst dying of cancer. Although Laura's narrative is explicitly endowed with spiritual connotations in a way that Sarah's is not,[73] the liminal status of both women afforded by their terminal illness (having a foothold in both the world of the living and that of the dead) parallels significant features of the narrative as a whole. In Sarah's case, her liminality is bolstered by her time-displacement. Laura's illness, meanwhile, leads to her taking a herbal drug known as 'chamalla,' the side effects of which give her prophetic visions. It is these

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[73] Though, as the mother of mankind's saviour whose initials are JC, whose father is physically absent and whose conception is endowed with mythical significance, the religious subtext of Sarah's story is self-evident.

visions which lead Laura and her people to the home of the mythical 'lost' tribe, Earth. Guided by her spiritual adviser, the priest Elosha (Lorena Gale), Laura gradually embraces her role as prophet as written in the Colonists' Sacred Scrolls, particularly in the writings of the oracle Pythia which are first mentioned when Laura tells Elosha of a hallucination of twelve snakes she experienced after taking chamalla:

> Elosha: You're kidding me, right? You read Pythia and now you're having me on.
> Laura: No, who is Pythia?
> Elosha: One of the oracles in the sacred scrolls. Thirty-six hundred years ago, Pythia wrote about the exile and the rebirth of the human race: "And the Lords anointed a leader to guide the caravan of the heavens to their new homeland and unto their leader they gave a vision of serpents, numbering two and ten as a sign of things to come."
> Laura: Pythia wrote that?
> Elosha: She also wrote that the leader suffered a wasting disease and would not live to enter the new land. But you're not dying… are you? (1.10, 'The Hand of God')

Notably, it is Laura's terminal illness rather than her vision of the serpents that proves the veracity of Pythia's prophecies. Furthermore, there is an implication that Laura's illness endows her with the power to relay signs and portents gleaned from the realm of the spiritual to that of the living. Laura is very evidently *Battlestar Galactica*'s Moses figure. And, as Moses was granted a view of the promised land from the top of Mount Pisgah by God but did not survive long enough to live in it, so Laura, in the final episode, surveys 'New Earth' from the vantage point of a Raptor before passing away, finally fulfilling Pythia's prophecy. The fact that prophesies such as this actually come to pass is important. There is no scientific explanation given for the accuracy of Pythia's prophecies and Laura's visions but, over the course of the series, they come to be regarded as a dependable means of guidance. Along with other supernatural occurrences such as Head Six's foretelling of the birth of a child in the prison cell, these predictions and divinations are continually proven accurate and the inference is that, within the *Battlestar Galactica* universe, it is not only the programme's characters that are wise to heed them – but the viewer as well.

Head Six is evidently not a human character and, therefore, does not fulfil the criteria for being a liminal, unliving protagonist. Nor does she function as an audience-identification figure as her role within the narrative dictates that she must remain a relatively unknowable presence throughout. However, the character does play a key role within the series, and a similar one to Laura and Starbuck's at that. If Laura's biblical counterpart is Moses, then Head Six's is the Archangel Gabriel. This would appear to be made explicit in the aforementioned Annunciation scene wherein she tells Baltar she is "an angel of God" sent to protect and guide him. In other words, she is God's 'messenger.' What prevents this character from becoming completely fantastical is the fact that the Cylons are (at least, at this stage of the narrative) aggressive technological antagonists, skilled in deceit and deception (anyone could turn out to be a Cylon) and are, therefore, untrustworthy. *Battlestar Galactica* deftly maintains this tension between the rational (Cylons as conniving machines) and the fanciful (Cylons as God's soulful 'children') throughout, only decisively signposting that God has been working through his messengers, Head Six and Head Baltar, all along in its closing moments. It is notable that audiences' reaction to this revelation that God had, in fact, been directing the course of events throughout was mostly negative, even though reviews were, otherwise, largely positive.[74] Furthermore, this negativity was often explicitly directed at the loss of ambiguity inherent in the solving of *Battlestar Galactica*'s central enigma. As Richard Edwards notes in his review in *SFX* magazine:

> My one quibble is with the angels, demons or whatever the hell
> Head Six, Head Baltar and Kara are. I have no problem with the
> principle – the existence of some higher power in the Galactica
> universe has been clear since very early on – but Starbuck's
> disappearance, and the Head couple's arrival in present day
> Earth remove some much-needed ambiguity. (Edwards, Richard
> 2009)

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[74] Most – if not all - internet message boards and comments sections devoted to the finale contain an abundance of negative comments regarding the programme's literal 'Deus Ex Machina.' Many, such as the now defunct on-line blog *Eclectica*, also argued that this revelation was antithetical to the Science Fiction genre.

As alluded to by Edwards, perhaps the most contentious development regarding the liminal characters of *Battlestar Galactica* in the series finale was the ultimate fate of Kara Thrace (known by her call-sign, 'Starbuck') who simply disappears once her 'mission' is completed. This mission mainly entailed deciphering the clues inherent in a piece of music written by her composer father that she recalled from her childhood and which eventually gave the Colonists the final set of co-ordinates needed to find their new home, literally leading them to a promised land. Dreilide Thrace (Roark Critchlow), Starbuck's father, is presented, through flashback, as an enigmatic, soulful, sensitive and mysterious figure who disappeared from her life early on, only to return to Starbuck as a vision of 'Slick,' a composer whom Starbuck befriends at the Galactica's bar and who she helps to compose a new work, whilst he offers her life guidance. The name 'Dreilide' is, obviously, an unusual one and would appear to be a composite of the German words for 'three' ('drei') and 'eyelid' (lides), suggesting a spiritual 'third eye' which, in many religions, bestows the owner with the gift of mystical second sight.[75] Dreilide Thrace is thus presented as a physically absent yet spiritually present father (or Father) to Starbuck who has become a mysterious figure herself – apparently having died yet returning with no memory of her own death. Once her work in leading the Colonists to salvation is completed, from atop of a paradisiacal hill top she simply vanishes, her final words of peaceful affirmation suggesting resolution and ascension.

Not only can Starbuck's actions ultimately be read as messianic, but the particulars of her story unambiguously suggest that she is specifically *Battlestar Galactica's* version of Christ. The programme's reveal that Starbuck *did* actually die and was physically resurrected would appear to compromise her liminal status relative to the definition I laid out in the introduction to this thesis, allying the character more with the undead (who die and then return), rather than the unliving (who are suspended in the space between life and death before the moment of passing). However, the fact that this reveal is extremely gradual (and, arguably still open to interpretation), and that viewers and characters (including Starbuck herself)

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[75] Although other characters are referred to by similarly unusual nomenclatures (Starbuck, Apollo, Athena, Helo etc.), these are actually call-signs belonging to individuals with conventional names (Kara, Lee, Sharon, Karl).

are unsure of her status for most of the final season, means that, in narrative terms, Starbuck is an unknown entity, apparently both living and dead. She does not exhibit any signs of being more dead than alive as evinced by undead characters in other texts who are intangible (ghosts) or decaying (zombies), or who exhibit superpower-like abilities (vampires).

Even though Starbuck only becomes a liminal figure once she 'returns' in the finale of season three, her role (like that of Laura and Head Six) in opening and maintaining the liminal space between the realms of the living and the dead is indicated by a vision she has immediately before she disappears. A figure that takes on the appearance of Leoben Conoy (Callum Keith Rennie), a Cylon who believes Starbuck to have a special destiny and who has romantic longings for her which she (mostly) does not share, explains his presence in her vision:

> Starbuck: You're not Leoben.
> Leoben: Never said I was. I'm here to prepare you to pass
> through the next door to discover what hovers in the space
> between life and death. (3.17, 'Maelstrom')

The true identity of the figure who has taken on Leoben's appearance is never revealed but we can deduce from 'his' words, actions and behaviour that it is either another of God's messengers or, perhaps, even God itself. The ambiguity regarding Starbuck's real status during *Battlestar Galactica*'s final season plays a key role in bolstering the discursive space regarding the feasibility of God's existence hitherto sustained by Laura's visions and Head Six's presence. This is especially important as, by this point in the narrative, Laura had lost faith in her own visions, and the frequency of Head Six's appearances in the show had declined as other (corporeal) versions of that particular Cylon model had repeatedly been introduced or re-introduced (Gina, Natalie, Caprica Six). Starbuck's continued presence on board the Galactica after her death also serves as the most direct challenge to an exclusively scientific, anti-spiritual view of the *Battlestar Galactica* universe. Whereas Laura's visions *could* be dismissed as lucky guesses, and Head Six's visitations as the delusional product of Baltar's guilt and paranoia, both Starbuck's death and eventual return are witnessed by other characters in the programme, and by the programme's audiences. This narrative enigma may be caused by a raft of different possibilities

but they are all 'unscientific' (notably in the Suvinian sense of relying on cognitive, rather than non-cognitive, estrangement).

Liminality is central to the representations of Laura Roslin, Head Six and Starbuck and serves as more than simply an interesting facet of these characters. As in *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, they bolster and emphasise the text's focus on the concept of liminality itself (exemplified in temporal instability and subjunctive spaces in the former, and the mystery and indefinability of religious spirituality in the latter). Laura's visions, Head Six' messages and, in the final season, Starbuck's actions all aid in creating and maintaining a gateway between corporeal and spiritual realms.[76]

Battlestar Galactica blends elements of 'Suvinian' Science Fiction (i.e. texts that operate entirely within a framework of cognitive estrangement) with an unquestioning acceptance of the existence of supernatural spiritual phenomena. The fact that it has succeeded in doing this whilst gaining mainstream recognition and popularity would seem to suggest that this approach has struck a chord with audiences. This would seem to suggest that *Battlestar Galactica*'s tolerance of spiritual themes was more relevant to audiences in the 2000s than the continuing secular humanism of the *Star Trek* and *Stargate* franchises.

Whether one believes that the success of a Science Fiction series that embraces matters of religion as wholly as *Battlestar Galactica* is due, at least in part, to the events of 9/11 or not, it is clear that the programme is skilful in its use of liminal characters to reinforce the central enigma concerning the existence of God(s). *Battlestar Galactica* consistently avoids scientific rationales for mystical occurrence and is, therefore, an unusual example of a text that appears to be unquestionably Science Fiction but also one which functions in diametric opposition to Suvin's framework of cognitive estrangement. Miraculous occurrences that occur within the narrative such as Laura's prophetic dreams, Head Six and Head Baltar's presence in

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[76] It is, of course, noteworthy that these characters are all female and, even when secondary characters such as Head Baltar and Samuel Anders (Michael Trucco) are ascribed liminal qualities, they are emasculated in some way: Head Baltar is presented as being even more epicene than the real Dr Baltar, whilst Anders, after being shot and incapacitated, begins performing a role similar to the jabbering, apparently half-crazed (female) Cylon 'hybrids.' I will return to this confluence of liminality with femininity in the thesis conclusion.

modern-day New York, and Starbuck's resurrection are examples of non-cognitive estranging elements and this, according to Suvin, precludes the text from being true Science Fiction. However, one cannot simply categorise *Battlestar Galactica* as what is commonly referred to as 'Fantasy' (Science Fiction's non-cognitively estranging opposite) as, in all other respects, it more than adequately fulfils Suvin's criteria for defining the genre. Not only does it contain all the iconography one associates with Science Fiction, it also relies heavily on explicit modes of cognition as a means of encouraging recognition in the viewer. If the programme had been unsuccessful, one might dismiss it as an example of a doomed attempt to fashion a generically impossible text – a science-based narrative engaging fully with those supernatural and metaphysical aspects of religion which cannot be categorised or referenced in a scientific way. But its clear success *as* a Science Fiction text suggests that Suvin's framework appears to require modification if it is to be used to define television Science Fiction. Nevertheless, as I have argued, despite its apparent shortcomings and even though Suvin's theory was originally formulated in regards to Science Fiction literature, it also remains a valid approach to television Science Fiction and remains one of the most resilient of approaches to the enduring challenges of genre categorisation and should not be hastily discarded.

Conclusion

> Science Fiction functions today as a religion … [it] is written for
> "believers." Its language, its fantasy, its laws of time and space,
> of robots and aliens, and its conventions of time travel, hyper
> space, parsecs, alternative worlds and telepathy, are for the
> initiated, for those believers who have made the leap of faith.
> (Kreuziger 1986, p.1, p.15)

This statement, written by Frederick A. Kreuziger over twenty-five years ago, appears remarkably prescient today. As the concept of Christianity is filtered through various religious groups which all worship in their own particular ways, so Science Fiction "believers" belong to their own sets and subsets, such as comic book aficionados, Trekkers, Whovians, Cosplayers, devotees of specific movie franchises or fans of particular television programmes. Indeed, with five of the highest-grossing

films of all time belonging to what is popularly understood as the Science Fiction genre,[77] it would appear that the majority of movie-going audiences these days are "believers." This notion is upheld by celebrated novelist and commentator Margaret Atwood, who declared:

> More than one commentator has mentioned that science fiction
> as a form is where theological narrative went after Paradise Lost,
> and this is undoubtedly true… The form is often used as a way
> of acting out the consequences of a theological doctrine…
> Extraterrestrials have taken the place of angels, demons, fairies
> and saints. (Atwood 2005)

Battlestar Galactica takes this idea further than ever since its characters such as 'Head Six' and 'Head Baltar' are not mere substitutes for angels, they *are* angels. Correlatively, Starbuck, *Battlestar Galactica*'s Christ-like figure really does undergo a form of resurrection (although, I would argue that she wavers between life and death before ultimately 'dying' in the final episode), and Laura Roslin actually is the long-prophesised emancipator who leads her people's exodus to their promised land. Neither of these characters functions on a purely allegorical level, and spiritual phenomena saturate the personal narrative of both. I would argue that *Battlestar Galactica*'s illustrious critical reputation has been earned through its skilful unification of religious and Science Fiction narratives, with the latter no longer simply acting as an analogy for the former. Unhampered by the restrictions of overly prescriptive generic conventions, the programme adroitly utilises the theory of liminality through various means - not least through its unliving protagonists - to move beyond these restrictions and engage with the complicated, diverse and nebulous concepts of religion and spirituality.

Ultimately, *Battlestar Galactica* can be read as a series-long meditation on the first words spoken in the pilot episode, the question "are you alive?" This meditation explores how one defines the concept of "life," and whether any definition could ever be truly adequate. *Caprica*, the programme's prequel series, is not framed by an overriding question in the same way but, if it was, an appropriate

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[77] According to *boxofficemojo.com*, as of November 11, 2013.

equivalent might be "what is death?" For, similar to *Battlestar Galactica*'s examination of what constitutes life, *Caprica* provocatively asks how do we 'measure' death, do we have souls, and – perhaps most controversially – are lives lived in the perpetual shadow of death inherently traumatic? This question forms the basis of the next chapter.

Chapter Four

Grievous Living and Immortal Avatars:
Trauma and Posthumanism in *Caprica*

Introduction

Caprica (2010-2011) was a short-lived, single-season spin-off which failed to match both the popular and commercial success of its parent show, *Battlestar Galactica* (2003; 2004-2009). Whilst *Battlestar Galactica* had a relatively straightforward Science Fiction premise and contained elements familiar to the genre (spaceships, cyborgs, alien worlds), *Caprica* was an altogether less generically-straightforward proposition. Essentially the story of two families, the Graystones and the Adamas (whose respective legacies would include the creation of the genocidal Cylons that would eventually destroy the titular planet, and the man destined to lead the Caprican refugees to a new home), *Caprica* was clearly intended to be much more of a character study than its predecessor. Whereas *Battlestar Galactica* foregrounds the militaristic aspects of its narrative, featuring spectacular battles in space and gritty combat scenes on-board the Galactica itself and on various planets, *Caprica* centres, instead, on the domestic lives of its characters, focusing primarily on the emotional fall-out of the death of teenage daughters from both families in a terrorist attack. The driving force of *Battlestar Galactica* is the Colonists' need to find a new home. The impetus of *Caprica*'s narrative is the Graystone and Adama families' need to manage their grief and to come to terms with the traumatic event that haunts them. Complicating the grieving process and repeatedly evoking the original traumatic event is the continued presence of both dead girls through their cyberspatial avatars. Despite having perished physically, their highly-sophisticated counterparts ensure that both girls continue to 'live,' albeit in a virtual world. Definitions of 'life' and 'death' therefore become problematic, frustrating both families' 'healing process,' especially once the possibility arises of the avatars being transferred into robotic (Cylon) bodies and thus bringing the girls back into the 'real 'world. Thus, *Caprica*

uses certain Science Fiction tropes (cyberspace, robotics) in order to explore the thorny and sensitive topic of grief and to interrogate traditional definitions of 'life' and 'death.' The programme questions whether, given the technological means for prolonging life indefinitely, one should take that opportunity, or whether one accepts that death, trauma and grief are an essential part of the experience of living. Furthermore, *Caprica* posits that life is inherently traumatic and invites us to consider an alternative wherein traumatic events have no consequences, where death is not the end, and where grief need not exist.

In this chapter I explore some of the issues regarding trauma and grief that *Caprica* raises, specifically in relation to liminality, which resonates throughout the text through representations of cyberspatial avatars, robots and (briefly paying homage to its parent show) angels. The chapter is divided into two halves. In the first, I present a brief overview of trauma. 'Trauma' has an established history but the term has become increasingly conspicuous in the years since the events of 9/11 (and which are implicitly alluded to in *Caprica*'s dramatising of an unexpected terrorist attack upon a sprawling metropolis). I examine the relationship between trauma, narrative and representation, in particular how the popularisation and proliferation of a nexus formed by these three concepts since 9/11 has been used in specific examples of popular culture (particularly television) commonly perceived to possess a 'post-9/11' sensibility. In the second half of the chapter, I present a case analysis of *Caprica* itself, concentrating particularly on the programme's exploration of trauma via various immortal avatars (sophisticated on-line analogues, robots and angels) and what I term 'grievous living,' whereby living with a form of PTSD constitutes a 'normal' existence.

As trauma is at the heart of this chapter, it behoves me, first of all, to provide a definition of the concept. The Greek word for wound, 'trauma' is a popular and commonly used term (a *Google* search results in over 36 million hits). Recent high-profile debates such as those concerning the growing prevalence of 'trigger warnings' on-line (whereby readers are warned in advance of potentially traumatic subject matter), and their seemingly unstoppable diffusion into the world at large (notably university lecture halls), suggest that our sensitivity to trauma has never been so great – or that such controversies regarding the concept have never

been so vital (for example, see Jarvie 2014). It appears that trauma has become so significant in people's lives that everyone has an instinctive understanding of the term.

The American Psychological Association's definition of trauma as "an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster" (Anon 2014) would no doubt chime (broadly) with a general consensus of what the word means within popular discourse, and the Oxford English Dictionary's initial definition also tallies closely with this generalised understanding. However, the OED goes on to indicate that the term is far more complex than is suggested by the relatively straightforward common denotation. It describes trauma as:

> A psychic injury, esp. one caused by emotional shock the
> memory of which is repressed and remains unhealed; an internal
> injury, esp. to the brain, which may result in a behavioural
> disorder of organic origin. Also, the state or condition so caused.

While simple definitions posit trauma as an emotional phenomenon, this more detailed description augments the definition to include symptoms of inadvertent personal conduct ("the memory of which is repressed," "behavioural disorder"), and temporality ("remains unhealed"). By this definition, the traumatic incident itself gives rise to a persistent and debilitating anxiety disorder. Historically, this disorder has mainly been associated with the psychological effects of warfare and has been known by a variety of names such as Soldier's Heart (during the American Civil War), Shell Shock (in the First World War), and Combat Neurosis (in WW2). Whereas these terms all assumed the anxiety to be the result of mental or, most commonly, physical trauma experienced during combat, the current denomination for the condition - Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – is a much broader term. Officially recognised and systematised for the first time in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (APA 1980), PTSD has, like 'trauma,' become a widely-used and often bandied about term in popular discourse.

As Judith Lewis Herman has noted, in addition to the medical establishment's recognition of PTSD (through its inclusion in the *DSM-III*), and the general publics' growing awareness of its prevalence in combat zones (as well as in the lives of war veterans), "even in peacetime, exposure to violence is more

commonplace and more damaging than anyone would like to believe" (Herman 1997, p.238). Also, whereas the *DSM-III*'s initial definition of PTSD stressed its causes as "outside the range of usual human experience" (APA 1980, p.236), this proposition now seems outmoded, perhaps even naïve:

> Rape, battery, and other forms of sexual and domestic violence are so common a part of women's lives that they can hardly be described as outside the range of ordinary experience. And in view of the number of people killed in war over the past century, military trauma, too, must be considered a common part of human experience; only the fortunate find it unusual. (Herman 1997, p.33)

Reflecting the rapid proliferation of PTSD within American society, the latest version of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, the *DSM-5* (APA 2013), features a considerably expanded entry on the condition which definitively signals how PTSD is a disorder which can affect anyone, not only soldiers. In addition to separate diagnostic criteria for children aged 6 and younger, the *DSM-5* states that Posttraumatic Stress Disorder may be precipitated by "exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence" in any of the following ways:

1. Directly experiencing the traumatic event(s).
2. Witnessing, in person, the event(s) as it occurred to others.
3. Learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend….
4. Experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s). (APA 2013, p.271)

Although DSM-5 states that the "aversive details" in the last criterion do not include those witnessed through the media, ongoing arguments over media effects suggest that this point is debatable (cf. Louis, Burke et al. 2013). This does, however, highlight an important distinction which must be made but which is often overlooked. Whereas the DSM contends that media exposure cannot count as trauma in and of itself, it does allow for the possibility that media exposure may trigger PTSD

(which may well help explain the increase in the aforementioned 'trigger warnings'). The important distinction to be made, therefore, is between the traumatic event itself, and PTSD which is a disorder that may arise as a consequence. By this token, *Caprica* is emphatically not a text about 'trauma' but about PTSD and the inability of its protagonists to grieve healthily and move on with their lives. The ramifications of this will become explicit in my case study of the programme in the second half of this chapter.

'Complicated Grief' or 'Prolonged Grief Disorder' are terms which have gained traction in popular discourse over the past few years (Schumer 2009) and they refer to the phenomenon whereby a bereaved person is unable to stop grieving. It was proposed that the condition be added to the (then forthcoming) DSM-5, but this idea was ultimately rejected. Whereas the DSM is unclear as to the exact relationship between the disorder and PTSD, it clearly shares many of the traits associated with the latter condition. I would also argue that it chimes with broader popular concerns regarding the process of grieving in the twenty-first century – notably in relation to recent technological advances. For example, writing about what she refers to as "Generation Facebook" in *The New York Review of Books* in 2010, novelist Zadie Smith made the following observation:

> When a teenager is murdered, at least in Britain, her Facebook wall will often fill with messages that seem to not quite comprehend the gravity of what has occurred. You know the type of thing: *Sorry babes! Missin' you!!! Hopin' u iz with the Angles* [sic]. *I remember the jokes we used to have LOL! PEACE XXXXX*
> When I read something like that, I have a little argument with myself: "It's only poor education. They feel the same way as anyone would, they just don't have the language to express it." But another part of me has a darker, more frightening thought. Do they genuinely believe, because the girl's wall is still up, that she is still, in some sense, alive? What's the difference, after all, if all your contact was virtual? (Smith 2010)

Smith refers to the 'virtual' manifestations of these well-wishers (and all users of social media) as "People 2.0" in order to distinguish them from their 'real world' analogues ("People 1.0"). Smith worries that, as someone who eschews social media, her idea of personhood might be "nostalgic, irrational, inaccurate," and it is difficult not to agree. Whereas the concept of what constitutes 'personhood' has been historically linked with physical characteristics such as race and gender, the emergence of virtual personhood represents a definitive break with corporeal considerations. Indeed, the act of demarcation, central to older modes of personhood, has been steadily devalued in the shift to online identities. In the virtual realm, physical attributes become insignificant and can even be 'blurred' or 'faked' if desired.

Since Smith wrote of her fears, the technological revolution has continued apace and the use of social media has both increased and diversified. As of December 2013, Facebook had 1.23 billion monthly users (Facebook 2013) and, in addition to Facebook, social media sites such as Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Tumblr and Pinterest have become popular and seemingly permanent on-line fixtures with tens or hundreds of millions of users worldwide. Moreover, due in part to their pivotal roles in the large-scale dissemination of information and the marshalling of an unprecedented number of people during numerous meteorological crises and significant sociopolitical events (such as Hurricane Sandy which wrought devastation in the U.S. in October 2012, and the on-going 'Arab Spring' with its associated protests, riots and demonstrations), social media are no longer perceived exclusively as the trivial yet sinister distraction Smith refers to. This has, in turn, helped 'demystify' social media for a significant number of potential users who may otherwise have remained doubtful about the benefits of joining the online community, and wary of creating their own online persona(s). These people, along with millions of others, now create and cultivate their '2.0' equivalent by eagerly sharing personal photos, videos, status updates, comments and 'likes.' Meanwhile, the interconnectivity of social networks continues to grow, either through cross-platform acquisitions such as that of Instagram by Facebook in April 2012, or users' wilful sharing of personal information across sites and apps in order to facilitate hassle-free log-ins and so forth.

Alongside seemingly unstoppable growth, social media are penetrating the lives of users in ways that even apprehensive commentators such as Smith could never have foreseen. For example, in December 2013, it was reported that personal status updates typed but ultimately 'unpublished' by Facebook users are still recorded by the site, thereby endowing users' record or 'virtual self' with information, thoughts and feelings which even their closest friends and family are not privy to (Golbeck 2013). Even if users themselves are only half-aware of their random musings and forget them thereafter, their virtual counterpart will store them away, permanently.

In an extraordinary development, social media are now prolonging the online presence of users beyond the point of their death. In addition to *DeadSocial*, a service which allows users to write and store messages that are sent to pre-destined recipients after the user has died, March 2013 saw the launch of an app called *LivesOn*. Essentially, an add-on to a user's Twitter account:

> [*LivesOn*] uses Twitter bots powered by algorithms that analyse
> your online behaviour and learn how you speak, so it can keep
> on scouring the internet, favouriting tweets and posting the sort
> of links you like, creating a personal digital afterlife. As its
> tagline explains: "When your heart stops beating, you'll keep
> tweeting." (Coldwell 2013)

To the list of physical attributes which have become literally immaterial for "People 2.0" we can now, it seems, add 'life.' Both *DeadSocial* and *LivesOn* could be seen as heralds of a technological turn which may eventually lead to *Grace*, the "resurrection program" featured in *Caprica* (1.13, 'False Labor'). All three programs, to various degrees, confound the inevitability of death, consequently complicating notions of what it means to be 'alive,' and creating a complex liminal zone between these two states of being where, traditionally, there was just a simple dividing line. This complication has a resultant effect on the related phenomena of trauma and grieving. Specifically, it simultaneously offers the possibility of an end to trauma and grief (as no-one really dies), whilst positing a world which is perpetually traumatised and grieving (as everyone is eventually caught in the liminal nexus between life and death). This dichotomy is at the heart of *Caprica* and, in the

following sections, I'll investigate how the programme explores this very timely and possibly prescient predicament.

The Telling of Trauma

As evidenced by the diagnosing of 'Soldier's Heart' during the American Civil War, trauma is not a recent invention. Whilst the origins of Trauma Studies are more recent, one can still trace them back to the early Holocaust studies of the late 1950s/early 1960s (Kaplan 2005, p.1). But, as Cathy Caruth has noted, it is "in the years since Vietnam, [that] the fields of psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and sociology have taken a renewed interest in the problem of trauma" (Caruth 1995, p.3), and the convergence of these fields (along with others such as medicine, and even the dramatic arts) under the umbrella term Trauma Studies has resulted in interdisciplinary approaches which have proved enlightening and educative. However, the sensitive nature and controversial potential of the various forms of trauma and PTSD mean that Trauma Studies remains a delicate and highly contentious investigative area:

> The difficulty of listening and responding to traumatic stories in
> a way that does not lose their impact, that does not reduce them
> to clichés or turn them all into versions of the same story, is a
> problem that remains central to the task of therapists, literary
> critics, neurobiologists, and filmmakers alike. (Caruth 1995,
> p.vii)

Caruth's reference to filmmakers as a distinct, specialist group which engages with the "problem of trauma" is significant. That she equates them with groups of medical professionals may, at first, seem strange. But, as Caruth notes, since the end of the Vietnam War (1956-1975), dealing with trauma has become a recurrent and prominent theme in popular American cinema (and, more recently, popular American television). Although there had been movies made about earlier wars (including those made during wartime), the return of veterans from the Vietnam War, in particular, prompted a cycle of films about the trauma experienced in Vietnam and/or the difficulties in re-adjusting to life afterwards. These included

high-profile (and often critically acclaimed) movies such as *The Deer Hunter* (Michael Cimino, 1978), *Coming Home* (Hal Ashby, 1978), *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979), *Platoon* (Oliver Stone, 1986), *Full Metal Jacket* (Stanley Kubrick, 1987), *Hamburger Hill* (John Irvin, 1987), and *Born on the Fourth of July* (Oliver Stone, 1989). The critical and commercial success of these movies meant that even those people who did not have direct links with Vietnam vets became very aware of the resultant trauma faced by many of these soldiers. Arguably, in this way, more people engaged with the concept indirectly through popular cultural texts like these movies than had ever done directly with an 'expert' practitioner.

By 1990, seemingly coinciding with the end of the Vietnam War movie cycle, the U.S. was embroiled in a new war – one referred to variously as the 'Persian Gulf War,' the 'Kuwait War' and the 'Gulf War' (1990-1991) but which, following the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the ensuing war that followed, has since become known as the 'First Iraq War.' The 1990-91 conflict was relatively brief and, consequently, the movies which sought to depict it were correspondingly fewer in number than of those representing the Vietnam War – although there were some eminent examples such as *Three Kings* (David O. Russell, 1999), *Jarhead* (Sam Mendes, 2005) and the updated remake of *The Manchurian Candidate* (Jonathan Demme, 2004). The conflict itself, however, was notable for being the first of its kind to unfold live on TV, via 24-hour rolling news channels. Advances in media technologies (including lighter, more portable cameras, and reliable satellite technology) meant that television channels throughout the developed world inundated viewers with visceral images of missile strikes, mechanised warfare and physical combat. Footage was presented as unmediated and immediate, putting the viewer at the heart of the conflict. Whereas traumatic real-world war imagery had once been the province of photography or the brief segments included in television news reports, from this point on, it saturated television news media. Even if, as the *DSM* maintains, repeated exposure to this imagery in itself cannot cause PTSD, there can be little doubt that the physical, mental and emotional trauma of warfare has, since the First Iraq War, become an integral part of how war is presented on television.

Concurrent to this increased general awareness of trauma through film and television, cultural forms have also influenced *how* trauma is perceived and understood. As Roger Luckhurst ascertains, the contemporaneous popularising of both psychoanalysis and film (along with the associated cinematic 'dream palaces') during the early twentieth-century resulted in shared concepts such as the traumatic/dramatised 'flashback.' More recently, "the notion of recovering pristine recorded memories, as it developed in the 1980s, was linked to cultural technologies like television and video recorders: alters were switched like channels; memories were recorded, stored, rewound, replayed" (Luckhurst 2008, p.80).

Caruth's original identification of filmmakers (and, by extension, television programme makers) as a group tasked with interpreting trauma thus makes perfect sense. Indeed, with the size of potential audiences for a movie or television programme vastly outnumbering those people who actively seek psychiatric or psychological help for trauma and PTSD (or knowing someone suffering from the disease), it can be argued that art is, far and away, the most significant mechanism for 'translating' trauma in late twentieth- and early twenty-first century American society. What makes fictional narratives especially suitable for this role is that the act of 'telling' is critical in the healing of trauma survivors and the process of reintegrating traumatic memories so that they no longer function as stressors and an impairment to living a 'normal' life. The representation of trauma in popular narratives and the *re-presentation* of the traumatic memory by the trauma survivor embody the process of healthily 'working through' trauma, as opposed to the harmful process of 'acting out,' wherein traumatic stressors engender debilitating behaviour or detrimental actions on the part of the trauma survivor. As Herman notes:

> In the second stage of recovery, the survivor tells the story of the trauma. She tells it completely, in depth and in detail. This work of reconstruction actually transforms the traumatic memory, so that it can be integrated into the survivor's life story… Normal memory as "the action of telling a story." Traumatic memory, by contrast, is wordless and static. (Herman 1997, p.175)

In addition to the simpatico that exists between the 'working through' process of trauma therapy and the narrativising modality of film and television, the visual nature of these art forms also lends itself particularly well to an exploration of trauma. Traumatic stressors are, in many respects, anti-narrative in that they derive their power from the 'irrational' effects they exert on trauma survivors. Outwardly, there appears to be no 'logical' reason for why stressors affect PTSD sufferers the way they do but the fact remains that they intrude on a trauma survivor's otherwise ordered existence – and these intrusions are usually visual. Hence television and cinema are both ideally situated for not only mimicking the 'working through' narrative of PTSD therapy, but also for depicting the intrusive traumatic image(s). Furthermore, with recent tendencies towards narrative innovation and experimentation in 'Complex Television,'[78] one could argue that television is now better placed to continue the grand tradition of representing traumatic subjectivity which Luckhurst associates with film:

> [Cinema] helped constitute the PTSD subject in 1980, and… it has continued to interact with and help shape the psychological and general cultural discourse of trauma into the present day… After the formulation and extension of PTSD in the 1980s… the marked disruption of linear temporality in 1990s cinema – with plots presented backwards, in loops, or disarticulated into mosaics that only retrospectively cohere – is partly driven by attempts to convey the experience of traumatized subjectivity. (Luckhurst 2008, pp.177-178)

The '9/11 Sensibility': National Trauma on Television

With its emphasis on thought-provoking and morally ambiguous storytelling, coupled with emotional investment facilitated by prolonged running times and the intimacy of television as a medium, Complex Television appears to provide a natural fit for trauma narratives. Also, whereas PTSD has become an increasingly prevalent trope in TV drama over the past two decades, it cannot be denied that the events of 9/11,

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[78] See Introduction for more on Complex TV and why I believe it is a better descriptor for a certain kind of television than the oft-used (but reductive) term 'Quality TV.'

especially, left an indelible mark on the television landscape in general and, I would argue, allegorical television genres such as Science Fiction in particular.

Similarly to how the events of the First Gulf War were presented, 9/11 unfolded on TV screens worldwide in real time, with hitherto unimaginable traumatic imagery being presented seemingly unmediated (whilst, of course, being heavily mediated). Needless to say, the raw exposure to such traumatic events and violent imagery impacted greatly on the American sociocultural sphere; consequently (and predictably) this affected the content of many American films and television programmes. Whereas certain television programmes already airing when the attacks took place (such as *Ally McBeal* [1997-2002], *Sex and the City* [1998-2004] and *The West Wing* [1999-2006]), made direct reference to the terrorist attacks in episodes made and broadcast after 9/11, certain programmes premiering in subsequent years were often perceived as addressing the events of 9/11 indirectly, usually allegorically, by possessing a sensibility rarely explained but designated as 'post-9/11' nonetheless. It is my contention that the 'post-9/11 sensibility' is, in fact, evidence of an attempt to work through the trauma of the events of that day, and the resultant shockwaves that emanated from the terrorist attacks and radiated through American society (by way of the Iraq War, the Afghanistan invasion, and a general sense of unease at the apparent ease by which an attack on U.S. soil could occur). As Emily Lauren Putnam asserts of many Horror movies made after 9/11, these texts "are engaged in the psychological and sociological processing of personal, national, and global responses to 9/11 and its aftermath" (Putnam 2013, p.359). The post-9/11 sensibility is, in effect, American PTSD writ large. And, whilst it may, at first, sound hyperbolic to ascribe a form of collective PTSD to the American populace as a whole, following the events of September 11th (and the televising of those events, specifically), symptoms were recorded by medical practitioners across the country. As John A. Updegraff, Roxane Cohen Silver, and E. Alison Holman have documented:

> The psychological effects of 9/11 spread far wider than the epicenters. In the days following the attacks, nearly half of Americans reported symptoms of posttraumatic stress (PTS; Schuster et al., 2001), and many of these symptoms remained elevated in the following weeks and months (Silver, Holman,

McIntosh, Poulin, & Gil-Rivas, 2002). Even more common were fears of additional terrorist attacks, as more than half of Americans had ongoing concerns for the safety of themselves and their families (Silver et al., 2002). The psychosocial impact of these events went beyond simply distress and heightened vulnerability, as other recent investigations have described reactions of anger and political intolerance (Skitka, Bauman, & Mullen, 2004), gratitude and spirituality (Peterson & Seligman, 2003), and even changes in patterns of normal language use, social behavior, and cognitive processing nationally (Cohn, Mehl, & Pennebaker, 2004; Mehl & Pennebaker, 2003). Clearly, the attacks constituted both a collective cultural upheaval for the American people at large and a directly experienced, individual trauma for a small proportion of Americans. (Updegraff, Silver et al. 2008, p.709)

Just as this "collected cultural upheaval" was not limited geographically, so cultural responses through representation were not restricted to certain textual forms. The post-9/11 sensibility saturated books, artworks, music, plays, film and television to such an extent that referring to certain cultural texts, especially movies and television programmes, as a 'response' to 9/11 has become commonplace and, some might argue, clichéd. The roster of films and television shows alone seems unending. What is particularly interesting about the volume of cultural responses is not just the sheer variety of genres, but of subject positions. For, just as the 'post-9/11' catalogue of cultural texts ranges from big Hollywood blockbusters to small independents, and high-concept special-effects laden Science Fiction space sagas to claustrophobic intimate character studies, so these stories are narrated by a diverse assortment of potential subjects, politically and socially. They range from those directly associated with the traumatic incident (whether it be 9/11 or a veiled stand-in) such as politicians, military personnel and official government agents, through 'ordinary people' whose lives are forever changed by the event, all the way to the antagonists and anti-heroes who function as analogues of the perpetrators of the initial trauma. Furthermore, texts run the gamut of responses to 9/11, from hard-line reactionary undertakings that mirror the Bush administration's uncompromisingly violent response to being attacked, to more introspective and liberal considerations of the underlying resentments that led to the initial attacks in the first instance.

A detailed list of the genres, subject positions, and political outlooks covered by various post-9/11 texts would be a monumental undertaking and provide enough material for an entire book (or several). As Stacy Takacs has pointed out, in 2005, within the space of one week, no fewer than three new Science Fiction programmes debuted, all of which "featured invasive alien forces, shadowy government conspiracies, and a generalised mood of paranoia and dread… [which] were all clearly enabled by and responsive to the heightened sense of anxiety associated with life in the post-9/11 United States" (Takacs 2009). All three programmes, *Surface* (2005-2006), *Invasion* (2005-2006) and *Threshold* (2005-2006), were destined to last one solitary season but this speaks more to the fact that they were far from unique in their outlook and tone, which often made them seem derivative, than it does to their overall quality.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the *Star Trek* franchise's penchant for political allegory found expression in its then-current iteration, *Enterprise* (2001-2005), as it featured a season-long story arc wherein the Earth was the target of a terrorist attack and the Enterprise crew were, ostensibly, sent on a mission to disarm the alien attackers of their Weapon of Mass Destruction (although there is also a clear sense that some crew members are driven by the desire to avenge their dead countrymen).

The roster of contemporary 'post-9/11 paranoia' programmes also included *Battlestar Galactica*, *The Event* (2010-2011), *Falling Skies* (2011-2015), *Flash Forward* (2009-2010), *Fringe* (2008-2013), *Heroes* (2006-2010), *Jericho* (2006-2008), *Person of Interest* (2011-) and *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* (2008-2009), as well as dozens of examples from outside the Science Fiction genre, most notably *24* (2001-2010). As this list indicates, the post-9/11 sensibility was rife on American television in the decade following the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001, and all of these programmes can be viewed as a collective 'working through' of the traumatic events of that day. Whether that process of working through involved retaliatory violence (including the use of torture as a justifiable method of extracting information), as in *24*, or took a more diplomatic tack by attempting to understand 'the enemy,' as in *Battlestar Galactica*, the emphasis remained squarely on an allegorical representation of PTSD. Lip service might occasionally be paid to the emotional losses suffered by protagonists (especially in the bleak and semi-

dystopic narratives of *Battlestar Galactica*, *Fringe* and *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*), but none of these programmes address the issue of PTSD in a direct and prolonged manner. Whereas they all address what Wheeler Winston Dixon refers to as the post-9/11 "warrior spirit" (Dixon 2004, p.1), either by emulating the gung-ho spirit of retribution or questioning its morality, they avoid representing the actual experience of dealing with PTSD itself. These programmes posit two possible reactions to a traumatic event as a collective response (either on a national or, in the case of certain Science Fiction narratives, on a planetary scale) but none feature the actual process of working through PTSD on an individual level. *Caprica* differs from these other examples by placing the personalised emotional toll exerted by a traumatic event at the heart of its narrative.

Grievous Living: PTSD in *Caprica*

If the post-9/11 sensibility is, as I have stated, American PTSD writ large, then *Caprica* represents an attempt to re-transcribe it in more intimate detail. Whereas the programme features the epic backstory of *Battlestar Galactica*'s genocidal Cylons, this storyline is but one amongst many. Others include the struggle for power amongst different factions of an illegal monotheistic religion, the hunt for the originators of a deadly bomb attack on the city's transport system, one man's descent into a world of organised crime, and two teenage girls' attempt to reach another colony called Gemenon in an effort to uncover the true purpose of a computer program known only as 'Apotheosis.' What sets all these storylines in motion is the traumatic occurrence of the suicide-bombing of a maglev train, and what preserves the bond between them is the spectre of PTSD present in each narrative strand. Indeed, despite its status as a prequel to *Battlestar Galactica*, a programme that is generally regarded as 'pure' Science Fiction (in terms of its iconography, at least), *Caprica* has mainly been regarded as a domestic drama about living in the aftermath of trauma. Reviewing the second half of the show's one and only season on its DVD release, Samuel Roberts in the popular Science Fiction magazine *SciFiNow* (a publication which one would naturally expect to emphasise the Science Fiction qualities of the programme) commented:

> *Caprica* has always been a family drama about grief at its core.
> The elements of artificial intelligence and morality are delicately
> woven into that, as billionaire industrialist Daniel Graystone
> ([Eric] Stoltz) searches for a way to bring his daughter Zoë [sic]
> ([Alessandra] Torresani) back to life using revolutionary
> robotics. Meanwhile, the Adama family tackles grief itself, after
> Joseph Adama ([Esai] Morales) lost his wife and daughter.
> (Roberts 2011, p.70)

The inability of Joseph Adama, Daniel Graystone, and his wife Amanda (Paula Malcomson) to move beyond the loss of their teenage daughters spans the entirety of *Caprica*'s 18 episodes and is actually the instigating factor of most of the storylines. These include Joseph's increasing involvement with his home colony's mafia, the Ha'la'tha, as he seeks retribution for his daughter's death, Amanda's unintentional assistance to the 'Soldiers of the One' (STO) terrorist group as she seeks counsel and support with its leader (and Zoe's former headmistress) Clarice Willow (Polly Walker), and Daniel's attempts to safeguard the continued existence of Zoe-A (also played by Alessandra Torresani), a sentient avatar, modelled upon and created by his real daughter. The latter storyline generates an alternative discourse around death, other than the prolonged grief disorder of Joseph and the Graystones – specifically, the potential for immortality inherent in virtual worlds – which I will discuss in the next section.

Roberts' assertion that *Caprica* has grief at its core is acute – for a programme which purports to be 'about' the creation of a new life form (the Cylons), death is ever-present. This anxiety around death is present from the pilot episode in which a terrorist attack claims the lives of over five hundred people during the morning rush-hour, bringing the city to a state of panic and scarring the metropolis' skyline as clouds of debris and smoke billow through the city streets (1.1, 'Pilot'). The similarities to the 9/11 attacks in New York are apparent, and the episode 'The Imperfections of Memory' (1.7) even features a memorial wall that recalls those in New York and, especially, the 'missing person' posters (MPPs). The analogy is an apt one as the posters and the walls (both fictional and real) allude to how the victims of recent traumatic events, such as a bombing, are often perceived as merely

'missing' or 'gone' (both terms suggesting the possibility of return), not necessarily dead.   Kevin T. Jones, Kenneth S. Zagacki and Todd V. Lewis have noted how the level of private detail inscribed on the September 11th MPPs, like the personal items left at memorial shrines or the intimate photos pinned on memorial walls, attempt to 'enliven' the missing subjects by evoking their agency, vitality and literal liveliness. In this manner, the mourners' grieving positions their lost loved ones within a liminal space where they are no longer entirely present, but nor are they entirely absent:

> As one eyewitness said, ''The posters were incredibly striking because of the photographs used and the level of content used to describe each person. The posters made you feel a part of their life. The photographs involving daily activities made you feel that this person was very much alive, a wonderful person who could not possibly have been taken from this planet before their time.'' (Jones, Zagacki et al. 2007, p.106)

In *Caprica*, the grieving process is made even more complex, and the liminal existence of the 'deceased' is bolstered, by the fact that those 'lost' really *are* still alive, at least in a certain regard. Both Zoe and Joseph's daughter Tamara (Genevieve Buechner) have been, in a sense, reconstituted from all the information that exists about them online, coupled with precise avatar recreations of their physical appearance. Although they are both technically 'copies' and do not have corporeal existence (at least, not initially), they are *so* similar to their real-life equivalents that to all of their human 'relatives' they may as well be the 'original.' The very existence of these reproductions problematises the grieving process; postulating whether it is possible to mourn something that still exists. Despite the fact that Zoe-A and Tamara-A wish to remain apart from Zoe and Tamara's families, Joseph and the Graystones cannot bring themselves to let go of these 'backups' of their missing daughters and they all embark on a quest to find the girls in a vast cyberspatial realm known as 'V-Space.' In this way, the living members of the girls' families hope that they may be reunited with their daughters and that they might eventually discover a way of bringing them 'back' into the corporeal world. Through no fault of their own, Zoe-A and Tamara-A end up haunting the traumatised families, compounding their PTSD and complicating their grief. Like the 9/11 MPPs, Zoe-A and Tamara-A are

constant reminders of their own progenitors' existence, their own personhoods, and their deaths:

> The linguistic cues and the personal snapshots, all posed in the subjunctive voice, pressed home the haunting metaphor: The missing exist and are living with us, will do things to us, are calling for us to help them, scaring us, driving us from our fear or complacency to help the survivors engage the search. (Jones, Zagacki et al. 2007, p.114)

Daniel, Amanda and Joseph's intensely personal and anguished plight in regards to their missing daughters shows that *Caprica*'s fascination with death goes beyond that of the kind of mass killings often depicted in special effects-laden Science Fiction texts. Indeed, the death (or apparent death) of several protagonists and named supporting characters, or the grief felt for friends and relatives is a feature throughout the series. By the final scene of the episode 'End of Line' (1.9), which served as the show's mid-season finale, in addition to Zoe, Tamara and the 500 who died in the MAGLEV bombing, we have witnessed Amanda's grief over the traumatic passing of her brother Darius (Jesse Haddock/Johnson Gray), the apparent death of Zoe-A, Amanda and Tamara-A's apparent suicides, the murder of Clarice's husband Nestor (Scott Porter), and Joseph's 'death' in V-World (which means he can never return to the virtual realm). By the end of the series, even Willie Adama (Sina Najafi) dies (1.17, 'Here Be Dragons'). This last death is the most traumatic of all as not only is Willie just a boy, but we have also been led to believe that this character is the same William Adama we meet during the events of *Battlestar Galactica* 50 years later (as portrayed by Edward James Olmos). By killing off a character audiences assumed could not die, *Caprica* cleverly (and astonishingly) replicated the incredulity at the heart of Prolonged Grief Disorder wherein the traumatised relative or friend cannot work through their grief healthily as they cannot comprehend how their loved one can be dead. This apparently impossible conundrum is resolved in the following (and final) episode where it transpires that Tauron custom dictates that, as a mark of respect, a child may be given the name of an older, deceased sibling and the William Adama of *Battlestar Galactica* is, in fact, the younger brother of the 'Willie' Adama of *Caprica*. It is noteworthy, however, that in-between the

penultimate and final episodes of *Caprica*, a series fixated upon the permeability of boundaries between the realms of the living and the dead, even William Adama, supposedly the *Battlestar Galactica* universe's most steadfast, unwavering and reliable character becomes a liminal character.

Similarly to how we can use the concept of liminality to comprehend those characters like Zoe-A and Tamara-A who are caught between life and death, the tripartite structure of the rites of passage, as outlined in Chapter One, becomes a useful way of understanding the grieving process. In this scheme, the pre-liminal corresponds to a time before a loved one dies, the liminal period is grief, and the post-liminal is an acceptance of death and a willingness to move on. Complicated Grief represents a repeated acting out of the liminal period, wherein the mourner cannot traverse this space and enter the post-liminal. The original traumatic event (death) is continually revisited, constituting a form of PTSD. The irony at the heart of *Caprica* is that, while Joseph and the Graystones' PTSD traps them within this kind of liminal zone, the unliving and truly liminal characters (Zoe-A and Tamara-A) are able to accept their own change of circumstance and embrace a new destiny. As they have no equivalents in the 'real world,' unlike every other character in V-World, they can never leave and are, therefore, incapable of 'dying.' Their new status affords them posthuman status; far from being a debilitating state, liminality becomes a promise of immortality.

Immortal Avatars: Liminality and Posthumanism in *Caprica*

> "The passing of a loved one is a terrible thing, a tragedy that leaves us bereft, our lives and our world that much smaller. But what if I told you there was a way to ease this heartache thanks to a breakthrough technology from Graystone industries? Imagine never having to say good-bye to your loved ones again. Imagine a future without loss, brought to you today. *Grace* by Graystone. Because some memories should live forever."

These words are spoken to camera by a CGI rendering of Daniel Graystone in a mocked-up commercial in the episode 'False Labor,' serving as a direct address to *Caprica*'s actual audiences. The question Daniel poses, namely whether one

would take the opportunity to live forever if it meant an end to grief, goes to the heart of the programme. Having spent most of the first half of the series exploring the problem of grief, *Caprica* now suggests how it may be overcome. Needless to say, having borne witness to the traumatic lives of the protagonists, the solution seems appealing. However, as audiences are aware, the creation of physical duplicates of the deceased, imbued with the high degree of personal information and behavioural quirks that Zoe-A and Tamara-A possess, is yet another step toward the rise of the Cylons who are destined to destroy humanity.

That Daniel ends up working on a way to cheat death or, more to the point, end grief, is unsurprising as his own grief is a driving factor behind his actions from the very beginning of *Caprica*'s narrative. Having only watched the pilot episode (which was released on DVD a year before the rest of the first season aired on television), Eric Repphun presciently stated that "it is obvious that [Daniel] is deeply affected by Zoe's death and his initial trials with the virtual Zoe and the Cylon bodies are motivated by a desire to undo her death, to *deny the basic fact of mortality*" (Repphun 2009). Ironically, it is the creation and cultivation of Zoe-A and Tamara-A's liminal existence, instigated by the original Zoe and Tamara's death that, in turn, makes the renunciation of mortality possible. As the Emcee of New Cap City's nightclub tells Joseph of his daughter's newly-acquired status, "we discovered she had the power to transcend life and death… it was quite a show" (1.8, 'Ghosts in the Machine').

The final scene of *Caprica* depicts a literal transcendence of life and death as Zoe-A is 'born' into an artificial body, awakening in a pool of transparent viscous fluid the same way that the humanoid Cylons do in *Battlestar Galactica*, definitively proving that she is their prototype (1.18, 'Apotheosis'). However, *Caprica* also establishes a spiritual link between Zoe, Zoe-A and their 'descendants,' and this link is also connected to their liminal status. Originally a playful amusement, Zoe-A and Tamara-A's adoption of the moniker "the Avenging Angels" when they begin to realise their own invulnerability within V-World and begin 'cleaning up' the sordid environment of 'New Cap City,' is incredibly apposite. The episode 'Things We Lock Away' (1.12) reveals the existence of a *third* iteration of Zoe (in addition to the human original and Zoe-A), who remains nameless in the

series, but whom I shall refer to as 'Head Zoe' as she appears exclusively to Zoe
(and Zoe-A by virtue of their shared memories). Similarly to 'Head Six' (Tricia
Helfer) in *Battlestar Galactica*, Head Zoe's true nature is not made explicit but, as
she is depicted the same way as Head Six in the earlier series, we can surmise that
she, too, may be an angel. Head Zoe's appearance in this episode occurs during a
flashback sequence (although a typically subjectively complex one) in which Zoe-A
recalls a house fire in which Zoe, as a child, was guided out by an older version of
herself. Lest Head Zoe be considered merely a figment of Zoe's imagination in this
one instant (or even a construct of Zoe-A's), Head Zoe is visibly older than Zoe
during the events depicted and a heated exchange between Amanda and Clarice
during their final encounter makes it clear that not only was Zoe in regular contact
with Head Zoe, but that Clarice clearly believed in the latter's spiritual origins:

> Clarice: I was more of a mother to her than you ever were.
> Amanda: You sent her to die on that train.
> Clarice: Oh, you think I led her? No. Oh no. She led me. She
> was the one who talked to angels. They guided her. Zoe saw it
> all.
> Amanda: She was just a kid.
> Clarice: You didn't really know her at all, did you? (1.17)

The link between the Avenging Angels' liminality, their posthumanism, and
their ambiguous spiritual status is reinforced throughout *Caprica*'s narrative. For
example, in the suggestively-titled episode 'The Heavens Will Rise' (1.16), Zoe-A
and Tamara-A, now in complete control of their abilities to re-write V-World's code,
thereby transforming the world around them, refashion the grimy cityscape of New
Cap City into an idyllic pastoral landscape (in much the same way as the messiah-
like Neo [Keanu Reeves] does in *The Matrix* [1999, The Wachowski Brothers]). As
they gaze out upon their handiwork from atop of a beautiful castle, Zoe-A says to her
friend, "Our fortress is complete… It's paradise."

What is especially interesting about *Caprica*'s confluence of liminality,
posthumanism and spirituality is that it is depicted as a uniformly positive
development. It is Daniel's insistence on reclaiming his 'daughter' and facilitating
her 'rebirth' into the physical world that eventually leads to the creation of the

Cylons and all its adverse effects, not simply the Avenging Angels' existence. Indeed, within the confines of V-World, both Zoe-A and Tamara-A grow to be an unvarying force for good. Their mastery of the programming code in V-World represents a transcendental moment wherein humanity reaches technological and spiritual perfection, and contrasts diametrically with the warnings and fears of celebrated posthuman theorists such as N. Katherine Hayles who muses on how her dream consists of:

> A version of the posthuman that embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality, that recognizes and celebrates finitude as a condition of human being, and that understands human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our continued survival. (Hayles 1999, p.5)

Conclusion

In its final televised scene, *Caprica* offers an answer to the question posed at the beginning of the *Battlestar Galactica* miniseries which opens the entire saga of the *Battlestar Galactica* universe: "Are you alive?" Standing in what appears to be a church in V-World, preaching to a congregation of Cylons who, judging by their attire, are employed in various industries by their human owners, Clarice Willow, in her new role as a spiritual prophet, addresses the question directly:

> Are you alive? The simple answer might be: you are alive, because you can ask that question. You have the right to think, and feel, and yearn to be more, because you are not just humanity's children. You are *God's* children! We are all God's children. In the real world, you have bodies made of metal and plastic. Your brains are encoded on wafers of silicon. But that may change. In fact, there is no limit on what you may become. (1.18)

Caprica (and, by extension, *Battlestar Galactica*), therefore, proposes that corporeal reality is not a prerequisite for personhood. Life is not simply the prerogative of living humans, but also of those caught between the realms of life and

death – humans, robots and AIs alike. Through the use of the liminal characters of Zoe-A and Tamara-A, *Caprica* explores how death need not be the inevitable outcome of a potentially fatal traumatic event, and how 'grievous living' need not be a mainstay of life in the twenty-first century. The allegorical underpinnings are clear and the programme's post-9/11 sensibility is apparent. Despite the brevity of its television tenure, *Caprica* is not simply a worthy successor to *Battlestar Galactica* in terms of its thoughtful stance on America's 'warrior spirit' in light of the events of September 11th, it surpasses its predecessor in unambiguously yet sensitively engaging with the psychological and sociocultural consequences of a devastating trauma.

Caprica is also a worthy successor to *Battlestar Galactica* in terms of how it features a number of strong female characters in non-stereotypical roles. However, in *Caprica*, as in *Battlestar Galactica* and in *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, nearly all of the liminal characters are women. Although their liminal natures are often liberating in certain senses, it is often characterised by less desirable qualities and the unliving frequently lead harrowing lives and perilous existences. The tendency to have female characters inhabiting the interstitial realm between life and death is a prevalent one in contemporary television and the relationship between liminality and gender forms the focus of the following, final chapter.

Chapter Five

"What You Don't Know Won't Hurt You": Action Chicks and Agency Inside and Outside the *Dollhouse*

Introduction

> The question of gender is particularly significant in the study of
> television in the U.S., in that the medium's primarily domestic
> location, its blatant commercialism, and its propensity for
> "lowest common denominator" programming are traits that have
> connected it historically to the feminine (as well as to the
> underclass)… Television is a feminized medium, thus the very
> act of studying it, of taking it seriously as a space for meaning
> making and social struggle, is a feminist act. (Levine 2012)

This powerful and provocative statement by Elana Levine forms part of her rallying call for a renewed interest in feminist television studies. Levine goes on to argue that changes in attitudes towards television as a medium (now less often considered a second-rate art form), developments in the media landscape (particularly in relation to exciting new technologies), and the advancement of women in social and political spheres (and postfeminist philosophies, most of all) have all contributed to a shift in the relationship between feminism and television. Although Levine's proclamations may sound alarmist, it is difficult to disagree. The 1980s and 1990s witnessed an interest in female-centric narratives and 'feminine' genres which, with hindsight, now seems disproportionate both to the amount of academic interest given to television as a medium at that time and, as Levine points out, to the amount of feminist analysis conducted within the field of Television Studies today. Thirty years ago, even as Television Studies struggled to form a coherent identity as a genuine academic endeavour, differentiating itself from both film and media studies (which were, themselves, struggling for legitimacy), feminist analyses of particular TV shows and genres became significant, even seminal, publications. Books such as Ien Ang's *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*

(Ang 1985) and Julie D'Acci's *Defining Women: Television and the Case of Cagney and Lacey* (D'Acci 1994) quickly became landmarks of feminist theory, positioned alongside studies of more traditionally 'feminine' and time-honoured pastimes such as the decorative arts and the reading of romantic fiction.[79]

A quick survey of the most discussed themes in recent academic studies of television reveals a distinct lack of feminist subjects, and the embracing of television as a locus of 'Quality' appears to coincide with a significant increase in a preoccupation with narratives about masculinity. Furthermore, the academy's interest is indicative of that of the majority of television critics and general audiences, with the same television shows dominating academic, critical and popular discourses. Indeed, the six television dramas currently with the highest aggregated scores on the popular film and television database *imdb.com*[80] appear to be those most often discussed in newspapers and magazines (both in print and online). These programmes are the most successful in terms of mainstream awards – particularly in regards to 'Emmy' nominations and wins. They are also the most studied televisual texts in academia. These programmes are, in order of their *imdb* rankings, *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013), *Game of Thrones* (2011-), *The Wire* (2002-2008), *True Detective* (2014-), *Sherlock* (2010-), and *The Sopranos* (1999-2007). Not only is this list of consensually-agreed 'Quality' fare made up of very recent examples (all airing most of their episodes in the 2000s and the 2010s), but the main protagonist in each programme is male and each show focuses on masculine concerns. This current emphasis on masculinity, and the supposed 'weightiness' (i.e. 'Quality') associated with masculine narratives, has become so recognisable that it is already routinely mocked and satirised in print and on-line media:

> That [*True Detective* creator and showrunner, Nic Pizzolatto]
> casts himself as a brooding, tortured masculine artist should not
> be particularly surprising to anyone who watched the first season

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[79] See, respectively, Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock's *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (Parker and Pollock 1981), and Tania Modleski's *Loving With a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women* (Modleski 1982) and Janice A. Radway's *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Radway 1984).

[80] As of June 2014, these six dramas reside in the website's top ten highest-rated television programmes of all time (with documentaries rounding out the rest of the list).

of *True Detective*, in which brooding, tortured, masculine
detectives say things like "We became too self-aware. Nature
created an aspect of nature separate from itself. We are creatures
that should not exist by natural law." (Read 2014)

The only notable example of a female-centred television show that one
might expect to see challenge the joint stranglehold on academic and popular
opinion of 'masculine' programmes, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), began
airing slightly earlier than *imdb*'s Top 6. It only just makes it into *imdb*'s top 250
(at number 244). Meanwhile, the most consistently well-reviewed, award-winning
and/or popular programmes starring women and produced in the intervening decade
have attracted far less debate – both within and outside of the academy. A list of
these programmes might include (but not be limited to) fare as diverse as *30 Rock*
(2006-2013) (*imdb* no. 226), *Parks and Recreation* (2009-2015) (*imdb* no. 135),
Nurse Jackie (2009-2015) (*imdb* no. 478), *The Good Wife* (2009-) (*imdb* no. 240),
Enlightened (2011-2013),[81] *Veep* (2012-) (*imdb* no. 373) and *Orange is the New
Black* (2013-) (*imdb* no. 148).[82] It is especially worthy of note that the only
programme on *imdb*'s Top 6 list that *could* be construed as having female
protagonists is *Game of Thrones*, featuring both Daenerys Targaryen (Emilia
Clarke) and Cersei Lannister (Lena Headey). However, the programme is really an
ensemble show that prioritises what are traditionally seen as masculine pursuits -
kingship, fighting and warfare.[83] I would argue that, in effect, all six of the most
critically and academically regarded programmes focus on masculinity and explore
the role of men in contemporary society. This is even true when, as in the case of
Game of Thrones and another staple of 'Best of' lists, Emmy nominations and
endless academic fascination, *Mad Men* (2007-2015), they do so by comparing

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[81] Despite achieving a rating of 7.4, which should put it in the mid-500s, *Enlightened* is absent from
imdb's list of highest rated TV shows as it has failed to accrue the 5,000 vote minimum.

[82] The fact that most of these programmes are half-hour comedies or 'dramadies' is itself worthy of
note and suggests another under-researched but potentially fruitful avenue of academic study (the
gendering of television formats).

[83] Despite the prominence of both Cersei and Daenerys in the narrative of *Game of Thrones*, features
and articles about the show tend to favour the character of Tyrion Lannister, played by Peter Dinklage
over any others, with Dinklage's Emmy win also reinforcing the perception that he is, in fact, the
chief protagonist – at least, after the unexpected demise of Ned Stark (Sean Bean) in the first season.

current ideals of masculinity with those of a different era. I contend that all these programmes reflect, to various degrees, a rising panic concerning gender roles and increasing doubts over the validity of a gender divide.

This perceived gender 'crisis' frequently finds expression in both popular journalism and 'scientific' analyses:

> A study by psychological researchers Bobbi Carothers and Harry Reis… demonstrates that, on a series of personality traits that are typically understood as gender-specific, men and women overlap far more than many people and most network TV shows would like to believe…. [T]he significant overlap was such that, contrary to public opinion, one could not predict a person's gender very well based on their personality traits… Feminists often face a wall of skepticism for suggesting simply that we relinquish our attachment to gender expectations, but this research implies that doing so would free us all up to be ourselves even more than we already are. (Marcotte 2013)

This passage, taken from an article by Amanda Marcotte and published on slate.com in 2013, neatly indicates several of the discourses around gender currently circulating in Western sociocultural spheres. Not only does Marcotte refer to the on-going debates regarding the fundamental differences (or lack thereof) between men and women that fuel the 'gender crisis,' she also alludes to overly-reductive representations of gender in traditional television programmes (i.e. those found on network channels and not cable television, which is where each of *imdb*'s top 6 dramas are found). Most pertinently for the purposes of this chapter, Marcotte alludes to the way in which gender 'policing' hinders our ability to "be ourselves." It is my contention that the television programme *Dollhouse* (2009-2010) is not only aware of all of these discourses, but is very much *about* them and uses its protagonists' liminality as a means of probing the current panic over the (in)stability of gender as a marker of personal identity.

Dollhouse retains some of the futuristic trappings of traditional Science Fiction such as advanced technology but jettisons the figure of the cyborg

completely to focus on unliving characters that are entirely human.[84] Although it is
technology that facilitates the transformation of the Dollhouse 'Actives' into liminal
beings, it does not in itself constitute an integral part of their liminal nature. Nor
does this liminal nature arise from being simultaneously alive and dead in the literal
sense (like Sarah Connor or the liminal characters in *Battlestar Galactica* and
Caprica). Whilst the liminal nature of the Dollhouse actives still engages with the
idea of someone being simultaneously present and absent, in this instance the
unliving are physically present but mentally/emotionally/spiritually absent. At
least, this is the central conceit – the question of whether this can ever really be the
case being fundamental to the programme's narrative. Furthermore, the Actives'
uncertain status in regards to life/death consequently leads to a similarly
indeterminate situation regarding agency (or the lack thereof). As I will move on to
argue, *Dollhouse* examines the role of gender within the 'Action Chick' subgenre
through the lens of narrative agency, ultimately indicating that a 'queer' approach
may resolve the problem of gender representation in texts such as these.

The complex representation of agency in regards to gender in *Dollhouse*
intersects with established discourses around gender previously found in other
television programmes, which have prominently featured a particular type of female
protagonist that has been referred to as *Tough Girls* (Inness 1999), *Girl Heroes*
(Hopkins 2002), (*The*) *Warrior Women of Television* (Heinecken 2003), *Athena's
Daughters* (Early and Kennedy 2003), and *Action Chicks* (Inness 2004). To situate
my case study of *Dollhouse* within its proper context, in the following section I
examine the ways in which the relationship between gender and agency has hitherto
been represented in television shows that have, like *Dollhouse*, revolved around
'Action Chicks' (including *Dollhouse* creator and fêted feminist Joss Whedon's
most celebrated TV show, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*). This brief survey is essential
because, as with all of the key texts in this thesis, I propose that it is the innovative
presence of a liminal subject within the narrative that facilitates a fresh approach to
the established and, some might argue, (over)familiar trope of the Action Chick.

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[84] Although the name of Rossum Corporation is a direct homage to Karel Čapek's play R.U.R., in
which the word 'robot' was coined.

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From Angels to Potentials: A Brief Survey of Action Chicks and Agency

> Athena's daughters: strong, intelligent, heroic warriors who
> defend the right as they see the right. (Rhonda V. Wilcox in
> Early and Kennedy 2003, p.ix)

The Avengers (1961-1969), with its succession of leather-clad, martial arts-trained warrior women, popularised the figure of the Action Chick in the UK.[85] However, the American equivalent did not become a staple on U.S. television until the 1970s, when *The Bionic Woman* (1976-1978), *Charlie's Angels* (1976-1981) and *Wonder Woman* (1975-1979) all debuted in one three month period.[86] Still, whereas the portrayal of the female Avengers was generally seen as progressive, with Steed and his female partner portrayed as equals, those hoping to witness an enlightened articulation of female empowerment in the American series were disappointed. Each of the American programmes listed above aired on the same network, ABC, and soon became associated with a particular kind of brand identity for this channel, which became known as the home of 'jiggle TV' due to the widespread perception of its programming as trashy, titillating and exploitative – notably with its emphasis on well-endowed, physically energetic women (Jezierski 2010, p.34). In addition to revealing costumes and voyeuristic displays of female 'athleticism,' these programmes also displayed a problematic attitude towards matters of female agency and control.

The Bionic Woman was a spin-off from the enormously popular series *The Six Million Dollar Man* (1974-1978), which was itself based on the 1972 novel *Cyborg* by Martin Caidin. *The Bionic Woman* was, to all intents and purposes, a remake of the parent programme, with both Steve Austin (Lee Majors) and Jaime Sommers (Lindsay Wagner) undergoing cybernetic enhancement after being

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[85] Although John Steed (Patrick Macnee) was originally paired with another male agent, Dr. David Keel (Ian Hendry), the show is more commonly recalled as featuring Steed and one of his subsequent female co-Avengers, Cathy Gale (Honor Blackman), Emma Peel (Diana Rigg) and Tara King (Linda Thorson).

[86] An attempt had been made to launch a series focusing on an American equivalent of the Cathy Gale/Emma Peel character from *The Avengers* in the form of *Honey West* (1965-1966) but it was cancelled after one season.

involved in separate accidents, and ending up working as secret agents for the same secret American government agency, the Office of Scientific Intelligence (OSI). It is perhaps because *The Bionic Woman* was a near-carbon copy of the earlier show that Jaime was afforded the same degree of agency as her predecessor, frequently offering assistance to the OSI. However, the OSI's reluctance to place Jaime in extreme danger contrasted with the enthusiasm with which they sent Steve into similar situations and could be read as paternalistic anxiety over a woman's inability to perform her duties as competently as her male counterpart.

The titular protagonists of both *Charlie's Angels* and *Wonder Woman*, meanwhile, similarly found themselves working under, and receiving their orders from, male authority figures. Even though Wonder Woman (Lynda Carter) invariably saves the day, in her 'ordinary' human guise of Diana Prince she is subservient to her work colleagues – firstly as the secretary of Major Steve Trevor (Lyle Waggoner) during World War Two, and then as the novice 'partner' of Colonel Steve Trevor, Jr (Lyle Waggoner again) in the 1970s. Although Wonder Woman's secret identity is a legacy of her comic-book origins, it is significant that she is held up as an exceptional figure whereas all the other women in the series (including Diana Prince) are in inferior positions of power (and are often disparagingly compared to Wonder Woman). Furthermore, as Wonder Woman only becomes aware of the various threats she encounters over the course of the series because of her alter-ego's orders, she is effectively still doing the work assigned to her by her superiors.

The feminist credentials of characters such as Jaime Sommers, Wonder Woman, and the ever-changing roster of women who comprised *Charlie's Angels'* trio are constantly in flux. It is not my intention to pronounce whether or not, or *how* much, these characters are 'feminist' (if such an exercise was even possible). However, by examining them in terms of the amount of agency they possess, to what end they are granted agency, and how this agency is depicted, it becomes apparent that these action heroines do not fare well. They are all dispatched by male superiors on missions to restore the (patriarchal) status quo; their purpose to restore the balance of power, never to affect change. Furthermore, the novelty and uniqueness of each character (or the triad in *Charlie's Angels*) is consistently

emphasised. These women are always portrayed as *exceptional* - not only in the abilities they possess but, by contrasting them with other female characters, in the level of agency they possess (such as it is).[87] Within the diegesis of each of these programmes, a pattern emerges regarding the relation between gender and agency – specifically, that agency is an intrinsically masculine attribute. The female protagonists in these programs are able to navigate their worlds freely and with proficiency, despite their sex, because they have had agency bestowed upon them by their male bosses. Wonder Woman may be an Amazon in her own realm, but she needs the structure of a paternalistic establishment (first the army, then the Inter-Agency Defense Command) to give her a purpose in ours. Jaime Sommers owes her Bionic Status and her life to the various (male) doctors at the OSI – and, notably, to Steve Austin, her boyfriend, who convinces them to carry out the procedure. Finally, the 'Angels' work for Charlie Townshend (at the 'Townshend Agency,' naturally), which the opening titles of each episode state explicitly. In regards to Wilcox' definition above, these daughters of Athena may have been 'defending the right' but it was the 'right' according to their male superiors.

Today, looking back at the lack of agency displayed by 1970s Action Chicks may prompt two separate (though related) questions. Firstly, as I have already stated, these characters' feminist credentials vary depending on how one chooses to measure them, so how much did their agency in these programmes actually matter? As Inness points out in relation to representations of women in non-traditional roles, "the media do not simply mirror social change; by showing nontraditional tough women, the media are helping to change how society conceptualizes what it means to be a woman" (Inness 1999, p.8). I contend that this is equally true for matters of agency – that the level of control afforded female protagonists influences how much women could expect to have in their own lives. Amanda Nell Edgar, in her article on the popular Horror television series *Grimm* (2011-), notes that the primary narrative concern revolves around the male protagonist's mission to control, regulate and restrain the show's endless parade of (literally) monstrous women. Female agency is framed as antithetical to the

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[87] When other women are granted a similar level of (still limited) agency they are, invariably, evil - such as Fausta (Lynda Day George) in *Wonder Woman* (1.3, 'Fausta, the Nazi Wonder Woman').

patriarchal status quo and the successful resolution of the crisis at the centre of each episode involves the necessary curtailing of a woman's freedom. Edgar goes on to draw parallels between this recurrent plot and the contemporary battles over women's reproductive rights that feature prominently in today's media:

> *Grimm* emerged from a cultural climate particularly interested in moral instruction, as evidenced by recent legislative fervor over women's choice. Last week, Kansas legally allowed pharmacists to withhold prescriptions they "reasonably believe" could terminate pregnancy, the "Protect Life Act" allows hospitals to "let women die" rather than perform life-saving abortions, and of course, transvaginal ultrasound legislation requires women to be probed vaginally before terminating a pregnancy. These bills are just as terrifying as, say, tales of fire-breathing lady-Dämonfeuer, which also come from the assumption that women's free (and presumed irresponsible) choice destroys American morality in a fury of fire and brimstone. (Edgar 2012)

Regarded in the light of sociocultural struggles such as these, I would argue that delineating boundaries of agency in these programmes matters a great deal. Further, the second question regarding the significance of contemporary representations of female agency relates to the age of the above examples of the Action Chick genre. It is, after all, almost 40 years since they first aired. Therefore, irrespective of how much it may have mattered at the time, why does their lack of agency matter *today*? The answer is simply that, as the volume of academic work conducted in the 1980s and 1990s (as mentioned by Levine) is testament to, televisual representations of women have remained problematic, the gendering of agency continues and, it can be argued, these earlier programmes established a 'norm' that still exists today. If further justification for the academic analysis of female agency were needed, it is worth noting that studies such as those alluded to by Levine tended to focus on representations of gender in relation to imagery – especially the physicality of women in film and television. This is hardly surprising as one of the earliest works in the field was Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (Mulvey 1975), which was tremendously influential and instrumental in precipitating other significant studies such as

Yvonne Tasker's *Spectacular Bodies* (Tasker 1993).[88] Although visual representations of women are still problematic and remain endlessly debateable they are, at least, *being* examined and questioned. Narrative agency, however, receives relatively little attention – despite the fact that, as I have argued, repeated depictions of limited female agency collude in the advancement of potentially harmful philosophies in broader sociocultural discourses.

Frances Early and Kathleen Kennedy are representative of a wider trend with their unabashed eagerness to celebrate how advanced and enlightened modern Action Chicks are in comparison to their 'limited' predecessors:

> Rather than depend on men to protect her, the new woman
> warrior mastered violence. She was not restricted in how she
> used her body or her weapons. She could match any man's
> physical prowess, command of technology, rationality, and
> leadership. (Early and Kennedy 2003, p.5)

However, although academic study has tended to focus on the female body as the site where gender is most vehemently contested, the ramifications of the lack of agency exhibited by those bodies has not gone completely unnoticed. Indeed, Dawn Heinecken's nuanced chapter on the Canadian thriller series *La Femme Nikita* (1997-2001) draws extensively on a mixture of both considerations (Heinecken 2003). By doing so, Heinecken identifies elements within the show that are can be considered progressive (such as the titular heroine's [Peta Wilson] body serving as a locus wherein the programme articulates its critique of patriarchal society's attempts to exert control over women's bodies), as well as others which are more problematic (her agency is consistently curbed by various patriarchal organisations and the programme ends with her forced to assume a position within one of these organisations, seemingly confirming that there is no escaping the 'system').

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[88] Tasker's work is especially noteworthy as she identified and developed the concept of 'musculinity' as a means of discussing masculinity in relation to both male and female bodies. Although not strictly 'queering' gender norms, and focused as it is on physicality, this phenomenon can be construed as a forerunner of the gender reconceptualising I discuss when examining *Dollhouse*.

These developments are, however, noteworthy and commendable and the list of TV action chick heroines to whom this description could be applied is currently extensive. In addition to Nikita we could add Sydney Bristow (Jennifer Garner) in *Alias* (2001-2006), Kara Thrace (Katee Sackhoff) in *Battlestar Galactica* (2003; 2004-2009), and Olivia Dunham (Anna Torv) in *Fringe* (2008-2013). However, the agency of each of these women is controlled, regulated and, frequently, restricted by male superiors/'colleagues' – Sydney's by her father, Jack (Victor Garber), her CIA handler, Vaughan (Michael Vartan), and the head of SD6, Sloane (Ron Rifkin); Kara's by her senior officers Commander Adama (Edward James Olmos) and Captain Adama (Jamie Bamber); and Olivia's by the doctors who experimented on her as a little girl, Walter Bishop and William Bell (John Noble and Leonard Nimoy), and, as an adult, by her boss in the 'Fringe' division of the Department of Homeland Security, Phillip Broyles (Lance Reddick).

Despite the lack of academic attention devoted to the narrative agency of Action Chicks on television, and the often disheartening conclusions reached when the agency of otherwise archetypically feminist exemplars *is* analysed, there are instances where action heroines in Science Fiction and related Fantasy genre series really are able to exercise control over their own lives and exert their own agency. For example, the actions of both Xena (Lucy Lawless) in *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995-2001) and Max Guevera (Jessica Alba) in *Dark Angel* (2000-2002) may be influenced by external factors (specifically, their tragic pasts), but they fulfil Early and Kennedy's criteria as "new warrior women" whilst remaining answerable to no-one.

Perhaps the best example of an action chick that reclaims her own agency is the titular protagonist of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. As portrayed by Sarah Michelle Geller, Buffy has become the quintessential TV female action hero and the programme's creator and showrunner, Joss Whedon, has achieved almost mythical status himself – beloved by fans of 'genre' television and feminists alike. This is not to say that Buffy has always been regarded in uniformly positive terms in relation to gender representation. As theorists such as Lorna Jowett have argued, in regards to gender, the programme is "a contradictory mixture" of both subversive and conservative views (Jowett 2005, p.1). What the programme *does* provide is a

discursive space wherein the concept of gender can be explored, and wherein 'subversive' alternatives to dominant ideologies may be articulated. Certainly, such is the high regard in which *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is held within the field of Television Studies, wherein the term '*Buffy* Studies' has even gained traction, and so numerous the academic treatises published on the programme, a vast number by scholars whose work is resoundingly 'feminist,' it feels almost heretical to mention the fact that, in its first three seasons, the protagonist's agency was exceedingly limited. Of course, Buffy being a 16-year old girl at the beginning of the series, one would expect to see her prone to certain restrictions, notably those placed upon her by her mother and by her schoolteachers.[89] But Buffy is no ordinary schoolgirl. She is the Slayer, the "Chosen One" who, according to the opening narration of the first two seasons, "will stand against the vampires, the demons, and the forces of darkness." Needless to say, Buffy is gifted with enormous power to assist her in her work as the Slayer, which manifests itself in incredible physical prowess and remarkable fighting skills. Nevertheless, power does not equal agency and, in addition to the restrictions placed upon her by familial and scholarly regulations, she is also answerable to a 'Watchers Council.' This shadowy organisation, made up mostly of older men, exists in order to train (and regulate the activities of) each generation's Slayer, their orders executed by a designated 'Watcher' who instructs and guides their young charge (who is always female).

Buffy and her watcher, Giles (Anthony Head), eventually sever their ties with the Watchers Council during the programme's third season, though the organisation reappears intermittently during the course of the following seasons when Buffy is in need of assistance or information. Although Buffy continues to rely on Giles' support from this point on, his role gradually shifts from mentor to advisor and he finally leaves the show during the sixth season, having realised that there is nothing more he can teach her. Indeed, during the programme's seventh

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[89] It is debateable to what extent Buffy's mother, Joyce (Kristine Sutherland), is able to restrict the movements of her daughter. Buffy is able to carry out her duties as the Slayer fairly easily during the first two seasons of the show, whilst Joyce is completely unaware of her nocturnal activities. For the remainder of her time on the programme, Joyce tries to curtail Buffy's activities as the Slayer, insisting on the importance of her scholarly pursuits. Needless to say, she is unsuccessful. By the end of the fifth season the character had been killed off, leaving Buffy to become head of the household and her sister's guardian.

and final season, it is Buffy who assumes the role of instructor when someone starts tracking down and murdering all the girls with the potential to become the next Slayer (and are actually referred to as the 'Potentials' by Buffy and her friends), leading Buffy to offer them refuge in her own home. In the series' penultimate episode (7.21, 'End of Days') this formation of a Slayer sisterhood is historicised when Buffy discovers that the Watchers have, themselves, always been watched over by a secret organisation of mystic women known as The Guardians. The last of The Guardians explains to Buffy that the scythe which has recently come into her possession was of their creation, has been imbued with the power of the Slayer and will aid her in preventing the oncoming apocalypse. In her final, triumphant act as a lone Slayer, Buffy convinces her friend, the young witch Willow (Alyson Hannigan), to perform a magic ritual upon the scythe which releases the power of the Slayer, sharing it equally between every Potential. In a decisive gesture against the wishes of the Shadow Men and the Watchers, who dictated that there should only ever be one single Slayer in every generation, Buffy selflessly relinquishes her unique status for the greater good. In a rousing speech the night before the final battle to avert the apocalypse, Buffy makes it explicitly clear that this act is an act of defiance, and she stresses the importance of owning one's own agency:

> In every generation, one Slayer is born, because a bunch of men
> who died thousands of years ago made up that rule. They were
> powerful men. This woman [Willow] is more powerful than all
> of them combined. So I say we change the rule. I say my
> power, should be *our* power. Tomorrow, Willow will use the
> essence of this scythe to change our destiny. From now on,
> every girl in the world who might be a Slayer, will be a Slayer.
> Every girl who could have the power, will have the power. Can
> stand up, will stand up. Slayers, every one of us. Make your
> choice. Are you ready to be strong? (7.22, 'Chosen')

In stark contrast to the 'jiggling' 70s heroines, Buffy's actions defy the patriarchal order. The redistribution of the power of the Slayer shatters the status quo that has existed for thousands of years. Buffy emancipates herself from the burden of being the only (responsible) Slayer and secures her own future agency whilst (literally) empowering thousands of other girls. Whereas the protagonists in

Wonder Woman, *Charlie's Angles*, *The Bionic Woman* and their ilk were special in comparison to other women, Buffy is exceptional because she shares that exceptionality with others.

Irrespective of *Buffy*'s position in regards to feminist theories, the high regard in which the programme was held by academics, critics and Whedon fans alike, meant that expectations were similarly high for *Dollhouse*, an equally high-concept television show by Joss Whedon, starring Eliza Dushku, the actress who portrayed a *Buffy* fan favourite, the rogue slayer, Faith. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* had ended with the throwing down of a metaphorical gauntlet (in the guise of a very real scythe), a challenge to make good on the promise of the Potentials, a call to arms for more Action Chicks to follow Buffy's example and take charge of their own purpose in life. In the next section, I examine how *Dollhouse* attempted to answer this call by situating gender and agency at the heart of its narrative, and how the programme appeared to fall short of fulfilling its own potential.

"Did I Fall Asleep?":
Uncertain Agency and the (In)Actives of *Dollhouse*

> "It's about power. Who's got it and who knows how to use it."
> (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, 7.1, 'Lessons')

These lines, delivered by Buffy whilst instructing her sister, Dawn (Michelle Trachtenberg), on how to fight, neatly sums up the premise of both *Buffy* and *Dollhouse*. Despite her superhuman strength, Buffy's personal agency is consistently frustrated – whether by supernatural irritants such as each season's 'big bad,' or more mundane institutional obstacles such as parental dictates, scholarly directives or the commands of her watcher and the Watcher Council. Within these parameters, however, Buffy is still afforded some degree of agency in her personal life and in the ways she deals with supernatural foes. The residents of the *Dollhouse*, on the other hand, are in an altogether different situation.

Dollhouse presents a scenario in which young people 'volunteer' to give five years of their lives to an organisation called the Rossum Corporation, usually in

exchange for money.[90] Having signed contracts, these volunteers become known as 'Actives' (or, pejoratively, as 'Dolls') and reside in what are referred to as 'Dollhouses,' underground complexes full of cutting-edge technology that is used to extract the Actives' personalities. Their personalities are then archived on specialised computer hard drives known as 'wedges' for the duration of their stay.[91] This then allows Rossum technicians to 'imprint' a new identity (personalities and skills from real people, or an amalgam of several) into the 'empty' body of Actives. Each imprint is created to fulfil the specifications of rich clients who hire the Actives from Rossum for a variety of purposes, euphemistically referred to as 'engagements.' After each engagement, the temporary imprint is extracted and, in-between engagements, the Actives exist as blank entities within the Dollhouse compound – able to perform simple tasks but otherwise devoid of personality or individuality. On awakening from a post-engagement 'wipe,' every Active asks the same question – "did I fall asleep?" – signalling to the Dollhouse technicians that the last imprint has been removed and the Active is once again a 'blank slate.' In this 'empty' state, the Actives exhibit no memory of who they were, either before their time in the Dollhouse or during engagements – at least, in theory. During their downtime, Actives exhibit child-like innocence and vulnerability, spending all their time just keeping their bodies in peak physical condition through physical exercise, meditation and massages and so forth. The emphasis on beauty, health and physical agility is paramount as the engagements on which the Actives are sent usually involve sex and/or an activity which requires great strength and manual dexterity (participating in extreme sports, for example, or leading a SWAT team into a hostage situation). As their bodies no longer house the owner's original personality, each Active is allocated a non-gender specific code name (based on the NATO phonetic alphabet), effectively further erasing any semblance of personal identity.

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[90] It becomes apparent as the series goes on that some Actives have been coerced into the Dollhouse, whilst others had absolutely no say whatsoever in regards to their presence there.

[91] Although *Dollhouse* is set in the present/near future and, as a result, focuses on wholly human protagonists, the process of 'imprinting' the Dolls is strikingly similar to that of Cylon 'downloading' in *Battlestar Galactica* and both processes are dependent upon the recipient being liminal, capable of being simultaneously present (physically) and absent (mentally/emotionally/spiritually).

When the series begins, Dollhouses worldwide have been operating successfully for some time. However, a recent recruit to the L.A. Dollhouse, an Active named 'Echo' (Eliza Dushku), begins to become self-aware. Echo's previous life was as a political activist named Caroline, who was caught breaking into a Rossum building and coerced into becoming an Active in lieu of having her crimes reported to the police and given jail time (a previous break-in having led to the death of another activist). Echo's growing self-awareness, however, doesn't simply involve the 'seeping through' of memories of her life as Caroline or even of the various engagements on which she has been despatched, although this does happen. Rather, 'Echo' begins to develop her own identity, separate from Caroline, demonstrating an ability to think for herself as well as experiencing emotions such as empathy and curiosity. Echo's strong empathic nature is significant as it is gradually revealed that Caroline, though principled, lacked empathy. This development suggests that, even stripped of Caroline's memories or devoid of imprints, Echo is neither as 'empty' as Rossum's employees suspect, or simply an incomplete version of Caroline. Whilst Echo continues to emerge as a person in her own right in-between engagements, the burgeoning relationship between two other Actives, known as Sierra (Dichen Lachman) and Victor (Enver Gjokaj), suggests that the imprinting/extraction process is unable to break the bond that has developed between them, even when they too, like Echo, are supposedly 'empty.'

Dollhouse deliberately engages with discourses around the irrefutability of the 'true' self, attempting to convey the traditional Cartesian notion that each person possesses an inherent quality that makes them the person they *truly* are, regardless of whatever characteristics (including those relating to gender) they are subsequently imprinted with. *Dollhouse*'s ultimate stance in regards to perceptions of selfhood appears to involve a reaffirmation of the self as the essential constituent at the heart of human existence, that this is what makes us 'human,' and that this humanity will always trump any attempt at technological meddling with a person's identity.

In terms of agency, Echo appears to follow a familiar narrative trajectory from powerless to powerful. The series begins with a scene in which Caroline is persuaded by Adelle DeWitt (Olivia Williams), the director of the LA Dollhouse, to

join the programme. Just 40 seconds in, the contentious issue of agency and control is firmly established as being central to the show's narrative and, although Adelle is wily in her choice of words, it is apparent that her 'offer' is illusionary and that Caroline really has no alternative:

> Adelle: Are you volunteering?
> Caroline: I don't have a choice, do I? How did it get this far?
> Adelle: Caroline, actions have consequences. (1.1, 'Ghost')

Eventually we learn that these 'actions' of Caroline's have not only led to her capture and the destruction of Rossum property, but also to the death of a fellow activist. However, this exchange also introduces a troubling proposition: if, as Adelle states, actions have (obviously undesirable) consequences, does this mean that *in*action is preferable? Certainly, the designation of 'Active' is patently unfitting for a group of people who are incapable of acting of their own volition. The pejorative term 'Doll' is clearly more appropriate for Rossum's powerless puppets.

The correlation between the Actives and the weakness and vulnerability of childhood playthings is reinforced later in the same episode when Echo is hired to negotiate the release of a kidnapped child. The mission is jeopardised when it transpires that the imprint designed to give Echo the skills needed for the assignment includes elements extracted from a former kidnap victim who was sexually abused for three months (and whose inability to deal with her experience ultimately led to her suicide). The current situation reactivates the suppressed memories and robs Echo of the skills needed to complete the mission. Although she eventually recovers her composure, Adelle is unconvinced of her ability to bring the engagement to a satisfactory conclusion and dispatches Sierra (imprinted with the skills of a SWAT team leader) to 'clean up.'

As a pilot episode,[92] 'Ghost' effectively introduces a myriad of questions that will eventually become crucial to the narrative – most importantly, those

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[92] 'Ghost' was actually the second pilot episode, written and filmed after network executives were reportedly unhappy with the original, entitled 'Echo,' which was eventually released as an extra on the Dollhouse Season One DVD/Blu-Ray.

revolving around the Actives' apparent absence of agency. The importance of agency is repeatedly stressed at the beginning of each subsequent episode as the *Dollhouse* theme song is *What You Don't Know Won't Hurt You* by Jonatha [sic] Brooke, and the song's title is the first lyric heard during the opening titles. Over the course of the series' two seasons, this situation gradually changes as we witness the emergence of Echo as a distinct identity who eventually challenges the status quo within the Dollhouse as well as Rossum's nefarious wider plans to perfect and utilise the imprinting technology to offer rich clients a form of immortality (by facilitating the transfer of identities from one body to another). Echo is unable to prevent the resulting apocalyptic free-for-all in which identities and skills are routinely transferred between bodies, sometimes willingly, often unwillingly. However, the two-part epilogue episodes (1.13, 'Epitaph One' and 2.13, 'Epitaph Two: Return') reveal that she is eventually successful in undoing the planet-wide damage caused by Rossum's technology with the assistance of her friends (including ex-Dollhouse employees as well as other Actives).

Echo's journey from empty vessel to the saviour of the world's population is clearly an epic one. Her ultimate achievement in ending what could be labelled the 'Identity Apocalypse' is (at the very least) on a par with Buffy's success in destroying the 'Hellmouth' that existed underneath her home town of Sunnydale. Yet, whereas Buffy's story is celebrated as the epitome of female empowerment, *Dollhouse* has been criticised for its negligent handling of human trafficking and prostitution and for being a text that revels in the fetishizing of female *dis*empowerment. Indeed, it has been suggested that, despite the glossy sheen afforded by the attractive cast, impressive multi-storeyed central Dollhouse set, and the polished action sequences, "one could argue that the entire series was predicated upon the sexual abuse of women" (Ginn 2012, p.58). Perhaps what has rankled feminist critics the most is the programme's focus on a heroine whose lack of character is intrinsic to the show's premise. As Angela Zhang notes, "in contrast [to Buffy], there is Echo, whom some have called the 'anti-Buffy' - while Buffy is confident, witty, and empowered, Echo is frequently helpless, confused, and ultimately disempowered" (Zhang 2011). Zhang's use of the term "ultimately" here is, I believe, key to understanding the confusion over whether *Dollhouse* can be

viewed as a feminist text, and consternation about how Whedon could create a programme that disappointed those same feminist critics that held him in such high regard for his previous work. Whereas Echo's overall story arc centres upon a woman fighting (and succeeding) to claim her own agency against incredible odds, simultaneously bringing down a patriarchal world order, she gains this agency in small increments within a relentlessly oppressive environment. Needless to say, Echo's personal growth and gradual empowerment occurs whilst she is also forced to serve the order she is destined to overthrow. Therefore, Echo 'ultimately' *is* empowered, at the series' conclusion, even though, at the end of (most) episodes, she is shown to be restricted by her Doll status.

This dichotomy is characteristic of *Dollhouse* as a whole. It is a programme in which nothing is as it seems. After all, not only do the Actives adopt and shed identities at an alarming rate, but Echo's growing self-awareness betrays the notion that 'wiping' someone leaves an empty shell of a human being. Actives can be devoid of identity, full of identities, absent and present all at once. There are also countless examples of Actives masquerading as 'regular' people. Both Mellie (Miracle Laurie) and Doctor Saunders (Amy Acker) are revealed to be, respectively, November and Whiskey, two deep-cover Actives with no idea of who or what they really are. Even Adelle, who runs the Dollhouse and is, therefore, tantamount to being the Actives' gaoler, is portrayed as both a hardened, cold, unfeeling businesswoman, and also as vulnerable, troubled by her role and in need of emotional support (as revealed in 1.09, 'A Spy in the House of Love'). In the series finale, it is Adelle, not Echo, who leaves the relative safety of the LA Dollhouse to care for people in the aftermath of the great identity 're-set' which frees the planet of Rossum's meddling. This leads a fully-aware Echo to refer to her as "ever the shepherd" (2.13, 'Epitaph Two: Return').

Adelle's status as both *Dollhouse*'s antagonist and Echo's (eventual) ally further complicates the question of female agency in the programme. As the public face of the Rossum Corporation (at least as far as the Dollhouse clients are concerned) and the woman who makes all the important decisions, it is her actions that most restrict the agency of the Actives. Still, her actions cannot be regarded as inherently 'villainous.' Indeed, it could be argued that her unabashed pragmatism

and deft handling of the various crises encountered by the Dollhouse qualifies her as a feminist role model, and Jonathan Mason has argued that, out of all the programme's characters, Adelle is the one that undergoes the most liberating story arc (Mason 2010). Eventually, Adelle frees herself from the shackles of her obligations to her employer, reclaiming her own agency, whilst becoming a surrogate mother to an entire world awakening from the nightmare of the Identity Apocalypse.

Further complicating the relationship between gender and agency in *Dollhouse* are the portrayals of the male characters. Although most of the Actives featured over the course of the programme's two seasons are female, the show also features a handful of male Dolls. The most prominent of these is Victor. Analogously to his female counterparts, Victor's agency is severely limited and he is similarly portrayed as very physically appealing to the Dollhouse's clientele, supremely capable of completing his engagements, but entirely at the mercy of the Dollhouse staff and the whims of the Dollhouse's clients. Although his burgeoning romance with Sierra suggests an ability to 'override' the imprinting process, when it transpires that Sierra has been repeatedly raped by her handler, not only is Victor unable to protect her, he is suspected of being the one who assaulted her and is unable to comprehend the charges brought against him, let alone defend himself (1.6, 'Man on the Street'). Like Echo and Sierra, by the time of the events depicted in the 2019-set 'Epitaph Two: Return,' Victor has reclaimed his own agency, has fathered a child with Sierra, and leads a group of self-imprinting freedom fighters. Nevertheless, Victor's journey to self-(re)discovery receives relatively scant attention and, it could be argued that, of all the Actives featured, he has the least agency.

Despite Victor's status as the Dollhouse's most visible male Active, the male character whose narrative arc is the most interesting (and complex) in relation to agency and gender is Paul Ballard (Tahmoh Penikett), an FBI agent who becomes aware of the existence of the Dollhouse and grows intent on bringing down Rossum, whose shadowy business is, in Ballard's eyes, nothing more than slavery with a corporate sheen. During the course of his investigations, he learns of Caroline's disappearance and begins to develop romantic feelings for her, despite

never having met her. His goal to destroy the Rossum Corporation then becomes inseparable from his quest to rescue Caroline. Ballard is clearly meant to be viewed as *Dollhouse*'s version of Vladimir Propp's classical 'hero' archetype, embarked on a quest to vanquish evil and rescue the captive princess (Propp 1968). The casting of Penikett in the role is significant as Ballard is, in many ways, reminiscent of his previous (and most high-profile) role: that of Helo in *Battlestar Galactica*, and Ballard displays many of the qualities of the heroic Helo - at least initially. Although, like Helo, Ballard is unquestionably an idealist, following his own moral compass, where Helo proved to be brave, loyal, and reliable with an ability to see a situation holistically, adjusting his beliefs accordingly, Ballard's need to take down the Dollhouse borders on obsession, and his growing and irrational fascination with Caroline is indicative of his need to be a hero. Far from personifying a masculine ideal (as Helo did), Ballard's behaviour and actions, whether intentionally or unintentionally, parody it. Ballard's conviction in his own progressive attitudes regarding the agency of women is at odds with his acting out of the role of a fairy-tale prince and his intent to rescue a damsel in distress from her role in fulfilling similar fantasies for Dollhouse clients. As Tony M. Vinci has asserted, this incongruity is even made evident to characters within the text:

> Dollhouse client Joel Myner (Patton Oswalt)… uses the fairy tale trope of the prince to raise Ballard's awareness of his acceptance of and participation in the same ideologies that have ensnared Caroline: "the brave little FBI agent whisked her away from the cash-wielding losers and restored her true identity. And she fell in love with him." (Vinci 2011, p.240-241)

Ballard's figurative emasculation is accentuated by the ultimate futility of his 'quest.' In addition to being duped into confiding in (and embarking on a sexual relationship with) his neighbour, Mellie, who is unsuspectingly a Dollhouse spy, Ballard fails to free Caroline from the Dollhouse. He does manage to negotiate an early release for Mellie, but this is at the cost of his reputation and his job at the FBI and, later, his principles, as he eventually becomes Echo's new handler and ends up working for the company he so despises. Despite his intent to bring down Rossum from within, he finds his agency restricted within the confines of the Dollhouse and

is eventually tortured to the point of brain death by a psychotic former Active named Alpha (Alan Tudyk). In a typical *Dollhouse* narrative twist, Ballard's identity had previously been 'backed up' on a wedge and, once the necessary 'architecture' is fitted into his brain, his body is subsequently re-imprinted with his own personality, effectively making Ballard a Doll (of himself), the very thing he sought to rescue Caroline from. He continues to fight by Echo's side during the events of the 'Epitaph' episodes, though he is unable to get her to admit her feelings for him. His agency frustrated to the end, Ballard is ultimately killed, predictably once again attempting to save a woman, Mag (Felicia Day), who is more resilient than he is and who survives to the story's end. Finally, Echo manages to imprint herself with Ballard's personality, adding his to the roster of imprints, including Caroline, the initial object of Ballard's affection. It is perhaps the ultimate irony that whereas Ballard failed to save Caroline in a fairy tale sense, Echo ends up saving him much like one saves data on a computer, Ballard's outmoded and ideologically unsound chivalry having been exposed as antiquated and ineffective.

Having conducted a survey of agency as it relates to gender (both female and male), it becomes apparent that *Dollhouse* is a text that revels in ambiguity and a feminist critique of the programme's narrative in this regard proves frustratingly inconclusive. Whereas the pantheon of televisual Action Chicks, from Wonder Woman to Buffy, can be more easily examined as feminist subjects in this way, the liminal bodies of *Dollhouse* embrace indistinctness and avoid easy classification. The ease with which personal identities can be adopted and abandoned would seem to correspond to the difficulties inherent in delineating the limits of agency. This suggests that a more fruitful approach might be one based on an acceptance of the mutability or arbitrariness of personal identity, namely Queer Theory.

<u>Gender-Neutral Dolls: Liminality as Queerness</u>

> "We're not anything; we're not anybody, because we're everybody. I mean, I get it. I understand it. I'm experiencing, like, thirty-eight of them right now. But I somehow understand that not one of them is me. I can slip into one, actually it slips into me. They had to make room for it. They hollowed me out. There is no me. I'm just a container." (1.12, 'Omega')

These words, spoken by Echo after experiencing a compositing of all her previous personalities, explicate *Dollhouse*'s central premise that, given the relevant conditioning (or imprint), people are capable of shifting identities as easily as containers can be filled and emptied. Over the course of the programme's 26 episodes, we see Echo adopting a number of different personalities – 14 named and 6 unnamed, in addition to Caroline Farrell, the 'original' inhabitant of Echo's body. Echo's continued growth as an entity with its own identity separate from Caroline and the other twenty imprints indicates the existence of a fundamental essence (whether it is mental, emotional or spiritual) which constitutes an essential human *identity*, separate from outwardly perceptible *personalities*. Whereas the behavioural patterns and characteristics which comprise personality can be appropriated and discarded with ease, the fundamental human identity is construed as being fixed, authentic, and almost primal. As Vinci notes:

> At the end of 'Gray Hour' [(1.4)] … Adelle uses Michelangelo's belief that "his sculptures already existed inside the marble, waiting to be freed" as a metaphor for the Caroline/Echo relationship, implying that there is an authentic identity residing at the centre of each individual that is obfuscated and trapped by ideology, though this identity can be 'freed.' (Vinci 2011, p.243)

The existence of imprints in the *Dollhouse* narrative universe is an explicit acknowledgment that behavioural patterns and characteristics are artificial constructs. The imprinting procedure serves to challenge the notion that human behaviour is a 'natural' manifestation of a person's inner self but is, in fact, the result of a deliberate *process*. This process of assembling an imprint from the habits, manners and customs of a variety of people and then implanting the resultant synthesis into the mind of an Active is, in effect, a microcosmic representation of the process of subject creation as posited by Queer Theory. The hands-on crafting of new imprints that occurs within the confines of the Dollhouse laboratory parallels the Foucauldian notion of how personal subject positions are created by ideological discourses, frameworks and apparatus in society. These discourses,

frameworks and apparatus participate in economic, racial and sexual regulation, the sum effect being the normalisation of the existing hegemonic order. Queer Theory seeks to identify and draw attention to these processes, exposing their artificiality and debunking the notion that human behaviours that support the existing hegemonic order are correct whilst 'disruptive' or 'unconventional' behaviours are incorrect, inappropriate or indecent. Although *Dollhouse* does not overtly engage with matters of race, and the notion of economic inequality is limited to a few brief references (such as the 'vox pop' interviews that punctuate 1.6, 'Man on the Street'), the show clearly explores the subject of sex, gender and sexuality.

As *Dollhouse* is a programme that revolves around the exchange of money for the hiring and use of human beings, and many of these engagements are of a 'romantic' or sexual nature, sexuality is a tangible concept in the text, even if the constraints of network television prohibited explicit exploration of the subject. In the episode 'Meet Jane Doe' (2.7), Echo states that the Dollhouse technicians "made me aggressively sexual, and phenomenally creative in bed… and at least 7 times gay" which seems to indicate that sexual orientation is one of the behavioural traits which can be imprinted.

Although none of the engagements in which Echo has a 'gay' imprint are portrayed on-screen, we do witness another form of imprint 'queering' when she and Victor are both on separate engagements and their imprints are accidentally switched (in 2.3, 'Belle Chose'). Echo inadvertently 'becomes' the psychopathic Terry Karrens, a serial killer who has suffered brain damage after being hit by a car and from whom the Dollhouse staff need to extract the location of his latest hostages before they die. Meanwhile, Victor is the unintentional recipient of an imprint of 'Kiki Turner,' a fun-loving, flirtatious college student who has been hired to seduce an older university professor. The swap occurs quickly but results in minimal disorientation for both Echo and Victor. 'Kiki' in fact does not even seem to realise that 'she' is now a man and, seeing she is in a club, begins to dance provocatively. The sight of Victor coquettishly cavorting on the dance floor draws looks of incredulity from those around 'him' and the scene is clearly intended to be a comic one. However, the incident also highlights the constructedness of gender performativity. Behaviour that seems acceptable in one context (Kiki's psyche in

Echo's body) looks preposterous in another (Kiki's psyche in Victor's body).
Accentuating the inauthenticity of gender performativity in this manner is redolent
of the estranging effects of Queer Theory and this approach has been
overwhelmingly associated with the work of Judith Butler. Butler's contention that
gender is fundamentally artificial corresponds to the *Dollhouse* narrative universe's
treatment of gender as merely another characteristic capable of being imprinted,
with superficially identifiable traits erroneously assumed to be outward
manifestations of a person's true identity, rather than mere signs from which an
imaginary identity is manufactured:

> Acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core
> or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body,
> through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never
> reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts,
> gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in
> the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport
> to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through
> corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered
> body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status
> apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. (Butler
> 1990, p.185)

Although *Dollhouse* reaffirms Butler's theory of gender performativity, it
also diverges slightly as, whereas Butler contends that the 'true self' is entirely
illusionary, a fantasy created by the mistaken assumption that gender is
representative of "an internal core or substance," Echo's spontaneous emergence as
a singular identity signifies that, within the world of *Dollhouse*, such an internal
core actually does exist – though gender, like other behavioural traits, is a construct
which exists independently from it. Butler's work also amplifies Queer Theory's
suspicion surrounding traditional normative associations of gender and sexuality in
order to include sex as yet another socially-constructed regulatory myth:

> The category of "sex" is, from the start, normative; it is what
> Foucault has called a "regulatory ideal." In this sense, then,
> "sex" not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory
> practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose

> regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the
> power to produce - demarcate, circulate, differentiate - the
> bodies it controls. (Butler 1993, p.1)

This contentious assertion of Butler's is theoretically complex but, as a result of the Active's identities possessing liminal qualities, *Dollhouse* is able to explore this complex concept in a more palpable way. After revealing to Ballard that her various engagements have involved adopting a different sexual orientation a number of times, Echo tells him that "there's a lot of noise from the chorus girls, but they're not me. There is a me. This is me" whilst suggestively touching his cheek (2.7). This does not contradict the notion that sexual orientation is separate from identity, only that Echo has adopted a sexual orientation which is separate from those that have been imprinted by the Dollhouse. After all, most of the other characters also display signs of sexual orientation – Actives and non-Actives alike. Echo's assertion that there is a separate "me" actually reinforces the concept and also suggests a different, though related, question regarding Echo's sex – specifically, whether it is correct to regard Echo as female and, returning to Butler's theory, whether there is any benefit to ascribing any sex to Echo.

Echo develops, seemingly from nowhere, mostly unrelated to either Caroline or any imprints bestowed. Although we often witness Echo appropriating some of the imprints' various traits through the course of the programme's two seasons (notably favourite sayings such as Taffy's "blue skies" in 1.4 and 2.7, and Terry Karrens' "goodness gracious" in 2.3), it is clear that these are simple personality traits that are being appropriated by Echo and that Echo's identity remains distinct from those of the imprints. By the end of the series, Echo has assimilated all these personalities, as well as Caroline's and Ballard's, but it is clear that the mixture of sexualities and genders are not causing any cognitive, emotional or spiritual dissonance. Rather, Echo has become a harmonious presence, able to amalgamate and incorporate numerous personalities whilst retaining a separate identity. The palpable separation between Echo's non-corporeal identity and Caroline's corporeality effectively questions essentialist assumptions regarding gender and sex. Butler argues that:

"Sex" is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized
through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body,
but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize "sex" and
achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of
those norms. That this reiteration is necessary is a sign that
materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never quite
comply with the norms by which their materialization is
impelled. Indeed, it is the instabilities, the possibilities for
rematerialization, opened up by this process that mark one
domain in which the force of the regulatory law can be turned
against itself to spawn rearticulations that call into question the
hegemonic force of that very regulatory law. (Butler 1993, p.2)

The Actives' liminal bodies in *Dollhouse* destabilise this "hegemonic force," whilst the Dollhouse itself represents regulatory apparatus, intent on rearticulating sex and gender norms. Meanwhile, the programme highlights how the continued popularity of the figure of the Action Chick often relies on the clichéd perception that most women are passive objects with limited agency whilst the Action Chick is exceptional. Furthermore, the queering narrative of *Dollhouse* transcends the contemporary gender crisis obsessively revisited by the recent male-focused 'Quality' television programmes mentioned at the start of this chapter.

Dollhouse begins with a scene featuring Caroline and, as Caroline is portrayed by Dushku who is the star of the show, it is evident that viewers are intended to assume that Caroline will be the programme's chief protagonist. But it is Echo, not Caroline, who becomes the world-saving hero. Echo, I contend, possesses personal identity but not a sex nor a gender. *Dollhouse* is not a text about female empowerment and, as Zhang (2011) has noted, Echo does not fight for female triumph, but for everyone's right to define their own role and identity. As Taylor Boulware notes:

A reading of *Dollhouse* as a critique of the oppressive ideologies
that have dominated American politics and culture for the past
thirty years … reveals the short-lived series to be not only the
most progressive of Joss Whedon's work, but one of the most
insightfully subversive television texts in recent memory.
(Boulware 2013)

Dollhouse's transcending of issues of gender and female agency facilitates a broader critique of essentialist theories of personal identity that currently prevail within the American sociopolitical sphere. Whereas a traditional feminist approach to the narrative suggests Echo is a disappointingly ineffective hero and the show itself intellectually insipid, Queer Theory reveals *Dollhouse* to be a provocative, overtly political text.

Conclusion: Liminality and the Subjunctive Society

It has been over a decade since 'Number Six' (Tricia Helfer) asked the bewildered Armistice Officer (Ryan Robbins) whether he was alive, initiating *Battlestar Galactica*'s (Universal/Sci-Fi TV, 2004-2009) six-year exploration of the subject of life, death and the space in-between through the use of spiritual cyborgs, a dying prophet and a resurrected messiah figure. Since then American television Science Fiction has asked the same question by means of a (potentially) terminally ill time-traveller, virtual avatars of dead teenagers, and a (supposedly) empty-headed 'Action Chick' – all unliving liminal protagonists. Regarded in terms of absence and loss, liminality has, traditionally, been viewed as a debilitating state and a referent for powerlessness. However, just as Queer Theory regards the destabilisation of the coherent subject to be an opportunity to disrupt the sexual status quo, so the unliving protagonists of contemporary American television Science Fiction (wittingly or unwittingly) embrace liminality as means of reconfiguring personal identities. In *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* (The Halcyon Company/Warner Bros. Television, 2008-2009) we observe Sarah (Lena Headey) struggle with her fugitive status and newfound knowledge of her (possible) terminal illness. However, we also witness her gradual acceptance of the situation, her eagerness to escape traditional social structures, and her eventual desire to enter into a different (sociolinguistic) world order. Similarly, Head Six (Tricia Helfer), Laura (Mary McDonnell) and Kara's (Katee Sackhoff) liminal subjectivities make them privy to knowledge that leads to the eventual salvation of both Cylons and humanity. These characters' privileged positioning within *Battlestar Galactica*'s narrative eventually culminate in the dying Laura being afforded final words that answer Six's initial enquiry of "are you alive?" Observing the Promised Land to which she has led her people and noticing how it teems with life, she unanticipatedly and upliftingly remarks "so much life" (4.20, 'Daybreak: Parts 2 & 3').

The thematic motif of the persistence of life against all odds recurs in *Caprica* (Universal/Sci-Fi TV, 2010-2011). In addition to facilitating the continuation of the lives of Zoe (Alessandra Torresani) and Tamara (Genevieve Buechner), the potentially eternal existence of their virtual equivalents symbolises a

means of ending the traumatic experience of grief. Existing in a state between life and death, as disembodied consciousness in the cyberspatial realm of 'V-World,' the girls take ownership of their interstitial existence, crafting new identities for themselves and remaking the world around them into a new dominion, over which they have total mastery. Finally, in *Dollhouse* (Boston Diva Productions/20th Century Fox, 2009-2010), liminality is not merely a mode that enables the (re)appropriation of agency or the refashioning of existing identities, it becomes a space in which brand new personal identities are brought into existence and empowered, then flourish. Unshackled from the need to escape from or overcome the confines of social, cultural, and political delineation, these authentic entities blossom and thrive, free from the demands of mandated performativity.

The preceding case studies demonstrate how the popularity of these unliving protagonists and their accompanying narratives functional as fictional analogues for recent transformations in political processes, social conditions and cultural mores, with certain texts plainly prioritising one or two whilst others engage with a variety of sociocultural or political developments. Thus, between them, *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Caprica* and *Dollhouse* explore fascinations with and anxieties regarding illness, religion, trauma, and gender. I do not mean to suggest that there is a simple causal relationship between texts such as those featured in my case studies and contemporary American sociocultural and political spheres. Proposing such paralleling is both reductive and difficult to substantiate. Moreover, it vastly devalues the intricate interplay between the texts and the sociocultural and political environments in which they are created, and the inherent complexities of the texts themselves. These texts do not 'reflect' or 'represent' contemporary American society in an unambiguously straightforward manner. They utilise and 'play' with subjunctive possibilities suggested by this society. As John Ellis notes:

> [Television] offers multiple stories and frameworks of explanation which enable understanding and, in the very multiplicity of those frameworks, it enables its viewers to work through the major public and private concerns of their society. Television has a key role in the social process of working through because it exists alongside us, holding our hands.

> Bearing witness to the present, television is no more certain than
> we are what the future might bring. (Ellis 2000, p.74)

In much the same way that the narrative of *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* opens up different potentialities to those established in the *Terminator* movie franchise, contemporary American Television Science Fiction programmes featuring unliving liminal protagonists exploit the genre's inherent predisposition for exploring the possibilities around shifting personal identities and alternative social modalities. By that same token, however, it then stands to reason that these texts take as their subject matter those themes that exhibit prominent contemporary cultural currency – such as illness, religion, trauma and gender. During the decade in which my chosen texts were broadcast, these subjects were under constant scrutiny in the U.S. Discourses around Obamacare, contentious illnesses, religious fundamentalists (of every hue and denomination), New Age spiritualities, 9/11 and the 'post-9/11 sensibility,' grief, women's reproductive rights and the rise in LGBTQ visibility abounded during this time. That all these matters were explored through the lens of liminality is, as Turner's work suggests, both appropriate and somewhat unsurprising.

As Turner argues, cultural depictions of liminality (by which he meant theatre but which we can also take to mean film and television as well as newer forms of mediated representations) "dissolve all factual and commonsense systems into their components and 'play' with them in ways never found in nature or in custom, at least at the level of direct perception." (Turner 1986, p.25). Indeed, as Matthew Weait has discerned, the use of the concept of liminality in this way can be witnessed during periods of social change other than that in which we are currently embroiled. Examining the children's literature of J.M. Barrie and Kenneth Grahame published at the turn of the twentieth-century, Weait remarks that these works (which featured liminal narratives) were published during a period which was itself liminal:

> An end and a beginning… It was a time of transition in which
> reflection on the past, anticipation of the future, and attempts to
> understand, resolve - and sometimes simply revel in - the
> conflicts in religious, social, political and cultural values and

institutions suffused scientific, artistic and literary creativity.
(Weait 2010)

I would argue that this summation of the fin de siècle could apply to the end of the twentieth century, too, as demonstrated by the conspicuousness of the contentious discourses previously mentioned as well as the rise in both religious and secular millennialism which was prevalent during the mid- to late-1990s.[93] As one might expect, just as the discourses around political, social and cultural change have continued well into this century, so have popular cultural representations of these same discourses. What functions as the common denominator throughout is the effect of these discourses upon notions of personal identity.

As Sherry Turkle has noted in relation to mental wellbeing, recent social and cultural transformations require corresponding modifications in (and alterations to) personal identity in order to ensure survival in the changed environment. As the social order transmutes, so we must adapt:

> Not so long ago, stability was socially valued and culturally reinforced. Rigid gender roles, repetitive labor, the expectation of being in one kind of job or remaining in one town over a lifetime, all of these made consistency central to definitions of health. But these stable social worlds have broken down. In our time, health is described in terms of fluidity rather than stability. What matters most now is the ability to adapt and change-to new jobs, new career directions, new gender roles, new technologies.
> (Turkle 1995)

Whereas Turkle's phrasing suggests the need to adopt flexible identities is a necessary evil for those individuals suited to the existing social order, those individuals who were marginalised, punished or penalised within more traditional "stable social worlds" are ideally positioned to prosper within the more fluid social worlds of contemporary society. In the same way that the unliving liminal

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[93] The enormous success of *The X-Files* (1993-2002) during this period is indicative of this theory. The programme featured several storylines concerning liminal creatures or liminal realms, whilst the overriding government/alien conspiracy arc effectively evoked the overriding sense of Millennial dread which saturated the media.

protagonists of my chosen texts can be viewed, potentially, as microcosmic referents of the issues and concerns they represent, so their empowered status *as* liminal beings could suggest the broader increase in sociocultural potentialities and the creation of subjunctive spaces.

There is, perhaps, no greater indicator that contemporary America is a 'subjunctive society' than the election in 2008 and re-election in 2012 of Barack Obama as the first African American President of the United States. His 2009 inaugural address evoked the concept of a changed environment requiring a change in its people; "what the cynics fail to understand is that the ground has shifted beneath them, that the stale political arguments that have consumed us for so long no longer apply" (Obama 2009). Having won a second term in office, the rhetoric of Obama's second inaugural address demonstrated an even greater commitment to the new world order. Calling upon his fellow Americans to embrace all the possibilities afforded by a "world without boundaries," Obama urged them to celebrate their country's innate diversity, specifying those social groups previously disadvantaged because of their minority status or their positioning outside the mainstream of society:

> Our journey is not complete until our wives, our mothers and
> daughters can earn a living equal to their efforts. Our journey is
> not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like
> anyone else under the law for if we are truly created equal, then
> surely the love we commit to one another must be equal as well.
> Our journey is not complete until no citizen is forced to wait for
> hours to exercise the right to vote. Our journey is not complete
> until we find a better way to welcome the striving, hopeful
> immigrants who still see America as a land of opportunity.
> (Obama 2013)

Obama's address also mentioned the debate over 'socialised' healthcare provision, a program aimed at those citizens 'outside the system' and which had often been viewed as detrimental to the country overall. In the context of this thesis, Obama's reference to women, the LGBTQ community, migrants and citizens who are, in relation to sociopolitical, legal or medical structures, 'invisible' or 'absent,' brings to mind the unliving protagonists of my chosen texts and the sociocultural groups they

embody. In the broader context, Obama's singling out of these particular groups reflects the sociocultural diversity of his supporters – most notably for the 2012 election and whom Hanna Rosin refers to as his "big happy rainbow party"(Rosin 2012). In addition to women voters, Rosin states, this unofficial alliance included Latinos, African-Americans and the young. Oddly enough, Rosin does not mention LGBTQ voters in relation to Obama's "rainbow party," despite the fact that GLB voters (as they were categorised by exit polls) also overwhelmingly favoured Obama over his Republican rival, Mitt Romney. According to Richard Schneider Jr in *The Gay and Lesbian Review*:

> Gay, lesbian and bisexual (GLB) voters preferred Obama over Romney by 76 to 22 percent, yielding a rather amazing spread of 54 percent. With five percent of the electorate identifying as GLB, this difference translated into millions of net GLB votes for Obama – close to 3.5 million, in fact, which almost equalled the difference in the popular vote between the two candidates. (Schneider Jr. 2013)

As these numbers demonstrate, an apparent 'minority' like the LGBTQ community can impact the outcome of an election significantly. Far from remaining on the outskirts of mainstream political discourse, over the past decade, the LGBTQ community has taken centre stage on numerous occasions. The campaign for same-sex marriage which, even ten years ago, was a provocative and often inflammatory issue, has essentially been won. Notably, as of 16 August 2014, same-sex marriage is legal in nineteen states and the District of Columbia whilst federal or state judges in a further seven have ruled same-sex marriage bans to be unconstitutional (Anon 2014).

The rise in LGBTQ visibility and, consequently, in the community's political power can be partly attributed to the recent re-framing of 'gay rights' as 'human rights.' In an address to the United Nations on 6 December, 2011, the same day that the President issued a memorandum to all government agencies, instructing them to "promote and protect the human rights of LGBT persons" (Obama 2011), then Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, announced that the Obama administration would be launching a $3 million dollar Global Equality Fund for pro-LGBTQ civil

society organisations. During her speech, Clinton stated how "like being a woman, like being a racial religious tribal or ethnic minority, being LGBT does not make you less human. And that is why gay rights are Human Rights and Human Rights are gay rights" (Volsky and Ford 2011). Further to Clinton's conflation of gay rights with Human Rights, the official White House website clearly considers gay rights to be 'civil rights.' As an African-American, President Obama's support of gay rights and (eventually) same-sex marriage, coupled with his administration's interpretation of gay rights as civil rights and the resultant upswing in support of same-sex marriage within the African-American community (Dade 2012), indicates how the LGBTQ and African-American communities together constitute a kind of 'collective minority.'

As made clear by a transcript of the speech delivered by Huey Newton, the founder of the Black Panthers, on 15 August 1970, in which he calls on his fellow African-Americans to unite with both the women's and gay liberation movements, there is a history of 'collective minorities' in the U.S. (Newton 1970). Until relatively recently, these have been mostly hypothetical, existing mainly as utopic constructs in political rhetoric. However, just as the election of President Obama, the increased support for same-sex marriage, and growing gender equality attest to the increase of political power by these previously powerless minorities, so this increase has resulted in these supposed 'minorities,' united in their goal of overcoming their lack of agency and power, becoming the 'new' majority. As Jonathan Cohn noted after Obama's re-election in November 2012, "Obama's disproportionately female, disproportionately minority coalition happens to be [the] majority. And it's getting better. They are no longer the "other." They are the authentic face of America" (Cohn 2012).

The journey from being a disempowered 'other' to being the empowered majority undertaken by these various social and cultural communities has been the culmination of a long process. Therefore, it is, perhaps, only appropriate that, instead of becoming a homogenised whole, the new majority remains a 'rainbow' coalition, permanently embodying the quality that distinguished them in the first instance – their *difference*, their 'outsider' status, and their interstitial positioning. By being both a minority and part of the majority, these groups are truly liminal.

The journey from powerlessness to power is, of course, typical of many of the narratives that focus on liminal beings – the need to address a lack being one of the six crucial tenets for identifying subjects for study that I identified in Chapter One. The noticeable increase in the political power (and sociocultural influence) of minorities over the last decade has, I believe, been reflected in the increase of texts featuring liminal protagonists and goes some way to explaining why these beings who historically fulfilled the role of the inhuman 'other' have, instead, been the focus of these narratives. Furthermore, these narratives have not appealed exclusively to those audiences who might identify with liminal characters, but also to a wider audience with an increased awareness of developments in and around the 'other' social communities and the resulting shift in personal identities. As Nathaniel Frank acutely observes:

> One of the most important - and most maligned - contributions
> of both the multicultural and LGBT movements of the past
> decades has been how the attention to minority experiences
> impacts everyone, not just minorities. African-Americans are not
> the only ones with a race; women are not the only ones with a
> gender; immigrants aren't the only ones who've left their homes
> to forge a new identity; gays aren't the only ones with a sexual
> orientation - or a secret to conceal. Understanding that these
> aspects of identity affect us all is crucial to ensuring that they
> don't govern our lives. (Frank 2013)

Liminal identities, therefore, affect everyone and those subjects who do not have their personal identities reconfigured by virtue of their inherent liminality must adapt to the changes around them. The last decade has been a time of tremendous political and social change in the U.S. and these changes have been wide-ranging and pervasive. Arthur W. Frank has used the term 'remission society' to refer to those who:

> Have had almost any cancer, those living in cardiac recovery
> programs, diabetics, those whose allergies and environmental
> sensitivities require dietary and other self-monitoring, those with
> prostheses and mechanical body regulators, the chronically ill,
> the disabled, those 'recovering' from abuses and addictions, and

for all these people, the families that share the worries and daily
triumph of staying well. (Frank 1995, p.8)

Obviously, this is already quite an extensive list but, should one consider
the stresses and pressures of social upheaval and fundamental changes to
personal identities as constituting a form of trauma (and Frank himself
considers the sharing of worries enough to qualify), then we are *all* a part
of the remissive society. Remission is, of course, a liminal condition
where one is neither sick nor well but, rather, constantly in the thrall of a
potential recurrence whilst continuing to live as normally as possible.
The boundary line between health and illness may collapse at any time
but the process of 'living' continues: "What is life like in the remission
society? For me it is ordinary or everyday, a quality so simple and so
everpresent that it becomes difficult to describe" (Frank 1991, p.139).

With their focus on unliving protagonists, my case studies can be
understood as part of an exploration of life in the remission society.
Seismic shifts in personal identities and social ruptures and upheavals are
filtered through the lens of film, television and newer media forms to
shape and structure subjunctive narrative arcs and the representation of
complex protagonists. However, I would also argue that the
predominance of the concept of liminality both within and outside of
these texts has wider ramifications for the formal qualities of the texts
themselves, and for their study – most significantly, their status as 'open'
narratives.

The concept of television serials as open ended is so firmly entrenched in
the field of television studies that it can appear axiomatic. Whereas the term
'series' has traditionally been used to refer to television programmes which consist
of self-contained episodes wherein each storyline is neatly resolved by the end of
the episode and no narrative enigmas are left unanswered, a 'serial' is a television
programme in which narrative closure is delayed until the final episode (which may
be the season finale, or the very last episode of the entire show). In recent years,
this distinction has become problematic as many (if not most) television dramas are
now series/serial hybrids wherein each episode has one story arc which is resolved

by the end of the episode, another which is resolved at the end of the season and, possibly, a third (often more personalised and pertaining to a particular character/set of characters) which is resolved in the final episode. As a result of this hybridising, the traditional characteristics of a serial are now a widespread feature of television programmes in general.

Robert C. Allen's ground-breaking work on the soap opera, the purest form of television serial, during the 1980s and 1990s would appear to be as relevant to popular television drama in general now as it is to soap opera in particular then. He explains how serials are:

> Predicated upon the impossibility of ultimate closure. No one sits down to watch an episode of one of these programs with the expectation that this episode might be the one in which all individual and community problems will be solved and everyone will live happily ever after. (Allen 1995, p.18)

Although Allen's reference to that staple of soap opera environments, the "community," here belies the fact that not all aspects of his work on soap operas are as relevant to today's serials, the fact is that most studies of television advocate the notion that, in terms of narrative structure, the differences between series and serials are more difficult to ascertain, and that, as a result, it is often taken as a given that television dramas are open texts. Amy Patrick, for example, asserts that the final episode of *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005) is significant not only for its excellence as a piece of television drama but also for the unusually definitive ending (in which a flash-forward reveals where and when each of the protagonists passes away). "Books and film," Patrick claims, "because of their finite-ness and sure authorial voice, provide a deliberate closure, but television, due to internal and external factors of long form storytelling and TV economics, is generally not so compliant" (Patrick 2011).

I contend that liminal protagonists disrupt the 'openness' of the text in which they feature, regardless of how the serial/series ends, or even whether it *does* 'end' (and isn't cancelled before the intended final episode). This disruption is not generated through action (or inaction). It is, rather, a natural consequence of the protagonists' liminal nature. Liminality is, as I discussed in Chapter One, the

middle stage of a tripartite schema. Liminality is dependent on the existence of a pre- and post-liminal phase. Therefore, each liminal character carries within her/himself the certainty of a post-liminal state, the answer to the question of how their own narrative arc concludes. It is true that the resolution of each character's story arc may not be equally as easy to foretell – terminally ill characters must die, for example, but Echo's (Eliza Dushku) end point in *Dollhouse* may be more difficult to predict.[94] However, what makes these protagonists *what* they are is their liminal natures and, as the programmes are centred around this enigmatic form of existence, it stands to reason that the narrative ends once the enigma is solved, and the characters move from the liminal into the post-liminal state.

Having conducted my case studies, I would argue that narratives about liminal identity are ideally suited to take advantage of the shifting televisual environment. Liminality is, after all, about change, fluctuation and transformation, and liminal narratives exemplify the dissolution of the previously rigid boundaries demarcating open/closed texts, 'Quality'/'Complex' TV, and – perhaps most of all – the relevance of popular American television Science Fiction. By employing an amalgam of narrative analysis and broader sociocultural contextualisation, my chosen methodology has highlighted the ways in which, through the figure of the unliving liminal protagonist, such seemingly escapist entertainment is, in fact, exceedingly well-attuned to portray, comment upon and explore the subjunctive possibilities suggested by significant developments and prevalent anxieties in contemporary American society. Such texts are exceptionally situated to engage with popular discourses involving the fluctuating and increasingly ambiguous nature of personal identity, and the concept of liminality, with its emphasis on the destabilising, diminishing and dissolving of supposedly solid and unyielding barriers, has become the perfect narrative device for conveying potentially 'slippery' contemporary sociopolitical experiences.

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[94] My personal reading would be that, since Echo's liminality arises from the disparity between the corporeality of Caroline's body and Echo as a purely mental/spiritual/emotional being residing within, and bearing in mind that Caroline's psyche is now simply part of the broader 'chorus' that has become a part of Echo, then the integration of body and psyche would appear to signal the end of the character's liminal existence.

Although it has been a few years since my chosen texts originally aired, liminal protagonists continue to appear with surprising regularity on American television. Indeed, the phenomenon appears to be increasing and diversifying. Two recent examples include *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* (2013-) and *Resurrection* (2014-) which both feature unliving protagonists (several in the latter show) whose liminal status provides both programmes with their central narrative enigma. It is noteworthy that, whilst the former is the first of Marvel Studios' comics-inspired television programmes,[95] the latter is a family-based drama, further evidence that the growth in popularity of liminal protagonists continues to contribute to the erosion of generic boundaries. 2015, meanwhile, sees the launch of the similarly premised *The Returned*, an American remake of the French programme *Les revenants* (2012-) which has been a critical and commercial success in several European countries (including the U.K.). The success of such programmes outside of the U.S. (as well as that of American exports like my chosen texts) suggests that the sociocultural significances of shifting personal identities are not geographically limited. It is my belief that further work in this field is not simply possible, but apposite. After all, liminality is, in the final analysis and above all else, about the dissolution of boundaries and making what had hitherto been hidden in the spaces in-between visible and distinct. It is my hope that this thesis provides a starting point from which further such work can begin.

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[95] *AKA Jessica Jones*, *Daredevil*, *The Defenders*, *Iron Fist*, and *Luke Cage* are all set to debut in 2015/6.

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American Horror Story: Asylum (2012-2013). U.S.A.: Brad Falchuk Teley-Vision/Ryan Murphy Productions/20th Century Fox Television.

Andromeda (2000-2005). Canada/U.S.A.: Fireworks Entertainment/Tribune Entertainment/BLT Productions/Global/MBR Productions Inc.

Angel (1999-2004). U.S.A.: Mutant Enemy/20th Century Fox Television.

Angels in America (2003). U.S.A.: HBO Films/Home Box Office.

Ashes to Ashes (2008-2010). U.K.: Kudos Film & Television/BBC.

The Avengers (1961–1969). U.K.: ABC Weekend Television/Associated British Corporation.

Awake (2012). U.S.A.: Letter Eleven/Teakwood Lane Productions/20th Century Fox Television.

Babylon 5 TV Franchise (in chronological order)

Babylon 5: The Gathering (1993, TV Movie). Dir. Richard Compton. U.S.A./Canada: Babylonian Productions/Rattlesnake Productions/Synthetic Worlds. 1993, February 22. Prime Time Entertainment Network.

Babylon 5 (1994-1998). U.S.A.: Babylonian Productions.

——— "The Fall of Night" Episode 2.22. Dir. Janet Greek. Prime Time Entertainment Network. 1995, August 15.

Babylon 5: In the Beginning (1998, TV Movie). Dir. Michael Vejar. U.S.A.: Babylonian
　　　　Productions/Turner Network Television. 1998, January 4. Turner Network
　　　　Television.

Babylon 5: Thirdspace (1998, TV Movie). Dir. Jesús Salvador Treviño. U.S.A.: Babylonian
　　　　Productions/Turner Network Television. 1998, July 19. Turner Network
　　　　Television.

Babylon 5: The River of Souls (1998, TV Movie). Dir. Janet Greek. U.S.A.: Babylonian
　　　　Productions/Turner Network Television. 1998, November 8. Turner Network
　　　　Television.

Babylon 5: A Call to Arms (1999, TV Movie). Dir. Michael Vejar. U.S.A.: Babylonian
　　　　Productions/Turner Network Television. 1999, January 3. Turner Network
　　　　Television.

Crusade (1999). U.S.A.: Babylonian Productions/Turner Network Television.

Babylon 5: The Legend of the Rangers: To Live and Die in Starlight (2002, TV Movie). Dir.
　　　　Michael Vejar. U.S.A.: Babylonian Productions/Legendary Films Inc./The Sci-Fi
　　　　Channel. 2002, January 19. The Sci-Fi Channel.

Babylon 5: The Lost Tales (2007, Direct-to-Video). Dirs. J. Michael Straczynski & Sara
　　　　Barnes. U.S.A./Canada: Lost Tales Films/NS Pictures/Warner Bros.
　　　　Entertainment.

Battlestar Galactica TV Franchise (in chronological order)

Battlestar Galactica (1978-1979). U.S.A.: Glen A. Larson Productions/Universal TV.

Battlestar Galactica (2003). U.S.A./U.K.: R&D TV/Sky TV/U.S.A. Cable Entertainment.

Battlestar Galactica (2004-2009). U.S.A./U.K.: British Sky Broadcasting (BSkyB)/David
　　　　Eick Productions/NBC Universal Television (2004-2007)/R&D TV/Stanford
　　　　Pictures/Universal Media Studios (UMS) (2007-2009).

——— "The Hand of God" Episode 1.10. Dir. Jeff Woolnough. The Sci-Fi Channel.
　　　　2005, January 3.

——— "Home: Part 2" Episode 2.7. Dir. Jeff Woolnough. The Sci-Fi Channel. 2006,
　　　　February 21.

——— "Maelstrom" Episode 3.17. Dir. Michael Nankin. The Sci-Fi Channel. 2007, April
　　　　24.

——— "Daybreak: Parts 2 & 3" Episode 4.20. Dir. Michael Rymer. The Sci-Fi Channel.
　　　　2009, March 24.

Battlestar Galactica: Razor (2007, TV Movie). Dir. Félix Enríquez Alcalá. U.S.A.:
Universal Network Television/David Eick Productions/R&D TV/U.S.A. Cable
Entertainment. 2007, November 24. The Sci-Fi Channel.

Battlestar Galactica: The Plan (2009, Direct-to-Video). Dir. Edward James Olmos. U.S.A.:
David Eick Productions/R&D TV.

(Also see *Caprica* and web series *The Resistance*, *Face of the Enemy* and *Blood & Chrome*,
listed below)

The Big C (2010-2013). U.S.A.: Perkins Street Productions/Showtime Networks.

Bionic Woman (2007). U.S.A.: NBC Universal Television/Universal Media Studios.

The Bionic Woman (1976-1978). U.S.A.: Harve Bennett Productions/Universal TV.

Breaking Bad (2008-2013). U.S.A.: High Bridge/Gran Via Productions/Sony Pictures
Television/AMC.

Buck Rogers (1950-1951). U.S.A.: ABC.

Buck Rogers in the 25th Century (1979-1981). U.S.A.: Glen A. Larson Productions (1979-
1980)/Bruce Lansbury Productions (1979-1980)/John Mantley Productions
(1981)/Universal TV.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1997-2003). U.S.A.: Mutant Enemy/Kuzui Enterprises/Sandollar
Television/20th Century Fox Television.

——— "Lessons" Episode 7.1. Dir. David Solomon. UPN. 2002, September 24.

——— "End of Days" Episode 7.21. Dir. Marita Grabiak. UPN. 2003, May 13.

——— "Chosen" Episode 7.22. Dir. Joss Whedon. UPN. 2003, May 20.

Caprica (2010). U.S.A.: David Eick Productions/Universal Media Studios (UMS).

——— "Pilot" Episode 1.1. Dir. Jeffrey Reiner. The Sci-Fi Channel. 2010, January 22.

——— "The Imperfections of Memory" Episode 1.7. Dir. Wayne Rose. The Sci-Fi
Channel. 2010, March 12.

——— "Ghosts in the Machine" Episode 1.8. Dir. Wayne Rose. The Sci-Fi Channel.
2010, March 19.

——— "Things We Lock Away" Episode 1.12. Dir. Tim Hunter. The Sci-Fi Channel.
2010, October 19.

——— "False Labor" Episode 1.13. Dir. John Dahl. The Sci-Fi Channel. 2010, October
26.

——— "The Heavens Will Rise" Episode 1.16. Dir. Michael Nankin. The Sci-Fi Channel.
2011, January 4.

——— "Here Be Dragons" Episode 1.17. Dir. Michael Nankin. The Sci-Fi Channel. 2011, January 4.

——— "Apotheosis" Episode 1.18. Dir. Jonas Pate. The Sci-Fi Channel. 2011, January 4.

Captain Video and his Video Rangers (1949-1955). U.S.A.: DuMont.

Carnivàle (2003-2005). U.S.A.: 3 Arts Entertainment/Home Box Office (HBO).

Charlie's Angels (1976–1981). U.S.A.: Spelling-Goldberg Productions.

Daredevil (2015-). U.S.A.: ABC Television Studio/Marvel Entertainment/The Walt Disney Company.

Dark Angel (2000-2002). U.S.A.: Cameron/Eglee Productions/20th Century Fox Television.

Dark Shadows (1966-1971). U.S.A.: Dan Curtis Productions.

The Day After (1983). U.S.A.: ABC.

Dead Like Me (2003-2004). Canada/U.S.A.: DLM Productions/John Masius Productions/MGM Television.

The Defenders (2016-). U.S.A.: ABC Television Studio/Marvel Entertainment/The Walt Disney Company.

Defiance (2013-). U.S.A.: Universal Cable Productions.

Demons (2009). U.K.: Shine/ITV.

Doctor Who (1963-). U.K.: BBC.

Dollhouse (2009-2010). U.S.A.: 20th Century Fox Television/Boston Diva Productions.

——— "Echo" Episode 1.0. Dir. Joss Whedon. Unaired (included on the Season One DVD/Blu-Ray, released 2009, July 28).

——— "Ghost" Episode 1.1. Dir. Joss Whedon. Fox Network. 2009, February 13.

——— "Gray Hour" Episode 1.4. Dir. Rod Hardy. Fox Network. 2009, March 6.

——— "Man on the Street" Episode 1.6. Dir. David Straiton. Fox Network. 2009, March 20.

——— "A Spy in the House of Love" Episode 1.9. Dir. David Solomon. Fox Network. 2009, April 10.

——— "Omega" Episode 1.12. Dir. Tim Minear. Fox Network. 2009, May 8.

——— "Epitaph One" Episode 1.13. Dir. David Solomon. Unaired (included on the Season One DVD/Blu-Ray, released 2009, July 28).

——— "Belle Chose" Episode 2.3. Dir. David Solomon. Fox Network. 2009, October 9.

——— "Meet Jane Doe" Episode 2.7. Dir. Dwight Little. Fox Network. 2009, December 11.

——— "Epitaph Two: Return" Episode 2.13. Dir. David Solomon. Fox Network. 2010, January 29.

Enlightened (2011-2013). U.S.A.: Rip Cord Productions/HBO Entertainment.

——— 'All I Ever Wanted' Episode 2.6. Dir. Todd Haynes. 2013, February 17. HBO.

Enterprise aka *Star Trek: Enterprise* (2001-2005). See entry under '*Star Trek* TV Franchise'

The Event (2010-2011). U.S.A.: Steve Stark Productions/Universal Media Studios (UMS).

Falling Skies (2011-2015). U.S.A./Canada: DreamWorks Television/Invasion Productions.

Farscape (1999-2003). Australia/U.S.A.: Jim Henson Productions/Hallmark
Entertainment/Jim Henson Television/Nine Film & Television Pty. Ltd./Nine
Network Australia/The Sci-Fi Channel.

Father Dowling Mysteries (1989-1991). U.S.A.: Dean Hargrove Productions/Fred
Silverman Company/Viacom Productions.

Father Murphy (1981-1983). U.S.A.: NBC Productions.

La Femme Nikita (1997-2001). Canada: CTV Television Network/LPN Productions
Inc./Fireworks Entertainment/Baton Broadcasting Incorporated (BBS).

Firefly (2002-2003). U.S.A.: Mutant Enemy/20th Century Fox Television.

FlashForward (2009-2010). U.S.A.: HBO Entertainment/ABC Studios/Phantom Four Films.

Flash Gordon (1954-1955). U.S.A.: Inter-Continental Film Productions/DuMont.

Fringe (2008-2013). U.S.A./Canada: Bad Robot/Warner Bros. Television/FB2 Films/Fringe
Element Films.

Game of Thrones (2011-). U.S.A.: HBO/Television 360.

The Gates (2010). U.S.A.: Fox Television Studios/ABC.

Grimm (2011-). U.S.A.: GK Productions/Hazy Mills Productions/Universal Television.

The Good Wife (2009-). U.S.A.: Scott Free Productions/King Size Productions/Small
Wishes/CBS Productions/CBS Television Studios.

Happy Days (1974-1984). U.S.A.: Henderson Productions/Miller-Milkis Productions (1974-
1981)/Miller-Milkis-Boyett Productions (1981-1984)/Paramount Television.

Heroes (2006-2010). U.S.A.: Tailwind Productions/NBC Universal Television (2006-
2007)/Universal Media Studios (UMS) (2007-2010).

Highway to Heaven (1984-1989). U.S.A.: Michael Landon Productions/National
Broadcasting Company (NBC).

Honey West (1965-1966). U.S,: Four Star Productions.

House of Cards (2013-). U.S.A.: Media Rights Capital/Panic Pictures/Trigger Street
Productions.

The Incredible Hulk (1978-1982). U.S.A.: Universal TV.

In the Beginning (1978). U.S.A.: TAT Communications Company.

Invasion (2005-2006). U.S.A.: Warner Bros. Television/Shaun Cassidy Productions.

Iron Fist (2015-). U.S.A.: ABC Television Studio/Marvel Entertainment/The Walt Disney
Company.

Jericho (2006-2008). U.S.A.: CBS Paramount Network Television/Junction Entertainment.

Joan of Arcadia (2003-2005). U.S.A.: Barbara Hall Productions/CBS Productions/Sony
Pictures Television.

John from Cincinnati (2007). U.S.A.: Home Box Office (HBO)/Red Board
Productions/Saticoy Productions.

Laverne and Shirley (1976-1983). U.S.A.: Miller-Milkis Productions/Henderson
Productions/Paramount Television.

Life on Mars (2006-2007). U.K.: Kudos Film & Television/BBC.

Lost (2004-2010). U.S.A.: ABC Studios (2007-2010)/Touchstone Television (2006-
2007)/Bad Robot/Grass Skirt Productions.

Luke Cage (2016-). U.S.A.: ABC Television Studio/Marvel Entertainment/The Walt Disney
Company.

Mad Men (2007-2015). U.S.A.: Lionsgate Television/Weiner Bros./American Movie
Classics (AMC)/Radical Media/U.R.O.K. Productions.

Manimal (1983). U.S.A.: 20th Century Fox Television/Glen A. Larson Productions.

Mildred Pierce (2011). U.S.A.: HBO Miniseries/Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM)/Killer
Films/John Wells.

Millennium (1996-1999). U.S.A.: Ten Thirteen Productions/20th Century Fox.

Nurse Jackie (2009-2015). U.S.A.: Showtime/Lionsgate Television/Jackson Group
Entertainment/Madison Grain Elevator/De Long Lumber/Caryn Mandabach
Productions.

Orange is the New Black (2013-). U.S.A.: Tilted Productions/Lionsgate Television.

Parks and Recreation (2009-2015). U.S.A.: Deedle-Dee Productions/3 Arts
Entertainment/Universal Media Studios (UMS).

Person of Interest (2011-). U.S.A.: Kilter Films/Bad Robot/Warner Bros. Television.

Pushing Daisies (2007-2009). U.S.A.: Jinks\Cohen Company/Living Dead Guy
Productions/Warner Bros. Television.

Resurrection (2014-). U.S.A.: Brillstein Entertainment Partners/Plan B Entertainment/ABC
Studios.

The Returned (2015-). U.S.A.: A&E Network/Fremantle Media North America/Haut et
Court.

Les Revenants (2012-). France: Haut et Court.

Saving Grace (2007-2010). U.S.A.: Fox Television Studios.

Sex and the City (1998-2004). U.S.A.: Darren Star Productions/Home Box Office (HBO)/Sex and the City Productions.

Sherlock (2010-). U.K.: Hartswood Films/BBC Wales/Masterpiece.

Six Feet Under (2001-2005). U.S.A.: Home Box Office (HBO)/The Greenblatt Janollari Studio/Actual Size Films/Actual Size Productions.

The Six Million Dollar Man (1974-1978). U.S.A.: Harve Bennett Productions/Silverton Productions.

The Sopranos (1999-2007). U.S.A.: Home Box Office (HBO)/Brillstein Entertainment Partners.

Stargate TV Franchise (in chronological order)

Stargate SG-1 (1997-2007). U.S.A./Canada: Double Secret Productions/Gekko Film Corp./Kawoosh! Productions IX (season 9)/Kawoosh! Productions VII/MGM Worldwide Television Productions/Sony Pictures Television (2005-2006)/Stargate SG-1 Production.

Stargate: Infinity (2002-2003, Animated Series). U.S.A./Canada: 4 Kids Entertainment/DiC Enterprises.

Stargate: The Ark of Truth (2008, Direct-to-Video). Dir. Robert C. Cooper. U.S.A./Canada: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer/Kawoosh! Productions DTV I.

Stargate: Continuum (2008, Direct-to-Video). Dir. Marton Wood. U.S.A./Canada: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer/Kawoosh! Productions DTV II/MGM Global Holdings/Acme Shark.

Stargate: Atlantis (2004-2009). U.S.A./Canada: Acme Shark/MGM Television/Pegasus Productions/Sony Pictures Television (2005-2006).

Stargate: Universe (2009-2011). U.S.A.: MGM Television/SyFy.

Star Trek TV Franchise (in chronological order)

Star Trek (1966-1969). U.S.A.: Desilu Productions (1966-1967)/Norway Corporation/Paramount Television (1968-1969).

Star Trek (1973-1975, Animated Series). U.S.A.: Filmation Associates/Norway Productions/Paramount Television.

Star Trek: The Next Generation (1987-1994). U.S.A.: Paramount Television.

——— "Q Who?" Episode 2.16. Dir. Rob Bowman. 1989, May 6 (syndicated).

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine (1993-1999). U.S.A.: Paramount Television.

———— "What You Leave Behind" Episode 7.25. Dir. Allan Kroeker. 1999, June 2
        (syndicated).

Star Trek: Voyager (1995-2001). U.S.A.: Paramount Television/United Paramount Network
        (UPN).

———— "Dark Frontier" Episodes 5.15/5.16. Dirs. Cliff Vole/Terry Windell. United
        Paramount Network (UPN). 1999, February 17.

———— "Unimatrix Zero" Episodes 6.26/7.1. Dirs. Allan Kroeker/Mjchael Vejar. United
        Paramount Network (UPN). 2000, May 24/2000, October 4.

———— "Endgame" Episode 7.25. Dir. Allan Kroeker. United Paramount Network (UPN).
        2001, May 23.

Enterprise aka *Star Trek: Enterprise* (2001-2005). U.S.A.: Braga Productions/Paramount
        Network Television/Paramount Television/Rick Berman Productions.

Surface (2005-2006). U.S.A.: NBC Universal Television.

Terminator: *The Sarah Connor Chronicles* (2008-2009). U.S.A.: Bartleby Company/C-2
        Pictures/Warner Bros. Television/The Halcyon Company/Sarah Connor
        Pictures/Syfy.

———— "Gnothi Seauton" Episode 1.2. Dir. David Nutter. Fox Network. 2008, January 14.

———— "The Turk" Episode 1.3. Dir. Paul A. Edwards. Fox Network. 2008, January 21.

———— "Queen's Gambit" Episode 1.5. Dir. Sergio Matt Earl Beesley. Fox Network. 2008,
        February 11.

———— "Automatic for the People" Episode 2.2. Dir. Jeffrey G. Hunt. Fox Network. 2008,
        September 15.

———— "Allison from Palmdale" Episode 2.4. Dir. Charles Beeson. Fox Network. 2008,
        September 29.

———— "Goodbye to All That" Episode 2.5. Dir. Bryan Spicer. Fox Network. 2008,
        October 6.

———— "The Tower is Tall but the Fall is Short" Episode 2.6. Dir. Tawnia McKiernan. Fox
        Network. 2008, October 20.

———— "Complications" Episode 2.9. Dir. Steven DePaul. Fox Network. 2008, November
        17.

———— "Self Made Man" Episode 2.11. Dir. Holly Dale. Fox Network. 2008, December 1.

———— "Earthlings Welcome Here" Episode 2.13. Dir. Félix Enríquez Alcalá. Fox Network.
        2008, December 15.

——— "The Good Wound" Episode 2.14. Dir. Jeff Woolnough. Fox Network. 2009, February 13.

——— "Some Must Watch, While Some Must Sleep" Episode 2.16. Dir. Scott Lautanen. Fox Network. 2009, February 27.

——— "Ourselves Alone" Episode 2.17. Dir. Jeff Woolnough. Fox Network. 2009, March 6.

——— "Today is the Day: Part Two" Episode 2.19. Dir. Guy Norman Bee. Fox Network. 2009, March 20.

——— "To the Lighthouse" Episode 2.20. Dir. Guy Ferland. Fox Network. 2009, March 27.

——— "Adam Raised a Cain" Episode 2.21. Dir. Charles Beeson. Fox Network. 2009, April 3.

——— "Born to Run" Episode 2.22. Dir. Jeffrey G. Hunt. Fox Network. 2009, April 10.

Terra Nova (2011). U.S.A./Australia: Amblin Television/Chernin Entertainment/Kapital Entertainment/Siesta Productions/20th Century Fox Television.

Three's Company (1976-1984). U.S.A.: DLT Entertainment/TTC/The NRW Company/Three's Company Productions.

Threshold (2005-2006). U.S.A.: Paramount Network Television/Heyday Films/Braga Productions.

Torchwood: Children of Earth (2009). U.K.: BBC Wales.

Touched by an Angel (1994-2003). U.S.A.: CBS Productions/Caroline Productions/Moon Water Productions.

Tripods (1984-1985). U.K.: BBC.

True Blood (2008-2014). U.S.A.: Your Face Goes Here Entertainment/Home Box Office (HBO).

True Detective (2014-). U.S.A.: Anonymous Content/Lee Caplin / Picture Entertainment/Passenger.

The Twilight Zone (1959-1964). U.S.A.: Cayuga Productions/Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS).

Ultraviolet (1998). U.K.: World Productions.

Under the Dome (2013-). U.S.A.: Amblin Television/CBS Television Studios/DreamWorks Television.

V (1983-1985). U.S.A: Kenneth Johnson Productions/NBC.

Veep (2012-). U.S.A.: Home Box Office (HBO).

The Vampire Diaries (2009-). U.S.A.: Alloy Entertainment/CW Television Network.

The Visitor (1997-1998). U.S.A.: 20th Century Fox Television.

The Walking Dead (2010-). U.S.A.: Circle of Confusion/Valhalla Entertainment/Darkwoods
        Productions/AMC Studios.

Werewolf (1987-1988). U.S.A.: TriStar Television.

The West Wing (1999-2006). U.S.A.: John Wells Productions/Warner Bros. Television.

The Wire (2002-2008). U.S.A.: Blown Deadline Productions/Home Box Office (HBO).

Wonderfalls (2004). Canada/U.S.A.: Living Dead Guy Productions/Millenium Canadian
        Productions/Regency Television/Twentieth Century Fox Film
        Corporation/Walking Bud Productions.

Wonder Woman (1975–1979). U.S.A.: Bruce Lansbury Productions/Douglas S. Cramer
        Company/Warner Bros. Television.

——— "Fausta, the Nazi Wonder Woman" Episode 1.3. Dir. Barry Crane. ABC. 1976,
        April 28.

Xena: Warrior Princess (1995–2001). New Zealand: MCA Television/Renaissance
        Pictures/Studios U.S.A. Television/Universal TV.

The X-Files (1993-2002). U.S.A./Canada: Ten Thirteen Productions/20th Century Fox
        Television/X-F Productions.

——— "The Truth" Episode 9.19. Dir. Kim Manners. Fox Network. 2003, May 19.

<u>Filmography</u>

2001: A Space Odyssey (1968). Dir. Stanley Kubrick. U.S.A.: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM)/Stanley Kubrick Productions.

Aliens (1986). Dir. James Cameron. U.S.A.: Brandywine Productions/Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.

Alien³(1992). Dir. David Fincher. U.S.A.: Brandywine Productions/Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.

Apocalypse Now (1979). Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. U.S.A.: Zoetrope Studios.

Beaches (1998). Dir. Garry Marshall. U.S.A.: All Girl Productions/Buena Vista Pictures.

Blade Runner (1982). Dir. Ridley Scott. U.S.A.: The Ladd Company/Warner Bros. Pictures.

Born on the Fourth of July (1989). Dir. Oliver Stone. U.S.A.: Ixtlan.

Coming Home (1978). Dir. Hal Ashby. U.S.A.: Jerome Hellman Productions Inc./Jayne Productions Inc.

Dark Victory (1939). Dir. Edmund Goulding. U.S.A.: First National Pictures/Warner Bros. Pictures.

D.A.R.Y.L. (1985). Dir. Simon Wincer. U.S.A.: Paramount Pictures.

The Deer Hunter (1978). Dir. Michael Cimino. U.K./U.S.A.: EMI/Universal Pictures.

E.T.: the Extra-Terrestrial (1982). Dir. Steven Spielberg. U.S.A.: Universal Pictures.

The Family Stone (2005). Dir. Thomas Bezucha. U.S.A.: The Family Stone/Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.

Full Metal Jacket (1987). Dir. Stanley Kubrick. U.K./U.S.A.: Natant/Stanley Kubrick Productions/Warner Bros.

Hamburger Hill (1987). Dir. John Irvin. U.S.A.: RKO Pictures.

Jarhead (2005). Dir. Sam Mendes. Germany/U.S.A.: Universal Pictures/Red Wagon Entertainment/Neal Street Productions/Motion Picture KAPPA Produktionsgesellschaft.

The Manchurian Candidate (2004). Dir. Jonathan Demme. U.S.A.: Paramount Pictures/Scott Rudin Productions/Clinica Estetico.

The Matrix (1999). Dirs. The Wachowski Brothers. U.S.A./Australia. Warner Bros./Village Roadshow/Pictures/Groucho II Film Partnership/Silver Pictures.

Platoon (1986). Dir. Oliver Stone. U.K./U.S.A.: Hemdale Film.

Robocop (1987). Dir. Paul Verhoeven. U.S.A.: Orion Pictures Corporation.

Shadowlands (1993). Dir. Richard Attenborough. U.K.: Price Entertainment/Spelling Films International.

Solaris (2002). Dir. Steven Soderbergh. U.S.A.: Twentieth Century Fox/Lightstorm Entertainment.

Star Trek V: *The Final Frontier* (1989). Dir. William Shatner. U.S.A: Paramount.

Star Trek: First Contact (1996). Dir. Jonathan Frakes. U.S.A: Paramount.

Star Trek (2009). Dir. J.J. Abrams. U.S.A: Paramount/ Spyglass Entertainment/Bad Robot/Mavrocine.

Star Trek: Into Darkness (2013). Dir. J.J. Abrams. U.S.A: Paramount/Skydance Productions/Bad Robot.

Star Wars (1977). Dir. George Lucas. U.S.A.: Lucasfilm/Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.

Steel Magnolias (1989). Dir. Herbert Ross. U.S.A.: Rastar Films/TriStar Pictures.

Stepmom (1998). Dir. Chris Columbus. U.S.A.: TriStar Pictures/Columbia Pictures.

The Terminal (2004). Dir. Steven Spielberg. U.S.A.: Dreamworks Pictures/Amblin Entertainment/Parkes/MacDonald Productions.

The Terminator (1984). Dir. James Cameron. U.S.A./U.K.: Hemdale Film/Pacific Western/Euro Film Funding/Cinema 84.

Terminator 2: Judgement Day (1991). Dir. James Cameron. U.S.A./France: Carolco Pictures/Pacific Western/Lightstorm Entertainment/Le Studio Canal+ S.A./T2 Productions.

Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines (2003) Dir. Jonathan Mostow. U.S.A./Germany/U.K.: C-2 Pictures/Intermedia Films/IMF/Mostow\Lieberman Productions.

Terminator: Salvation (2009). Dir. McG. U.S.A.: The Halcyon Company/Wonderland Sound and Vision.

Terms of Endearment (1983). Dir. James L. Brooks. U.S.A.: Paramount Pictures.

Three Kings (1999). David O. Russell. U.S.A./Australia: Warner Bros./Village Roadshow Pictures/Village-A.M. Partnership/Coast Ridge/Atlas Entertainment/Junger Witt Productions.

Twilight (2008). Dir. Catherine Hardwicke. U.S.A.: Summit Entertainment/ Temple Hill/Maverick/Imprint/Goldcrest Pictures/Twilight Productions.

The Wizard of Oz (1939). Dir. Victor Fleming. U.S.A.: MGM.

The X-Files (1998). Dir. Rob Bowman. U.S.A.: Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation/Ten Thirteen Productions.

Web Series

Battlestar Galactica: The Resistance (2006). U.S.A./Canada: Universal Cable Productions.

Battlestar Galactica: The Face of the Enemy (2008). U.S.A./Canada: Universal Cable
      Productions.

Battlestar Galactica: Blood & Chrome (2012). U.S.A.: David Eick Productions.