Echoes of Frankenstein: Shelley's Masterpiece in Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse* and Our Relationship with Technology

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[1] In Cultural Criticism theory, media content is studied in relation to other works and within relevant social contexts (Murfin, 2000). Since the Industrial Revolution set the stage for Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* in 1818, the elements of that story have been used to address the relationship between society and technology in many forms. Indeed, representations of and references to the novel and its characters have become the most prominent symbols of concern over the dangers inherent in today's technological advances (Hammond, 2004). The tale embodies a core cultural fear that the technology society creates will be its undoing—the fear of a seemingly inevitable time when "the maker is then threatened by the made, and the original roles of master and slave are in doubt" (Rushing & Frentz, 1989, p. 62). Shelley's *Frankenstein* exposes these fears in the context of a very old story. A human constructing a body and creating life was familiar both to the ancient Greeks in the myth of Pygmalion and to Renaissance Jews in the legend of the Golem (Shanken, 2005). In the midst of today's Digital Revolution, the so-called Frankenstein myth has enjoyed popularity in the mass media, predominantly in the form of the science fiction television series. This article will explore evidence that Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse*, appearing in 2009 on the Fox network, is both a direct re-imagining of Shelley's classic work and a postmodern and posthuman commentary on the

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current status of an early twenty-first century society's relationship with the advance of technological progress.

[2] Research on this topic is beneficial because, as Severin and Tankard (2001) point out, "Fictions and symbols, aside from their value to the existing social order, are important to human communication" (p. 325). The cultivation theory of mass media suggests that people's perceptions, attitudes, and values are affected by television (Severin & Tankard, 2001); this theory would explain how technology acceptance levels and fears are gleaned from science fiction mass media as Jones and McMahon suspected in their 2003 study. This analysis, in contrast, aims to show that the proliferous employment of the Frankenstein myth in contemporary television is primarily a reflection or, perhaps more accurately, a refraction of society's dependence on and fear of recent advancements in technology, rather than their root. Certain of these advancements have sparked controversy in recent years, conjuring questions of "acceptable science, and how far humans should be allowed to go in engineering their own race" (Jones & McMahon, 2003, p. 68). However, dependence on new digital media has also recently been criticized, as discussed in Kakutani's 2010 article in *The New York Times*. It would be negligent to refrain from applying the Frankenstein myth to those concerns as well. As Marcus noted in his 2002 article, "the monster is the body electric, not as sung by Walt Whitman, but as enacted by those who put themselves in thrall to the Web—for whom the electronic network figures as the extended body of humanity" (pp. 189-190).

[3] The potential effects of these biological and digital advancements lead a culture to face its fear or acceptance (or combination of the two) of the posthuman. Posthuman theory represents a large collection of concepts (much like Humanism or Postmodernism before it) addressing the concurrent evolution of humans and the tools they use. One relevant focus of posthuman research is the application of technoscience and its effects on both

society and the individual. The rocky relationship in which a society fears its technology becoming more powerful than anticipated while remaining essential to daily life has been explored in previous film and television research. Rushing and Frentz studied *Rocky IV, Blade Runner*, and *The Terminator* as representations of the Frankenstein myth in their 1989 work, stating, "virtually from the beginning, we humans have carried on a love-hate relationship with the tools we have made" (p.61). In a 2005 article, Milner examined *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *The X-Files* in this light, citing specific episodes that play on the Frankenstein narrative in particular. Milner suggested that ideas take precedence over effects in television simply because ideas work better on a television budget than the flashy special effects employed in blockbuster films (p.105). The importance placed on the idea, as well as the serial format, makes television an excellent medium for exploring the most intricate elements of a narrative and the viewer's acceptance of or aversion to that narrative.

[4] Widely considered the first science fiction novel, Mary Shelley's 1818 masterpiece questioned the convention of the solitary, intellectual Romantic protagonist and served as a strong response to the beginning of the Industrial Revolution (Rose, 2002; she examines applications of the Frankenstein myth to Whedon's earlier work *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*). Victor Frankenstein is selfishly, even childishly, obsessed with his work. He separates himself from society in order to create life. Horrified by his creation, Victor flees the scene and then becomes ill. After his creator abandons him, the creature learns about himself and his relation to the world through the close observation of a family. He first learns of rejection when he attempts to communicate with this family. The creature becomes aware of the fact that he is alone—set apart from humanity. In fact, he exists in contrast to humanity. He explains this to Victor in a confrontation in the mountains, where Victor has gone to find solace for his guilt. The creature convinces

Victor to make a female version of himself to ease his loneliness—his otherness. Victor agrees and begins work on a second creature but, when he realizes the possible consequences of this work, he destroys his creation. Not only does the creature murder Victor's younger brother William, his friend Henry, and his bride Elizabeth out of revenge, but the fallout from Victor's experiment extends to the girl accused of, and executed for, killing William and to Victor's own father, who dies grieving for Elizabeth. Determined to (finally) take responsibility for his actions, Victor chases his creature into the Arctic, where he meets ship's captain Robert Walton. After telling his tale, he dies. The creature grieves him and treks north to die himself.

[5] As Romanticism gives way to Modernism, Modernism to Postmodernism, and Postmodernism to Posthumanism, Shelley's readers identify less with Victor and more with his creature. The creature actually becomes the solitary Romantic hero, set apart from society and wrestling to achieve his own individuation. *Dollhouse* retells *Frankenstein* with a posthuman protagonist as its focus. This hero, Echo, begins as a creation of the Dollhouse and of its lead programmer, Topher Brink. Throughout the series, however, Echo establishes control of her identity by remembering her imprints—coded consciousnesses that are uploaded to her physical form at the request of the Dollhouse's clients.

Method

Narrative Analysis

[6] The twenty-six episodes of *Dollhouse* provided a sample for analysis of narrative structure, intertextual elements, and posthuman commentary as they relate to both Shelley's *Frankenstein* narrative and the resultant Frankenstein myth.

Results

[7] The posthuman themes in *Dollhouse* are readily apparent. In

his examination of the monster as metaphor in 2003, Botting writes, "Emptying body and nature as substance, leaves informational organization free to re-form and relocate identity and significance at an abstracted and decontextualized level" (p. 358). This is the purpose of the Dollhouse. The basic premise lies in the advanced technology that is utilized to construct the "perfect" person for any situation, requested by the Dollhouse's very rich and well-connected clientele, "to simulate an experience in a way that is indistinguishable from reality" (Severin & Tankard, 2001, p. 368 on virtual reality). Severin and Tankard (2001) have an optimistic outlook of virtual reality: "a sophisticated virtual reality system could be the ultimate in communication—a form in which we would share the very experience of others" (p. 369). These constructs are, in fact, a kind of psychological Frankenstein's creature—a consciousness made up of parts of many others. When such a construct is requested, or more accurately, rented, the montage consciousness is inserted into one of the Dollhouse's residents, called Actives. When they are not called to an active engagement, the inhabitants wander the spa-like setting in a semi-aware and innocent state and are referred to as Dolls. This state is described as "childlike," and indeed many of the attributes of children's learning abilities and memory discussed in Perse's 2001 text are evident in these Dolls. Through the arc of the series, the protagonist, Echo, evolves from her Doll state and constructs her own posthuman identity by retaining the memories of the various personas of her imprints. This is in contrast to another posthuman archetype represented by her foil, Alpha, who suffered a "composite event" and was driven mad by his multiple personalities fighting for dominance.

Team Frankenstein and Team Creature

[8] While the protagonist of the series is decidedly posthuman, the character structure is still very much rooted in a postmodern context. As such, Shelley's archetypes are represented by groups of

Dollhouse characters rather than single entities. These characters can be recognizably divided into Team Frankenstein and Team Creature. (Ironically, and perhaps confusingly, the character Victor is squarely positioned on Team Creature.)

[9] Characters representing Frankenstein include the associates of the Dollhouse and its parent company, the Rossum Corporation. Topher Brink is the most prominent representative of Victor Frankenstein. He is the lead programmer for the Los Angeles branch of the Dollhouse and shares several of Victor's own traits. Bennett Halverson is Topher's counterpart in the Washington, D.C. Dollhouse in season two. Adelle DeWitt is the administrator of the L.A. Dollhouse. Well-intentioned but misled by Rossum, she stands in opposition to Echo and her talents. She also acts as a mother figure to the actives corresponding to Frankenstein's role as father to his creature (cf. Nadkarni). Boyd Langton is first Echo's handler, later head of Dollhouse security, and is finally revealed to be one of the founders of the Rossum Corporation. A behind-the-scenes mastermind, he is the most poignant father figure to Echo. He is also a representative of the dangers of applied technoscience in the wrong hands.

[10] Team Creature is represented first and foremost by the protagonist, Echo. Formerly Caroline Farrell, Echo resigned her original personality in part in order to save her friend (Bennett Halverson). Becoming a Dollhouse Active, she gradually begins to retain memories from her imprints that allow her to piece together her own identity. Frankenstein's creature, made up of parts of other people (just like Echo), found his identity through his relation to others. Where the creature fails to connect, however, Echo ultimately succeeds, highlighting "the impact of love and acceptance on the formation of character" that Shelley's novel addressed (Rose, 2002).

[11] Also representing the creature are all the Actives in the Dollhouse, including Echo's friends Sierra and Victor, as well as

November, an Active the Dollhouse uses to foil FBI agent Paul Ballard's attempts to uncover the operation. Alpha is the other side of Echo's coin. Corresponding to the darker impulses of the creature, Alpha—Topher's experimental creation gone wrong—engages in a killing spree and demands the power to create life himself, to have a partner. Whiskey is an Active who is imprinted to take the place of the house's doctor after he is killed by Alpha. While she appears to serve Team Frankenstein, she of course is one of its creations. She eventually learns this and wrestles with the same identity questions that the creature and Echo face.

[12] The three *Dollhouse* characters that most markedly represent Shelley's novel (our team captains and co-captains) are Topher Brink, Alpha, and Echo. Therefore, it is important to analyze these three characters more explicitly.

Topher Brink

[13] The technology that allows the Dollhouse to exist is facilitated and developed by house programmer Topher Brink, who serves as the primary counterpart to Shelley's Victor Frankenstein. Topher shares Victor Frankenstein's god complex, his passion for science, and his separation from society, so much so that he sleeps in the server room. His personality is nicely summed up by Vargish's (2009) estimation of Victor Frankenstein: "it reveals a childish, narcissistic self-preoccupation in which all events and all animate beings become relevant only as they contribute to the gratification of the perceiving ego" (p. 331). In the course of the series, he, like Frankenstein, "enters forbidden territory to steal knowledge from the gods, participates in overthrowing the old order, becomes a master of technics, and is punished for his transgression" (Rushing & Frentz, 1989, p. 62).

[14] He seems, for the most part, oblivious to the consequences of his actions until, eventually, he is driven mad by them, realizing as Frankenstein did, "I had been the author of unalterable evils" (Shelley, 2000, p. 87). This is an important theme of both Shelley's

novel and *Dollhouse*. As Caroline (the original personality of Echo) protests in the opening scene of episode one, "I know, I know. Actions have consequences." Adelle Dewitt, the administrator of the Dollhouse replies, "What if they didn't?" In this scene, she is referring to the Doll's ability to achieve a "clean slate" whenever they return from an engagement. In the context of the series, however, this statement questions Topher's avoidance of consequences that leads to his psychotic break. Shelley's Frankenstein, like Topher, runs from the consequences of his actions and the result is a physical break—the direct or indirect murders of everyone with whom he is engaged in a relationship.

[15] More often than not, Topher seems adolescent, even infantile, with his video games, juice boxes, and office full of toys. He is the child to Echo's posthuman evolutionary adult. He is also, as Hammond (2004) refers to Frankenstein, "an arrogant and egocentric scientist—reveling in his own powers and achievements" (p. 189). Adelle tells Topher, "You were chosen because you have no morals. You have always thought of people as playthings" ("The Public Eye" 2.5). But as his arc wanes, he realizes the extent of his hubris: "I did all this. I'm the one who brings about the thought-pocalypse. I invented it, which means I have to destroy it" ("The Hollow Men" 2.12). The last picture of Topher in the series is after he is driven mad by his guilt. He asks, "The seat of consciousness. I made it the seat of destruction. How many people do you think can sit on it before it breaks?" ("Epitaph Two" 2.13). In his final act of redemption, he sacrifices his own life in an attempt to right the wrongs his technology has done to society, just as Shelley's Frankenstein died trying to destroy the creature he unleashed on the world.

Alpha

[16] The Frankenstein narrative is most directly manifest in the story of Alpha. He is often referred to in the past tense (just as Frankenstein relates his story to Walton), making his first real

appearance in episode eleven of the first season. One of the house's most requested actives and a special project of Topher's, over a period of time Alpha became self-aware, and then a murderous genius.

[17] Alpha yearns for the ability to recreate life in his own image that Frankenstein's creature was denied, and sees that opportunity in Echo. Through a sequence of flashbacks, the viewer learns of Alpha's escape from the Dollhouse, as he mutilated and killed other Dolls in an attempt to elevate Echo.

[18] In the guise of Steven Kepler, the engineer responsible for the L.A. Dollhouse's sustainable systems, Alpha takes the opportunity to comment on many of *Dollhouse*'s tech themes. When Ballard first finds him and asks him "Steven Kepler, is that you?" he responds, "Wow, there's a lot of aspects to that question" ("Briar Rose" 1.11). "Kepler" asks Ballard, "Just because we can move forward, we must?" According to Vargish (2009), "while technology is about what we can do it also always leads to questions of what we will agree to do and not to do" (p. 325). Vargish (2009) refers to the Frankenstein myth as our version of the fall of man, the exile from the Garden of Eden. In his view, humanity equates its sense of identity, of being chosen and special, with the power and freedom its technology provides. Alpha refers to the Dollhouse as "the new Eden" and "the future" and, in conversation with Ballard, "The machine feeds them what they need. Machine takes away what it needs. We're all just cells in a body." Ballard: "Just cells in a body? That's the future? We're all functional? Interchangeable?" Alpha responds, "We already are, man!" (1.11).

[19] In episode twelve, "Omega," Alpha both poignantly attacks and disfigures the Doll named Victor and attempts to create his own *bride* when he imprints Echo with a combination of all of her imprints. His goal is to have a companion to share in—not the inferiority felt by Shelley's monster—but the superiority of the digital age posthuman. This imprinting of Echo is also important

because, in a sense, Alpha now has the ability to reproduce, to create more like himself. Boyd notes this by comparing imprinting to childbirth in the same episode.

[20] Alpha arranges a ritual to commemorate what he anticipates is Echo's ascension to posthumanism, saying, "From the moment man first clawed his way out of the primordial ooze and kicked off his fins he's understood that the gods require blood" (1.12). He abducts a shopkeeper and imprints her with the psyche of Caroline—Echo's original personality—in order for Echo to kill her and subvert the master-slave relationship. He refers to Caroline as "this whining pathetic creature" and "this self-hating human" distinguishing himself—and Echo—as supremely posthuman (this scene is rife with terms like "superior creature," "ascended being," and "evolve"). Alpha is the posthuman technology set out to destroy and supplant its creator. Unexpectedly, however, as the eros to Alpha's thanatos, Echo is compassionate toward Caroline and refuses to kill her. She is the technology that supports humanity even as she becomes indistinguishable from it. Echo astutely recognizes this later in the series, stating, "I'm like him. But not" ("A Love Supreme" 2.8). She asserts that she and Alpha are not gods. Alpha: "Fine! Ubermensch. Nietzsche predicted our rise. Perfected. Objective. Something new."

[21] Putting his words into social context, Echo responds "Right. New, superior people—with a little German thrown in. What could possibly go wrong?" (1.12).

Echo

[22] Most of the residents of the Dollhouse, as they are meant to, submit willingly to the master-slave relationship as did Pygmalion's Galatea. In 2005, Shanken described the shift from this submission to Eliza Doolittle's demand for equality in George Bernard Shaw's version of the myth. Interestingly, Echo not only demands to be equal, she demands to be better. In the episode "Stop-Loss," she informs Adelle DeWitt that she is "smarter, tougher, and

a whole lot scarier than you'll ever be" (2.9). As the reader's sympathy for Frankenstein's monster increases with the shift from modern to postmodern criticism (Zakharieva, 2000), the viewer's ability to identify with Echo is illustrative of the shift from the postmodern to the posthuman.

[23] Security chief Lawrence Dominic represents the technophobe to Echo's tech with lines such as: "She's a risk. An increasing risk...we can't control her" ("Stage Fright" 1.3) and "They shouldn't be adaptable. They should be predictable" ("True Believer" 1.5). But, as Cabrera (2009) points out, "the potential unleashed by technology hinders the possibility of predicting its outcomes" (p. 112). Perhaps the most prescient of the Dollhouse staff, Dominic warns Echo, "one day you'll be erasing them. Even after all this, they won't see it coming" ("A Spy in the House of Love" 1.9). Yet "the double status of monsters remains both necessity and threat" (Botting, 2003, p. 346). As a representative of technology, Echo is not what they expected, but she is their only hope. Dominic's fears are realized as Echo begins to build her own self-schema from the memories she retains.

[24] In "Vows," Ballard refers to Echo as Frankenstein referred to his creation—as a "demon" (2.1). When informed that Echo can now control when and where a particular imprint dominates her mind, Topher asks, "What does that make her? What is she?" ("A Love Supreme" 2.8). Vargish (2009) asks, "at what point the tool assumes an identity separate from its creator or owner . . . at what point does the creature have the right to assert independence?" (p. 327). Echo not only establishes independence from her creators, but also from Caroline, the "owner" of the body she inhabits, though they pointedly share several traits. In the original work, "Shelley uses the character of the 'being' to explore social injustice and irresponsible, unaccountable science" (Hammond, 2004, p. 188). This is true of both Caroline and Echo. Both characters share an intense altruism—refusing to leave their fellow fighters behind. Both

characters make it a goal of theirs to take down the irresponsible, unaccountable Rossum Corporation. In different ways, both succeed. Here, Echo represents not only the creature, but Shelley herself. She is determined to uncover the dangers inherent in the corrupt pursuit of technology and its nefarious applications, just as Shelley sought to uncover the doubts and fears associated with industrialization.

Frankenstein Narrative Parallels

[25] In the first episode of season two, "Vows," a scene from the film *Bride of Frankenstein* flashes on Topher's readout screen. In addition to Topher, Adelle, and Alpha and their links to the novel, *Dollhouse* makes reference to the novel many times both in concept and in episodic form. Zakharieva (2000) notes: "Mary Shelley introduces two innovations to the traditional narratives of creation: first, the scientific method, and second, the idea of a composite body" (p. 418). Perhaps most significantly, the Actives are composite psyches, created in a similar electric process. Like Frankenstein's creature, Dolls "unit[e] separate parts that attain life through the use of electrical energy" (Cabrera, 2009, p. 115).

[26] In another parallel to the novel, Topher is forced to dismember the body of a man one of his creations has murdered, replicating the scene in which Frankenstein "tore to pieces the thing on which [he] was engaged" (p. 145) when he imagined the consequence of creating a second monster. Commenting on both Topher and Frankenstein's actions in this scene, Boyd says, "You had a moral dilemma. Your first. And it didn't go well" ("Gray Hour" 1.4).

[27] There are two *Dollhouse* versions of Dr. Frankenstein's confrontation with the monster on Monte Blanc. One occurs in episode eight, "Needs," in which Echo gains pieces of awareness and confronts Topher, who denies responsibility by claiming "Look, I'm just the science guy," to which Echo observantly replies, "up here . . . looking down on everyone. Playing God" (1.8). And

another happens when Adelle fences opposite Roger—an imprint she secretly uses to fulfill her own desires ("A Spy in the House of Love" 1.9). The lines between love and revenge seem to blur when this friendly match quickly becomes more dangerous. The act of fencing itself represents the stand-off between creator and creation, Victor and his creation. These are both representations of the scene from the novel as well as symbols of society's confusing parry and riposte with technology. In Adelle's fantasy conversation with Roger, she asserts, "we'd never own clocks or computers." She understands that this broad swath of technological advance has negative consequences that must be dealt with.

[28] Shelley's 1818 masterpiece employs an interesting narrative device. As ship's captain Robert Walton writes letters to his sister, he relates the story told to him by a strange man he happened upon while stuck in the Arctic ice. The reader hears Frankenstein's story as told to Walton through his letters to his sister. The creature's story is told to Frankenstein and then relayed to Walton. This use of frame story is an illustration of reflexivity (a concept central to Posthuman theory), which is also seen on many levels in the Dollhouse. Stories are constructed from imprints, through Dolls, who are, on some level, also individuals. For example, Caroline, Echo the Doll, all of Echo's imprints, and Echo the individuated posthuman are all iterations of the same person, like a nesting Doll. Another example of this reflexivity occurs in the episode "Briar Rose." Viewers are introduced to Alpha in the present, played by Alan Tudyk. Actually, they are introduced to a Doctor Steven Kepler, played by Alpha. In an effort to break back into the Dollhouse, he poses as the paranoid environmental enthusiast architect of its sustainable life systems and tricks FBI agent Ballard into dragging him along on his quest to infiltrate the building. Introducing another level of reflexivity, during this intrusion, Kepler (Alpha) poses as a Doll.

Frankenstein Myth

[29] Because Shelley's novel was published at a turbulent time for society's acceptance of technology, scholars have often applied a moral of the negative consequences of "the hubris inherent in the artificial creation of life by humans. We may be able to make it, but can we control it? Or might it end up controlling us instead?" (Shanken, 2005, p. 49). In her 2002 essay on the Frankenstein myth in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Anita Rose argues that these questions may be even more relevant today than in Shelley's own time. Modern questions on technology paved the way for the Frankenstein myth, wherein the agents of technological advance often wake to find that they have created a monster. Bouriana Zakharieva (2000) sums it up nicely in her essay on Kenneth Branagh's 1994 film version of the novel:

> The glorification of the natural is in its essence a fear for the lost soul of man. This fear is the counterpart of the twentieth-century concern with progressive dehumanization (of society and art). Yet, Mary Shelley succeeds in showing monstrosity not only in its metaphysical aspect, as abiding in the "mechanical," but also as resulting from the evils of the social realm (p. 423).

[30] In the mythology of *Dollhouse*, the agents of technological progress are represented by the Rossum Corporation, which exemplifies the picture of experimental science painted by Shelley: "shrouded . . . in suspicion and clouded objectivity and experimentation with baser motives like desire, ambition and selfish short-sighted immorality" (Botting, 2003, p. 342). They are driven, not by epistemophilia, but by power and profit.

[31] An employee of Rossum, DeWitt was recruited after heading a division that grew replacement organs from stem-cells (1.9). She herself describes the company as "a clandestine organization with little government oversight" (1.9). A very real fear related by the Frankenstein myth in contemporary society is that of technology falling into the wrong hands. This seems to be a

legitimate concern, as today's science thrives in a corporate environment, harboring proprietary secrets and without regard for the wellbeing of the public or democratic processes (Hammond, 2004).

[32] Opposed to Science, Society is represented by FBI agent Paul Ballard in his own cautionary tale. He is at first driven by his own epistemophilia—he must discover the truth behind the rumors of the Dollhouse. As he fights the acceptance of the tech (illustrated by a fight sequence with Echo), however, his life is destroyed. He then comes to terms with the existence of the Dollhouse (or the use of technology) and eventually becomes Echo's handler. Completing the transformation, he is ultimately imprinted with active architecture in an attempt to save his life, becoming the technology he protested.

[33] The events of "Epitaph One" and "Epitaph Two" (the final episodes of season one and two, respectively) are supremely important in relation to the Frankenstein myth. These episodes paint a post-apocalyptic, dystopian picture of a future (2019 and 2020) in which Rossum's tech has been weaponized and a signal can be sent through almost any technological medium to "wipe" a person's psyche. The population has been reduced to "Butchers," "Dumbshows," and very few "Actuals" who have survived by a simple mantra: "No tech ever, right? That's our theme song?" intoned by Zone, one of these Actuals who has managed to retain his original personality ("Epitaph One" 1.13).[1]

[34] One of the interviewees in the "Man on the Street" episode predicts the calamity portrayed in the *Epitaph* episodes: "If that technology exists it will be used, it will be abused, it will be global. And we will be over as a species" (1.6). Apart from the fictions of *Dollhouse*, Cabrera (2009) also predicts that, in the dystopian future, "technological artifacts constantly become man's mirror: a mirror reflecting a crazy and out-of-control omnipotence" (p. 112). Topher relates how the loss of control took the form of a

robocall to a city that sent an imprint signal: "And then the war has two sides: those who answered the phone, and those who didn't" (1.13).

[35] The Dollhouse, like technology, professes to give people what they "need." In the series, this reiteration is used to paint Team Frankenstein as, on some level, well-intentioned, but according to Cabrera (2009), "the very definition of 'needs' is already an answer to the human capacity to grow" (p. 110). "Giving people what they need" is a sure path to scientific advancement, but not necessarily a benevolent path. In fact, the uses and gratifications theory of communication turns on this idea of "needs" (Severin & Tankard, 2001) and can be applied to any imprinted Active.

Discussion

[36] As new technology is able to "assume hitherto unprecedented powers of intervention, transformation and creation" (Botting, 2003, p. 348), both *Frankenstein* and *Dollhouse* are brilliantly adept at exploring society's complicated relationship to the tools it creates. In Hammond's terms, "this human-machine nature-culture hybrid image symbolizes our inextricable entanglement with our own creations" (2004, p. 193). Hammond (2004) also notes that members of society are urged to decide where they stand between acceptance and rejection of these new technologies "rather than to see uncertainty in the mixture of possibility and limitation, liberation and exploitation" (p. 194). Echo tells Adelle, "You can be on my side or you can be on Rossum's, but the time for playing both is over" (2.9). However, Hammond's assessment that "Frankenstein can more usefully be read as a tale of uncertainty and ambiguity in relation to science and technological creation" seems accurate (2004, p. 194). And the same is true for *Dollhouse*: "Fear is the other side of the coin of progressive optimism" (Cabrera, 2009, p. 108). These are the technologies society depends on for surviving the future. They are

not inherently evil, but they possess a potential for unthinkable destruction, or unthinkable evolution. Vargish (2009) posits, "It is the potential for conflict between the technology and [our] values that gives rise to the fear of usurpation, the fear of technology's influence on our freedom and autonomy" (p. 324).

[37] A culture's uses of technology are inextricable from its fears of it. It is part of its social identity. As Cabrera (2009) writes, "technologies constitute the centre of an interpretation of the human condition in a society that dreams, defines, and calls itself a society of 'knowledge' and 'information'" (p. 110). In the digital realm, "information has become the new terrain of living, of creation and of technological innovation and, of course, the locus of a new species of monsters" (Botting, 2003, p. 342). It would be beneficial to research the effects of digital media on identity and individualism. It is important to recognize what kind of monsters humanity is becoming.

[38] In the meantime, the Frankenstein myth populates popular culture. Botting (2003) argues that these fictions shape perceptions of and reactions to experimental science, which would agree with both cultivation theory and the suggestions of Jones and McMahon in their 2003 study. However, from a cultural criticism standpoint, it is important to remember that these fictions themselves are reactions to the events of scientific progress. In this chicken and egg scenario, researchers must not forget that art mirrors life as much as, or even more than, life reflects art. This media content, these narratives, are not handed down from an outsider looking in but are valid expressions of society's worldview. As prophesied in episode four of the first season, "That's what art's for: To show us who we are" ("Gray Hour" 1.4).

[39] Will these fears be realized? Are the present and the posthuman one and the same and what does that mean for society? In a shift from Shelley's industrial age to the digital era, Rossum exploits a "period in which consumption, simulation and

hyperreality predominate" (Botting, 2003, p. 349). We seem to be nearing a time when "technology would finally be able to 'un-programme' the 'flaws' of the human body and, above all, to 'programme' a new being" (Cabrera, 2009, p. 118). As early at 1998, there was a fear that use of the internet would lead to social isolation (Perse, 2001). Is the digital age laying down Active architecture for its society? Already, online gaming allows users to take on different appearances and identities (Severin & Tankard, 2001). With internet access and a subscription fee, a player can be anyone—as far as fellow gamers are concerned. Severin & Tankard (2001) cite examples of online users not being able to distinguish non-player (programmed) characters from those controlled by a human. When the people of a culture are no longer able to distinguish technology from humanity, they are all monsters. They are all Echoes: "We're not new. We're not anything. We're not anybody because we're everybody" ("Omega" 1.12).

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[1] One of the Actuals is played by guest star Felicia Day, who is an appropriate choice for this commentary as she is a prominent figure in the world of digital media. She has written, produced, and starred in multiple successful web series and frequents social media outlets. She recently released her autobiography (with a foreword by Joss Whedon) entitled *You're Never Weird on the Internet (Almost): A Memoir*.