

The New Eden: Deconstructing the Los Angeles Dollhouse

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STEPHEN KEPLER: They told me this was gonna be the new Eden.

PAUL BALLARD: Eden wasn't a prison.

STEPHEN KEPLER: What, are you kidding? The apples were monitored!

-“Briar Rose” (DH1011)

[1] In “Man on the Street” (DH1006), a reporter refers to the Dollhouse as “A Bigfoot for the Big City,” equating it with a legend most are familiar with. This statement immediately situates the Dollhouse not as a physical space but a metaphorical space, one of fiction rather than one of reality. It exists not in the external world, but in the internal worlds of the reporter and the people he interviews. When the segment proceeds to the man on the street interviews, inevitably, the people interviewed focus on what the Dollhouse does — if it is a good thing, a bad thing, or the end of society as we know it. None of them talk about what they think the Dollhouse looks like or where they think it might be. Physical space is not on these people’s minds, which is ironic, considering the series itself is so grounded in it. As David Kociemba writes in “Welcome to the Dollhouse: Reading Its Opening Title Sequence,” “Physical space grounds the series — a necessary task given the lack of character continuity due to its premise of unmoored psyches” (7). With characters taking on completely new personalities in every episode, the physical space takes on a far more important role. It is also the first of Joss Whedon’s productions to take place largely in a location that is not considered home by its characters. In *Buffy* the library is home, in *Firefly* Serenity is (Sayer). The Dollhouse, however, is no home and the people who try to make

it one or are forced to make it one meet unfortunate ends. This is the beginning of a dramatic shift in location for Whedon's works. After the fairly dark and morally ambiguous Dollhouse, he moves onto even more threatening places like the hellish cabin in *Cabin in the Woods* and the Helicarrier in *The Avengers*, waiting three years before finally (and literally) returning home in *Much Ado About Nothing*.

[2] Referring to the Los Angeles Dollhouse as *the Dollhouse* makes it sound like one singular place, but it is not. In fact, no place can be a singular space at all. In her essay "This Was Our World and They Made It Theirs: Reading Space and Place in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*," Karen Sayer writes, "Places are multiple, contingent and plural ... 'place' is not simply a location or a territory, but it is a phenomenon that 'is inseparable from the consciousness of the people who occupy it'" (134). Indeed, in the Dollhouse the emotional and psychological implications of a space have more of a bearing on the conceptualization of it than the physical space. Consequently, since the emotional and psychological implications come directly from people, place is actually about people and the way they interact with the space and the way those interactions overlap. For instance, the Dollhouse is Rossum's Dollhouse. Yet, it is also Adelle DeWitt's Dollhouse, Echo's Dollhouse, Topher's Dollhouse. The Dollhouse is a combination of all these and many others as well. To further complicate matters, place is not fixed. It can and will evolve alongside the characters, paralleling the characters' growth and development. For instance, the "golden-era" Dollhouse of the present day in the series transforms into the post-apocalyptic shell of the Dollhouse that greets the viewer in the Epitaphs. Yet neither one of these Dollhouses is more valid or true than the other. It is only when all of these Dollhouses are taken together that we get a better idea of the Dollhouse as a whole space.

[3] The Dollhouse is a place where dreams come true. As Echo tells Paul in “Man on the Street” (DH1006), “The Dollhouse deals in fantasy.” This is especially true in two locations within the house: the Costuming Area and the Attic. The Costuming Area is never seen and the lobby of it is only seen once in “Belle Chose” (DH2003) as Paul takes Echo there to be outfitted for her latest mission. Yet, this place is integral to the Dollhouse, working its magic behind the scenes. The actives enter in their casual active clothing, in Echo’s case a strappy, revealing tank top and yoga pants, and exit looking exactly like their imprint would. The imprint room may make the fantasy possible, but the costuming area makes it believable.

[4] The Attic, however, is a place of nightmares, a place the viewer often hears used as a threat, but never has fully described to him or her. The closest the viewer gets to a description comes from Topher, who calls it, “A mental suck. You know that feeling you get when a name is on the tip of your tongue, but you can’t say it? It’s like that but with every thought you ever have” (“A Spy in the House of Love” DH1009). Even Adelle, the head of the house, can only speak about it in hypotheticals. When she prepares to send Echo to the Attic in “Stop-Loss” (DH2009), she tells her, “They say it’s whatever hell you imagine.” Even then, these brief descriptions refer only to the mental and psychological effects it has on an individual, not what it actually looks like. It is an imagined space long before it is a physical one. Still, the threat of being sent to the Attic looms over everyone in the Dollhouse. It is certainly not a place that anyone wants to be sent. When Laurence Dominic is discovered to be the spy leaking Dollhouse secrets to the outside world, Adelle orders him to the Attic. As he is taken to the chair to have his personality wiped in preparation for his stay there, he struggles, fighting the handlers who attempt to hold him down. Dominic manages to grab one of the handlers’ guns and points it to his head in an attempt to end his own life, preferring death to the unspeakable and imagined

horrors of the Attic. In the end, he is subdued, his personality wiped and his body sent there anyway.

[5] When the Attic is finally seen near the end of Season 2, it is almost a letdown, the physical space unable to compete with the imagined space of it. It looks very much like a stripped down intensive care unit. Prisoners are kept one to a room, strapped into a fluid-filled bed and covered with what appears to be Saran wrap. Needles pierce their foreheads, collecting blood, while a tube down their throats breathes for them. A few flatscreen monitors measure their fluid temperature, heart rate, and pulse. Other than that, the rooms are empty. There are no weapons or torture instruments or anything that seems to suggest that the people kept there are mistreated. The viewer later learns that the torture of the Attic is not physical but mental, the prisoners forced to relive their worst nightmare over and over again. It wreaks the worst kind of trauma — the kind that cannot be seen. The Attic is a nightmare not because of what it actually looks like, but because of what the characters imagine it to be, both in the Dollhouse as they imagine it as the last place they want to be sent and in the Attic itself as they live through their worst imaginings. In both the Costuming Area and the Attic, the fantasy of the place is far more important than the reality of it.

[6] The central area of the Dollhouse is a place of relaxation and recharging. All of this relaxation occurs mostly in the main area of the house, which is a large, open space. There is a lot of wood flooring and walls and glass. Tall potted plants are sprinkled throughout the area. It is also well lit from multiple sources. There are small circular lights in the ceiling and lots of Asian-inspired lamps and lighting fixtures. In the center of the main area there is a wooden structure constructed over a koi pond where we often see the actives doing yoga. There are always a lot of people walking around this area, actives and staff alike. The people in this area

often look relaxed, either participating in calming activities like yoga, arts and crafts, or mealtime or having just coming from calming activities. Yet, there is no privacy in this area. It is exposed and open, allowing the actives to be watched by multiple people from multiple angles. Handlers peer down at them from the walkways far above their heads. Topher and Dr. Saunders watch the dolls from their respective offices. The other Dollhouse staff members are often stationed nearby, keeping an eye on the dolls. No one can ever be alone in this portion of the house.

[7] In rare cases, the Dollhouse is a place of solitude. The sleeping pods offer the actives a place to be on their own and by themselves, a rarity in a place where they are constantly monitored by staff and cameras alike. There are five sleeping pods per room all arranged around a central point, fanning out like a star or pinwheel. Each active gets one pod. When it is time for them to go to sleep, they get in the pod and a pane of frosted glass covers them, creating a womb-like environment (Lo). These pods are a sanctuary most of the time, particularly for Echo. It is where she hides her books and scratches on the glass when she is first starting to develop beyond the docile doll state. As she slowly evolves and becomes more self-aware, it becomes one of the few places where she can truly be herself — be Echo the person rather than Echo the doll. It is where she goes at the very end of the series once the Apocalypse has ended and she can finally rest. She is not the only one to find comfort here. Permanently traumatized Topher makes a nest in one of the sleeping pods during the Apocalypse. His books and candles fill the pod itself and the area around it. He writes on the sides of the pod in chalk. It is almost a shrine to the person he used to be (St. Louis). This is where he comes up with the final solution to ending the apocalypse. This is where he is closest to being his old self.

[8] While it is never explained why he becomes so attached to the pods, there are a few possibilities. He harbors great guilt over his role in bringing about the Apocalypse, so returning to his lab, office, or even the lonely mattress behind the wall that acted as his bedroom would be out of the question for him. He would not be able to bear to return to any of those places because it is where he developed and perfected a lot of the technologies that made the Apocalypse possible. Logistically, the other Dollhouse staff must have had somewhere to sleep in the House, but we are never shown any of those places, so that leaves the pods as the only other visible place to sleep. This is not really about finding a place to sleep, though, because honestly it does not look like Apocalypse Topher gets a lot of sleep. It is more likely that the pods appeal to Topher because they are so closely associated with the dolls, who he would probably strongly identify with after everything Rossum and the Apocalypse put him through. Much like the dolls he once imprinted day in and day out, Topher no longer appears to be in control of himself. He has been used as someone else's puppet for far too long. Perhaps he returns to the pods because they succeeded in bringing the dolls peace; perhaps he thought they would do the same for him. The only time we see the pods as anything but a sanctuary is when Echo, Sierra, Victor, November, and another active wake up with their original personalities intact ("Needs" DH1008). To them, the pods are a prison, not a sanctuary.

[9] The Dollhouse is a hidden place. The majority of it is underground, unable to be seen or entered. Adelle's office is the only part of it that is above ground (Lo). Paul Ballard gets around this by persuading who he thinks is the architect of the Dollhouse to come with him and show him how to get into the building. In reality, he is leading Alpha, the infamous active that went rogue and escaped the house, straight into the building to wreak havoc — murderous, murderous havoc. Once they make it into the building, Paul cannot help but stop and stare,

saying, “It’s real” (DH1011). This turns the Dollhouse from an imagined space into a real one for him. This same situation, however, has different effects on the other characters. For Alpha, it allows him re-entry into a space that he once terrorized. For Adelle and the others, it is a terrifying breach of security. It is even more terrifying than Alpha’s original breakout years prior because that was an anomaly, an unexpected turn of events, a first for the Dollhouse. This is not a breakout, this is a break in. This is something they should have prepared for, should have safeguarded against. This is something they should have expected. Yet, none of them saw this coming. This is the Dollhouse made a little less safe than it was before.

[10] While the Dollhouse itself is a hidden place, it is also made of hidden places. Even in a place filled with security cameras, a place carefully monitored at all times, hidden places can and do exist. There is a hallway the actives use regularly. It seems like its sole purpose is to allow the actives to move from one part of the house to the other. Consequently, nothing looks particularly striking about this hallway. It has cherry wood walls, a few perpetually unused benches, and a smattering of Asian-inspired lighting fixtures. It fits in with set designer Stuart Blatt’s overall vision of the show, which he describes as “this world-class spa that’s sealed off from the rest of the world ... [with] a minimalist Japanese feel,” but does not appear to have any unique characteristics that set it apart from the rest of the Dollhouse besides the pane of frosted glass at the end of it (Fernandez). In “Man on the Street” (DH1006), however, the viewer learns that there is something sinister about this pane of frosted glass. It is slightly out of range of the security cameras and, therefore, never shows up on the surveillance feeds. It is behind this frosted pane of glass that Sierra is repeatedly raped by her handler. This is the most infamous of hidden places in the Dollhouse, but certainly not the only one. There is the shelf in Topher’s bedroom where he attempts to hide his blueprint for how to create a portable imprinting device.

There are the archives hidden deep within Topher's lab that protect all of the Dollhouse's imprints, including the original personality of each and every active.

[11] Yet none of these places remain hidden for long. Boyd discovers the unmonitored pane of glass. Topher shows Adelle where he has hidden the blueprint, only for her to turn around and steal it and give it to Rossum to regain her control of the house. In "Getting Closer" (DH2011), Ivy discovers Caroline, Echo's original personality, is missing, taken during Alpha's last invasion of the house. These instances seem to suggest that while hidden places can exist in the Dollhouse, they cannot stay that way forever. They also indicate that places can and will change over time. For instance, when Topher returns to his room and finds the blueprints missing, he panics because his room is no longer a safe place for him and neither is the Dollhouse. He is experiencing what the viewer experiences on a regular basis — no one and nowhere is safe.

[12] The Dollhouse is a place where a woman like Adelle DeWitt can be in charge. Her office features a lot of dark, rich colors. The walls are a deep red, the doors a dark chestnut. Her desk matches the wall in color and serves as a focal point of the room. It is arranged, so that whenever Adelle is sitting at it, she is looking out of the floor to ceiling windows that dominate that wall to the city skyline. This puts her back directly to the door, suggesting that she feels safe enough in the Dollhouse itself and her position in it to keep her back to one of the few entrances (and exits), certainly the most prominent one, in the room (Lo). The desk also sits on an elevated platform, so whenever Adelle is sitting at it or standing near it, she is in a higher position relative to that of her guests. She is above them, both physically and in her position at the house. Off to the side, still on the platform, she has a flatscreen monitor hanging on the wall that is always tuned into the surveillance cameras, so she can keep an eye on the Dollhouse. Off to the side, she

has a seating area for the many people that come through her office. There is a large black leather couch and matching armchairs. A potted plant stands in the corner. A subdued, colored print hangs on the wall, framed by two rectangular prism shaped lights. There is a table right beneath it with three bottles of alcohol always sitting on it for those days when tea just is not enough. Her office is that of a sophisticated businesswoman, one who is always in charge and knows what she is doing.

[13] When Adelle loses control of the house, however, her office and her relationship with it changes. The Rossum executive who takes her place seems to only make a few changes, but those changes are startling. He replaces Adelle's desk with his own, a large wood number that he situates facing the door, not as secure in his position perhaps as Adelle was. The furniture in the sitting area also changes. There are more couches and more chairs, both definitely more masculine looking, adding to the air of a boys club when the executive invites a few high-ranking men to discuss business over a few cigars. Adelle herself is no longer the strong woman in charge that we are used to. Instead of making the decisions, she stands by the executive's side, acting far more like an assistant than anything else. She serves tea to their visitors, something she used to do before, something that used to show how powerful she was. Now it distinctly shows her lack of power. She listens as the Rossum executive tells her what to do. Most importantly, though, she remains silent, never standing up for herself like we have seen her do so many times before. Since this office is no longer hers, it is almost as if she is no longer herself, the place acting as an extension of the self. After the executive dismisses her and Boyd on one occasion, Boyd tells Adelle that she needs to take the house back. When she asks him how she is supposed to do that, he turns to her and says, "The Adelle I knew would never ask me that question,"

suggesting that more has changed than just the office (“Meet Jane Doe” DH2007). She could, in fact, be the Jane Doe the title of the episode refers to, someone who does not even know herself.

[14] For Topher, the Dollhouse is a nerd’s paradise. In his office, he has a dartboard, a trampoline, and a whack-a-mole. He has a fridge, which is kept stocked by his assistant Ivy, and a drawer of “inappropriate starches” for when he needs something to eat (“Echoes DH1007”). He has multiple computers, monitors, and holographic screens that he uses to do his work. His office and its place within the Dollhouse bear striking similarities to Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon. Originally designed as a prison, the Panopticon is a circular building that revolves around a central tower, where a watchman can see the entire building and everyone in it, but no one can see him (Bentham). Topher’s office serves as the central tower and Topher himself serves as the watchman. When he looks out of his office, he can see the entire main floor of the Dollhouse. Rarely does anyone look up and see Topher and when someone does, that person is usually Echo, someone who is slowly uncovering the reality of her own situation.

[15] Although he has the best view of the physical space of the Dollhouse, Topher repeatedly proves himself to be utterly blind to the emotional, moral, and ethical implications of the space. Barring Adelle, he is the only person in the Dollhouse who has met every single doll’s original personality. He has seen them in great pain, fear, and sadness. He has performed invasive, life-altering surgery on their brains. He has wiped their personalities and stored them on a drive. He has literally held their lives in his hands. Yet, despite the intimate nature of his interactions with the dolls, he has perhaps the least insight into their emotional well-being. Boyd and Dr. Saunders appear to have greater insight into the dolls’ suffering than Topher does. Even Adelle, who has no physical view of the Dollhouse from her office above ground, manages to be more in tune with the emotional environment of the House than Topher. Indeed, he comes off as

a mad scientist who has no compassion for his experiments, going so far as to call them bison (“Gray Hour” DH1004). Dr. Saunders calls him a “sociopath in a sweater vest” (“Vows” DH2001). Adelle puts it most harshly when she tells Topher he was chosen to work at the Dollhouse because he had no morals (“Belonging” DH2004).

[16] Despite all of the evidence to the contrary, Topher is not incapable of compassion. In “Briar Rose” (DH1011), he imprints Echo as an abuse survivor and sends her on a humanitarian mission to help a young abuse victim. In “Belonging” (DH2004), we learn that when he first brought Sierra to the Dollhouse, he thought he was helping cure her of a severe case of schizophrenia. In the same episode, he imprints Sierra with her original personality and allows her to face the man who sexually abused her, drugged her, and gave her to the Dollhouse. When she accidentally kills her abuser, Topher helps her get rid of the body and hide the evidence. Before he wipes Sierra again, sending her back to her doll state, he tells her he is not sure he can live with what they did (DH2004). All of these instances prove that Topher is capable of compassion. He is just not always capable of showing it—perhaps because of his current lonely existence of working, living, and breathing the Dollhouse. His bedroom is behind a wall in his lab, his bed a lonely mattress on the floor. He has no friends to speak of. In fact, the only time we see Topher come close to having a friend is on his birthday when he imprints Sierra to be his ideal friend. They run around the house playing laser tag, throwing a football back and forth, and verbally sparring over suitably nerdy topics. Knowing this, it is hard to say that Topher is blind to the emotional and psychological implications of the space because blind suggests that he is unaware that the implications exist at all, which is not the case. He is aware of the implications. In fact, he actively distances himself from them in order to survive the Dollhouse.

[17] While Topher's office is all fun, his lab is all business. While his office is cluttered, his lab is nothing but the bare essentials. There are a few machines and monitors sitting to the side and then there is the chair, the focal point of the room and of the Dollhouse. It is a long silver chair with a lot of black cushioning, a headrest, and a pair of restraints. When the chair is fully reclined, the person in it is almost parallel with the ground and their head is resting within a metal loop that acts as the CPU of the chair. When an imprint is being applied, this metal loop flashes blue as the person being imprinted twitches and convulses, appearing to be anywhere from mildly discomforted to extremely pained. For the actives, the chair is nothing to fear. It is simply part of their day. For others, it is far worse. When Paul sees it, he says, "So this is it. This is where you steal their souls" ("Omega" DH1012). For Dominic, it is the last place he will see before he is sent to the Attic. For anyone without active architecture, it is a painful way to die. For Topher, it is a measure of his professional success (Perdiago). When he first arrived at the Dollhouse, he altered the imprinting method so that the time it took to imprint a doll jumped from hours to a few minutes. Every day he imprints active after active, doing his job with great success and great pleasure. At one point, he tries to minimize the pain and violation the chair causes by saying that pain is simply neurons in the brain talking to each other. Yet, when Echo shoves him into chair in "Needs" (DH1008) and Dominic shoves him into it in "A Spy in the House of Love" (DH1009), he is terrified. He only recognizes the danger of the chair when he is in it.

[18] Topher's domain is not to remain a professional and personal paradise. In "Getting Closer" (D2011), Bennett, his counterpart at the DC Dollhouse and love interest, is shot and killed in front of him, a traumatic event which is only made more traumatic by the lack of the time he is given to mourn her. With Rossum about to show up and punish them, he must push

her death aside and reconstruct Caroline's wedge, so they can imprint Echo with it before it is too late. Security's down across the house, as is most of the technology in Topher's lab. He works on the wedge right next to a monitor broadcasting static, splattered in Bennett's blood. When he finally succeeds in reconstructing the wedge, he puts Echo in the chair and starts the imprinting process. In the middle of this process, a Rossum assassin barges in, a machine gun in hand, ready to kill. Topher tries to defuse the situation with humor, the only weapon he has available to him. The assassin knocks him out and, in doing so, knocks out any lingering sense of security Topher might have in the location. The violation of this place marks the beginning of Topher's mental downfall.

[19] The Dollhouse is home as much as an actual dollhouse is home. Both are places where dolls are made to act out activities typically associated with homes — eating, sleeping, showering, participating in leisure activities like arts and crafts or yoga. This creates the illusion that the dolls are actually participating in and leading normal domestic lives and that the place they are doing this in is actually home. In reality, however, the dollhouse is not home; it is simply a shell to be filled with the fantasies of the person or people pulling the strings. Rossum's fantasy is to have a house full of beautiful, empty people that can be turned into anyone at any time. Topher fulfills that fantasy for them and, in turn, makes it possible for the Dollhouse to fulfill the fantasies of their clients. While he programs the dolls to be able to perform basic tasks like eating, sleeping, and showering, all things that are typically associated with the home environment, he never programs them to specifically think of the Dollhouse as home until he programs Whiskey to be Dr. Saunders.

[20] After Alpha kills the original Dr. Saunders and severely scars the house's most popular doll Whiskey, Topher programs Whiskey to be the new Dr. Saunders. He does not stop

there, though. He also programs her to have crippling and debilitating phobias of crowds, people, sunlight, open spaces, noise and pets (DH2001). As we learn in “A Spy in the House of Love” (DH1009), these phobias have prevented her from stepping foot outside the Dollhouse since Alpha’s breakout. She has no friends, no family, no anything outside of the Dollhouse.

[21] By default, the Dollhouse becomes her home physically, but never psychologically. She never seems at peace in the house. At first, it seems like her restlessness stems from being one of the few people at the House who genuinely cares about the dolls. While Topher calls them bison and Dominic calls them pets, she still thinks of them as people and does her best to treat them as such. After we learn that she is a doll, it becomes clear that her phobias play a large role in her unhappiness. She has not chosen to make the Dollhouse home. She has been forced to. Even after she summons up her courage and leaves, she cannot escape. In “Getting Closer” (DH2011) she returns as the others are evacuating the Dollhouse and preparing to infiltrate Rossum. When left alone with Bennett, she shoots Bennett in the head and disappears, a completely blank look in her eyes. Someone has gotten a hold of her and reprogrammed her into a sleeper doll, turning her into a tool for Rossum to use. In “Epitaph One” (DH1013), she has completely reverted to her doll-like state, retaining no memories of her time as Dr. Saunders and only answering to her doll name Whiskey. She ends up dying in the Dollhouse, an empty shell of who she once was. For her, the Dollhouse is not a home. It is a prison.

[22] The Dollhouse is a place that can and will change with the passage of time. Much like the biblical Eden, the Dollhouse starts out as a paradise, safe only as long as its inhabitants play by the rules and outside influences are kept out. As Echo starts to bend then break the rules and outsiders start coming in, Alpha and Paul in “Briar Rose” (DH1011), Alpha in “A Love Supreme” (DH2008), and Rossum in “Getting Closer” (DH2011), that safety is threatened.

Eventually, they are forced to abandon the house in “Getting Closer” (DH2011) as Rossum closes in on them. They return to the house at some point, however, using it as a stronghold during the Apocalypse as we see in “Epitaph One” (DH1013). Once they establish a stronghold somewhere else, they abandon the house once more. The house becomes a relic of the “golden age,” a time when people could get what they needed with little to no consequence, at least none comparable to those of the Apocalypse. This is the house that greets a group of actuals, people who have not been imprinted and have maintained their original personality. Searching for a safe place in the midst of the chaos of the Apocalypse, they find the entrance to the Dollhouse and enter, finding a mostly intact, albeit eerie, house. The lights are completely out, so everything is in shadow. As they use their flashlights to navigate the house, the audience sees what used to be familiar sights: the main area, the dining room, the showers even Topher’s lab. They look exactly as they did during the heyday of the Dollhouse, as if they are simply waiting for the actuals to return and use them once more. This is no safe place to the actuals, though. As they learn this is the place where the imprinting technology started, they express their disgust with the house and the people who once occupied it.

[23] Although the Apocalypse Dollhouse looks remarkably familiar to us, it is not the same Dollhouse. In “Epitaph One” (DH1013), it is because we are viewing it through the actuals’ eyes, so it is like we are seeing it for the first time all over again. In “Epitaph Two: Return” (DH2013), it is because we are viewing it through the war-weary eyes of Echo and the others. After battling the war-torn streets of Los Angeles, they finally make it back into the Dollhouse, only to discover that it looks exactly the way it did during the golden age. The lights are on. Dolls are wandering the main area. It almost looks like no time has passed. Victor and Echo are both thrown. When they see Alpha, though, it all makes sense. It turns out Alpha, who

has become good in the time since we saw him last, has turned the Dollhouse into a sanctuary for the “dumbshows,” people who were wiped during the Apocalypse and act much like dolls even though they do not have active architecture in their brains. While this Dollhouse looks like the golden age Dollhouse, it is not the same. These people are not kept there to be turned into someone else’s fantasy; they are kept there for their own protection.

[24] While the Dollhouse itself does not change much physically, Adelle’s office does. When the actuals end up there, we see just how much. The windows are blown out. The venetian blinds, which are never out of place during Adelle’s tenure, hang at odd angles, torn and askew. The furniture is pushed together to form a makeshift bed, so people can sleep. Stockpiles of supplies are stacked against the wall. Adelle’s desk is gone, the new focal point being the collage of photos on the wall with the words “To Remember” above it. Here there are pictures of Echo, Sierra, Victor, November, and the other actives that once lived in the house. In “Epitaph One” (DH1013), the young girl imprinted with Echo’s personality plucks the photograph of Echo off the wall and says, “I hope we find me alive,” allowing herself this brief moment of peace and hope before leading the actuals to Safe Haven. In “Epitaph Two” (DH2013), this collage of photos will be the last thing Topher will see. After detonating the device that will return everyone who has been turned into a doll into their former selves, he turns to stare at the collage and, like it did for Echo, it appears to give him some peace of mind. Then the device goes off, ending his life but also ending the Apocalypse. Considering Adelle’s office is where the revolution starts, with Echo and her followers and Adelle and hers finally coming together to fight Rossum, it seems fitting that this is where it all ends as well.

[25] To return to Karen Sayer, place “is inseparable from the consciousness of the people who occupy it” (134). The Dollhouse is a paradise, a safe haven, a closely kept secret, a start to

the Apocalypse and an end to it as well. Yet, it is also a prison and a nightmare. It is a place where the people we love die and where they are brought back to life or some semblance of one. It is a place where Victor and Sierra fall in love, where the original Dr. Saunders dies and another (unknowingly) takes his place, where Caroline fades out and Echo fades in. It is a place that Echo tries to escape time after time, only to come back to at the very end, a halfway house for her as she waits for the world to be rebuilt above ground. It is all of these places because the characters made it those places. They transformed this mere physical location into something, into many things far greater. They had that power and so do we. If Echo and Victor and Sierra can transform the Dollhouse, certainly we can transform our own world because bricks and mortar do not make our places what they are; we do.

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