FAN-TEXTUAL TELEVISION: NARRATIVE STRUCTURE, VIRTUALITY AND FANDOM IN *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*, *ANGEL* AND *VERONICA MARS*

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Fan-Textual Television: Narrative Structure, Virtuality and Fandom in Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel and Veronica Mars

Hayran-Metinsel Televizyon: Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel ve Veronica Mars'ta Anlatı Yapısı, Sanalsallık ve Hayranlık

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Tez Danışmanının Adı Soyadı (İMZASI) : Tuna Erdem
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5) Veronica Mars	5) Veronica Mars

Abstract

This study is concerned with tracing the relationship between the narrative structure of American television and fandom with a specific focus on the texts of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel and Veronica Mars. Television narratives differ from classic narratives in certain key respects. Television narration is characterized by an episodic and fragmented structure that relies on the postponement of closure for its continuation. Viewer interest is further maintained by heavy characterization and the use of multiple concurrent story arcs spanning numerous episodes in addition to one central seasonal arc. These narrative specifics enable the construction of a fabulated universe, 'virtuality,' by the fan viewer. Virtuality ensures a safety zone where the fan is able to manipulate the meanings of popular texts and to create new, possibly subversive ones. On the other hand, the self-reflexive nature of the medium and its position within Postmodern popular culture lend television texts a heightened degree of awareness of fannish meanings. Because of this hyperawareness, subversive readings and fannish meanings are increasingly incorporated by industrial texts, simultaneously generating further fan interaction and acting as possible inoculations.

Özet

Bu çalışma, başta Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel ve Veronica Mars olmak üzere, Amerikan televizyon dizilerinin anlatımsal yapısı ile hayranlık arasındaki ilişkiyi gözlemlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Televizyon anlatıları bazı temel noktalarda klasik anlatılardan farklılıklar göstermektedir. Televizyon anlatımlarının yapısı bölümsel ve parçalı olup devamlılıklarının temelinde dramatik sonun sürekli olarak ertelenmesi ve karakterlerin derinliği yatmaktadır. Seyirci ilgisinin devamlılığını sağlayan diğer bir unsur ise tüm bir sezonu kapsayan tek bir ana hikaye yanında birkaç bölüme yayılan başka olay dizilerine de yer verilmesidir. Tüm bu anlatımsal özelliklerin de katkısıyla hayran seyirci sanalsallık olarak adlandırılabilecek olan hikayeleştirilmiş bir evren kurgulayabilir. Bu sanalsallık, hayrana, popüler metinlerin egemen söylemlerinin farklılaştırılabileceği veya altüst edilebileceği güvenli bir bölge sağlar. Bununla beraber, Postmodern popüler kültürün içinde yer alan televizyonun kendine dönük yapısı, televizyon metinlerini alternatif anlamların ve okumaların ileri derecede farkında kılmaktadır. Bunun sonucu olarak ise hayranların farklılaşmış anlamları ve okumaları giderek sektörün metinlerinin içine dahil edilmektedir. Böylelikle hayranların egemen söyleme alternatif okumalarına ham malzeme oluşturulurken aynı zamanda farklı okumalara ve anlamlara karşı aşı etkisi de yaratabilmektedir.

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Introduction

For the past 50 years, television has accompanied people in their daily lives, supplying them with information, news, entertainment and consumable products. It has been a persistent companion of domestic life, binding people together since the early days of its birth. Even today, with the Internet casting a menacing shadow over it, television remains the most effective medium of mass communication. Nonetheless, like everything else in our lives, the medium has evolved through time as the world transformed itself from Modernity to something else. Popularly categorized as a postmodern medium, television has embraced this evolution and reveled in the self-reflexivity, intertextuality and awareness of the (popular) culture from which it feeds. American television, which informs national institutions and defines the norms of television narration and broadcasting across the world, can be identified as a symptom of this process.

In fact, the state of American television, especially in terms of the hour-long fiction drama is by no means coincidental. Revealing itself in the narrative structure of the texts and their relation to the audience –primarily the fans-, the specifics of the form is a natural result of the medium's move within and through Postmodernity and commercial culture. This move has culminated in a self-reflexive text that, using the narrative devices accorded to it through its specific narrative structure, foregrounds intertextuality, has a heightened awareness of, and nurtures the viewer/fan as the primary source of meaning. It is possible to trace this gradual transformation of television texts into *bona fide* examples of the Postmodern through a historical account of the medium. However, this study does not attempt to map out such an account. It is primarily concerned with outlining the structural mechanism with which television has internalized this transformation, generating a very peculiar relationship between its texts and

its audiences through its narrative structure; and to that end, focuses on three particular texts: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*[1], *Angel*[2] and *Veronica Mars*[3].

Before continuing, the reasons for focusing on these three should be discussed briefly. First, it is impossible to ignore the significance of the fan culture surrounding *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars.* Although they have achieved relatively few institutional awards and are not ratings Juggernauts[4], all three shows have succeeded in garnering significant recognition and a cult following that has successfully kept them on air for a notable period. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the pioneer of the three was broadcast for seven seasons and survived moving to a different network before it was terminated. Its spin-off, *Angel*, was broadcast for five years, the last of which extended past its predecessor's final season. In fact, these two shows established such a strong cult audience for their creator and executive producer Joss Whedon that despite the unexpected cancellation of his third series -*Firefly*- after ten episodes, the strength of the fandom was able to secure a movie adaptation of the series.

Although *Veronica Mars* is a younger show that is still being broadcast, it is surrounded by an equally devoted fandom that has actively advocated for the renewal of the show against the threat of cancellation due to low ratings. At the end of the series' second season, the possibility of cancellation was made more significant by a corporate merge between UPN (the network that produces the series) and the WB (a rival network that caters to the same demographic). This merge has formed the CW network, which cut almost half of the current programming from the collective roosters of the two networks. Whether due to some other, unfathomable reason or as a result of the activities of the fans, which involved, among other things, donating DVD copies of the first season to public libraries and flying a plane bearing a banner protesting against cancellation over the offices of the studio, the series was renewed by the new network.

The strength of the fandom for these series is especially important when considered in light of the particulars of the medium. All popular texts depend on commercial success for their survival. However, this dependence

is particularly significant for the television medium because of the necessity of consistency and loyalty it demands from the audience. A television show is broadcast in periodic installments that stretch over years into the unforeseen future. In order to remain on air, the text must garner a sufficient audience base that is willing to commit to the text in the long run. Such a commitment requires a level of investment –of time, attention and affect- from the viewer that can only be categorized as *fannish*. This statement may appear somewhat contradictory in the face of the mundane and, according to Grossberg, "in-different" nature of television[5]. Although television watching may generally be characterized by a cursory and laid-back viewing style, however, continued viewing of a text is clearly indicative of a textual relationship that transcends a casual reading. The audience for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars* may be relatively small, but it consists of viewers who are willing to commit to and invest in the texts. This willingness renders the textual relationship akin to *fannish* –if not entirely so- and opens the texts to an intricate and non-casual interaction with their reader. Although unquantifiable, it can easily be posited that the audience for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars* consist almost entirely of fans and have very few casual viewers who tune in sporadically.

In conjunction with the aforementioned, the organic compositions of the fandom/audience for these three texts have also been influential in their determination as focus points for this study. There are two factors involved in this statement. First of all, all three texts are geared toward a younger audience. This is particularly underlined by the producing networks. *Angel* was broadcast by the WB; *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* started in this network but was later bought over by UPN; *Veronica Mars* started out in UPN and will continue in the newly formed CW. The fact that CW is the product of a merger between UPN and the WB that seeks to optimize resources by eliminating the chief competition attests to the commonality in target audiences. Furthermore, the overlap in audience targets is particularly strong

for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars* due to the intertextual interaction between the three shows and their fandom.

In popular culture, one is rarely a fan of a single text. Although this point will be discussed in greater detail below, it is necessary to state that fandom is essentially a relationship between readers and texts that finds its place in popular culture. As such, all texts within that culture can and do yield *fannish* interaction. The three shows discussed here are not exceptional in the fact that their fans may belong to fandom of different texts. However, the extent of overlap between the fandom of these three shows renders it significant. Such an overlap is only natural when considering *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*. After all, the latter is a spin-off of the former series. As such, the fandom of *Angel* is derived from that of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The situation is somewhat more complicated for *Veronica Mars*. First, while the former series belong to the fantasy genre, the younger one belongs to the *noir*/crime genre. Furthermore, there is no organic connection between the producing teams such as it exists between *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Firefly*, Joss Whedon's third series. Nonetheless, a sizeable portion of the fans for *Veronica Mars* consists of *Buffy/Angel* fans as evinced by the personal disclosures of online fans. In fact, the overlap is reinforced by the text, as well. Rob Thomas has cast two former *Buffy/Angel* stars –Alyson Hannigan and Charisma Carpenter- in recurring parts while Joss Whedon, a self-proclaimed fan, made a guest appearance during the second season. Since the composition of the fandom for each of these series is remarkable similar and overlapping, the mechanism of fandom and its specific structure is rendered highly comparable, especially due to the commonality of the types and modes of fan activity generated, despite the difference in broadcast periods and genres.

The final although possibly the most important factor in focusing on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars* in this study arises from personal experience. I have long been a devoted television viewer but it was with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* that I identified myself as a fan for the first time. As it stands, I am a fan of all three shows as well as other series

that are not discussed here. This fact is at once advantageous and injurious to this study. The possible injury it may inflict is relatively straightforward. Because I am a 'Fan' *per se*, my perception of the phenomenon is admittedly complimentary. The negative image of fandom, which will be discussed below, is foreign to my experience and remains unintelligible on a personal level. My opinions and observations are necessarily colored by my self-identification as a fan, which may cast a shadow over the objectivity of the study. Nonetheless, it is precisely the presence of first-hand experience that presents an advantage to this study. Since fandom denotes a specific relationship between the viewer and the text, a discussion of fandom and its emergence as a symptom of the narrative structure of television benefits from the said experience. Furthermore, all discussions within the realm of humanities and art are colored by the personal ideologies of their proponents. Subjectivity is not an exception but a rule in the contemporary state of human thought. Thus, although my personal position as a fan is highly visible, its consequences on my arguments are not unparalleled or singular. Nevertheless, I have attempted to provide counterarguments to the issue of fandom and television viewing -when possible- in good faith and my discussion of the general structure of televisual narrative remains disinterested in the issue of fandom until the point where it focuses on the structure of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars* in order to provide an analytical and objective basis for the rest of the study.

Linda Hutcheon, paraphrasing Robert Siegle, states, "A self-reflexive text suggests that perhaps narrative does not derive its authority from any reality it represents, but from 'the cultural conventions that define both narrative and the construct we call reality'."[6] Today, the television text recognizes that its meaning is made, not necessarily by a collective of cultural conventions, but even more so by those sub-cultural ones that exist as a part of the fandom that surrounds the text. The fandom, in turn, is enabled by the medium as a direct result of its instinct for self-preservation, which reveals itself in the specifics of its narrative structure.

Television is faced with the challenge of presenting coherent narratives in spite of the fact that these narratives are fragmented structures with institutionally imposed breaks in their discourse. Since incorporating these breaks to its texts is vital to the commercial survival of the medium, television has turned to serialization and series as its primary narrative form. This structure, characterized by presenting the narrative over regularly scheduled installments, is dissimilar to the classic text in several respects including but not limited to: The need to perpetuate the narrative, either through the use of continuous storylines or a reaffirmation of the initial status quo of the narrative, eliminates closure; the syntagmatic axis is overshadowed by the paradigmatic axis; existents (of character) rather than events are the principal components and each installment (or episode) is structured over five acts. The two primary forms that enable these narrative specifics in television are series and serials. The first chapter will discuss the particular characteristics of these forms as well as providing a general discussion of televisual narrative including particularly influential theoretical approaches.

While series and serials represent the basic narrative forms of television narratives, they differ significantly in relation to some of the aforementioned narrative traits. Furthermore, contemporary American television in general and the specific narrative structure of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars* in particular, have moved away from the polar extremes of these forms toward a hybrid structure. Identified as "serialization," this process blends different components of narrative form and constructs a new structure whose principal novel trait as utilized in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars* is the use of the season and/or myth arcs, which play a significant role in the creation of the *virtuality*. The second chapter will provide a detailed outline of the hybrid form in terms of the subject texts, especially in regards to the three-layer structure of the storylines (episodic, character-driven and seasonal).

In simplistic terms, virtuality is the universe in which the narrative exists. Essentially a fan construct, it differs from the diegetic –which is a

narrative concept that is defined in relation to the classic text- in the intricacy and complexity of the construct. Since television narratives employ multiple storylines (that proceed without a strong causal link) as well as employing a large number of characters, often with equal weights, the virtuality must be large enough to accommodate these components.

It has been stated that the season/myth arcs play an important role in the creation of this alternate universe. To explain this point, it is necessary to discuss the mechanism with which the virtuality is constructed. The fragmented nature of television narration renders it inherently 'incomplete' and 'insufficient'. That is, the breaks in the discourse, albeit expected and organically assimilated, function as stop points which indefinitely postpone narrative, ideological and emotive closure in the text. They open up and weaken the syntagmatic chain, reinforcing the shift of the paradigmatic possibilities to the foreground. As a result, the viewer is drawn into an interaction with the text that is characterized by the attempt to complete the omissions, whether thematic or discursive, of the text; and by elaborating on the paradigmatic possibilities as they exist. This engagement with the text in a productive and proactive fashion is, in actuality, the construction of the virtuality. The season/myth arcs are significant because they provide a thematic point of reference to the multiple storylines and paradigmatic possibilities from whence the virtuality is born. For example, the entirety of *Angel*'s narrative is linked to the title character's quest for redemption. Independent of character-driven or episodic plotlines, the myth arc for the character unifies the text and the virtuality created from it.

Once the fan is embroiled in the virtuality, he/she interacts with the text as well as other fans in an effort to perpetuate the construct. As a result, fandom's relationship with the text is characterized by productivity, which reveals itself in different types of fan activity, ranging from fiction stories and music videos to art works and old-fashioned gossip. This productivity, in turn, enables the fan to appropriate the text for the construction of his/her own meanings by creating a safety zone where subversive readings are enabled. It is important to note that not all safety zones born from

virtualities yield subversive readings. Fandom may remain at a reactionary level that precludes 'revolutionary' relationships. Nonetheless, the possibility remains.

The third chapter will discuss these issues as outlined above, particularly in relation to the fandom of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars*. First, a general overview of the concept of the fan and different arguments regarding fandom will be provided. The chapter will then proceed with a detailed discussion of the mechanism with which fandom and virtuality are created. Finally, text-specific examples of subversive readings from the subject texts that point to a resistant reading practice will be discussed.

It has already been stated that contemporary American television has become highly self-reflexive and hyperaware of the fan as a source of meaning. The subversive readings discussed in the third chapter are increasingly recognized and acknowledged by the fan. This acknowledgement draws the subtexts that generate resistant and marginal readings of the text to the forefront. *Fannish* meanings are recognized and incorporated into the texts. The fourth and final chapter will discuss this phenomenon as well as providing specific examples from the texts of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars* in which *fannish* meanings are adopted by the canon text. It is important to note that while such incorporation may act as counter-productive in terms of reactionary fandom by depriving fans of an appropriation device, it is not necessarily an unequivocally negative development. The fandom of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars*, which are more prone to establishing resistant relationships with the text, are not hindered by the texts' adoption of their meanings. In fact, the legitimization of the subtext encourages resistant reading practices. Nonetheless, like most developments in a cultural context, the newly formed hyperawareness of the medium is a double-edged sword that cuts both ways.

Finally, several things should be mentioned before proceeding with the main body of the study. First of all, television is a highly intertextual

medium. As such, even in a discussion of specific texts, it is impossible to ignore the implications of theoretical concepts to other texts and the medium in general. Although all arguments proposed in this paper relate directly to the texts of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars*, they are easily applicable to similar texts of contemporary American television fiction. As such, unless otherwise noted such as in the discussion of the narrative structure of television, and especially in relation to the final two chapters focusing on fandom and *fannish* meanings, the terms 'television text', 'series' and 'show' should be regarded as primarily denoting the three shows even though the arguments proposed therein may be valid for other television series.

Secondly, it should be noted that the terms fan and viewer have occasionally been used interchangeably. It would be grossly erroneous to suggest that all television viewers are fans. Nonetheless, the presence of a highly significant difference between the reading practices of casual television viewers and fans, the particulars of which do not concern this paper, renders casual, sporadic viewers far outside the scope of this study. Furthermore, I have already argued that the viewing base of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars* are predominantly composed of fans. Consequently, with the exception of the first and second chapters which deal with generalized concepts, and unless otherwise noted, 'the viewer' has been used to refer primarily to the fan viewer.

Notes to Introduction:

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1. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, WB, 1997-2001; UPN, 2002-3.
Detailed information is available in the Appendix.
2. *Angel*, WB, 1999-2004.
Detailed information is available in the Appendix.
3. *Veronica Mars*, UPN, 2004 -.
Detailed information is available in the Appendix.
4. Typically, an episode of *Crime Scene Investigation* will be viewed by approximately five times as many people as an episode of *Veronica Mars.* Ratings data on specific episodes is often available in popular Internet sites such as www.tv.com.
5. Lawrence Grossberg, "The In-Difference of Television," *Screen* 28: 2 (Spring 1987).
6. Hutcheon, The *Politics of Postmodernism*, p.36.

Chapter 1: Narrative Structure in Television

Defining the structure of the American hour-long television fictional narrative, a classification to which *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars* belong, is somewhat akin to defining pornography. Though the task is not an impossible one, it is by far easier to indicate a text as such than to define the perimeters of the specific structure. One of the first difficulties encountered is that the said structure does not bear a thematic unity or genre specificity. Almost all primetime[1] fictional narratives, from soap operas such as *Desperate Housewives*[2] and *The O.C.*[3] to the relatively newborn police procedurals such as the *Crime Scene Investigation*[4] family – heretofore referred to by its well-known abbreviation of *CSI*-, and science-fiction oeuvres like the *Star Trek* franchise[5], can be considered as examples of the same broad narrative class.

In addition, despite their inclusion to the same category, some of these texts differ significantly in their treatment of narrative closure, characterization and plot development, as well as thematic motivation. That is, while an example such as *CSI* is very much grounded in a formula, which emphasizes the episode-specific plots that are concluded at the end of each installment, soap-oriented examples like *The O.C.* eschew this emphasis on episode-centricism in favor of multiple plotlines spanning several episodes that are often centered on individual characters or couples. These plotlines, also known as story arcs, run through the narrative until some measure of resolution is achieved in any given storyline without concluding the entire narrative. On the other hand, procedurals like *CSI* adhere to a regiment of one central plot per episode. It is important to note that the specific difference between the formula of *CSI* and the structure of shows like *Desperate Housewives* results mainly from the difference between a series and a serial and will be further discussed below. Despite their differences of genre, theme and treatment of closure -among others- however, certain

characteristics, such as the presence of a five-act structure, the habitual postponement of closure, the proliferation of the paradigmatic against the syntagmatic, the treatment of character as a narrative tool and the balance of the elements of the series and the serial, can be traced to varying degrees across different hour-long texts, lending a seeming unity to the broad category of primetime drama.

The aim of this chapter is to provide the basic tools for a discussion of the televisual narrative structure, including a brief historical summary of the theoretical frameworks; the problems encountered in such a discussion; and the use of narrative components such as the hermeneutic code, characterization and segmentation as they relate to the basic forms of fictional television narrative: The series and the serial. Once the parameters of these two forms are outlined, the subsequent chapter will discuss the move toward a blending of these structures, referred to as serialization, specifically as they pertain to the narrative structure of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Veronica Mars,* and *Angel*.

1.1. Basic Problems in Discussing Television Narration

Television is a prolific and polysemic medium that permeates almost every society. Its easy accessibility and high degree of normalcy not only affords the medium the largest audience but also renders it one of the most controversial issues of modern culture. Even though it is a staple appliance of every home, television is often reviled for its perceived ill effects. Discussions of television are riddled with conflicts; of social responsibility, of aesthetic value; of cultural influence. Despite these conflicts of perception, however, television remains unified at its basis by the persistent presence of narration. From fiction programs to news programming to game shows, narration, though to different degrees, plays its part[6]. Although Sarah Kozloff limits her analogy to American television exclusively, the medium, in all its geographical and social reincarnations, is "as saturated in narrative as a sponge in a swimming pool."[7] Nonetheless, the tensions that are apparent in the cultural existence of the medium are reflected in the

multifaceted nature of television's narrative structure, which is complicated by several issues:

- Variety of programming
- Dependence on classic narrative theory
- Counteracting tensions

1.1.1. Variety of Programming

Although television as a medium is very distinguishable, the fact that it houses extremely different types of programming of varying themes, designs (in terms of both composition and aim), formats and priorities makes it irreconcilably fragmented. The difficulty faced in defining the hour-long television narrative is only magnified when faced with the challenge of studying all television programming. It is very difficult to propose a singular, or at the very least, unified theoretical framework of narration that is equally adaptable to the study of different forms of broadcast television such as news programming, commercials, game shows as well as fictional works including series, serials and television films. There are, however, two notable theoretical frameworks that have proposed a narrative schema that is applicable to television programming in general: Raymond Williams' idea of flow and John Ellis' formulization of segmentation, which came almost a decade later. Although their endeavor to have broad applicability causes intrinsic problems within both theoretical frameworks, they have, each, been vastly influential in the field of television studies. Therefore, a brief outline of Williams' and Ellis' work is appropriate before proceeding to the discussion of the problems posed by the dependence of television narrative study on classic narrative theory.

1.1.1.1. Raymond Williams and Flow

Dating back to 1974, Williams' notion of 'flow' in television is a chiefly pessimistic one; a viewpoint John Corner suggests resulted from "the arrival of interruptions to programme sequence in the form of commercials."[8] Williams' own account of his first encounter with 'the flow'

of American television illustrates this pessimism clearly in the way it subtly articulates an apparent dislike of the experience:

> One night in Miami, still dazed from a week on an Atlantic liner, I began watching a film and at first had some difficulty in adjusting to a much greater frequency of commercial 'breaks'. Yet this was a minor problem compared to what eventually happened. Two other films, which were to be shown on the same channel on other nights, began to be inserted as trailers. A crime in San Francisco (the subject of the original film) began to operate in an extraordinary counterpoint not only with the deodorant and cereal commercials but with a romance in Paris and the eruption of a prehistoric monster who laid waste New York.[9]

The notion of 'flow' in William's theory differs from 'programming' (and scheduling) in the degree of fluidity and interspersion involved. While programming/scheduling is more interested in the syntagmatic sequencing of different programs, John Corner, in his elaborate discussion of Williams' theory, suggests that 'flow' in Williams' work is a covert "meta-process" geared to "discourage switching off."[10] As opposed to the pre-commercial era of British television programming where schedules are composed of segments lined consecutively with breaks that are clearly headlined by transitional sequences –such as the commercial jingles still in use in Turkish television-, American television as it was experienced by Williams in particular, and the medium as it has evolved in general, creates an organic whole whereby individual programs and segments bleed into each other, overlapping and intruding at intervals to create a greater schema: the flow. Williams elaborates:

> What is being offered is not, in older terms, a programme (sic) of discrete units with particular insertions, but a planned flow, in which the true series is not the published sequence of programme (sic) items but this sequence transformed by the inclusion of another kind of sequence, so that these sequences together compose the real flow.[11]

Although Williams' work on flow has been influential in the field of television studies, it has also yielded criticism, especially regarding the perceived preference in the theory for the single, unified classic text[12].

Evoking a modernist disdain for popular culture and the mass media, this preference for the classic text renders the theory of flow fairly biased in its application to the medium. Nonetheless, Williams' work not only presents the first articulation for the constancy and 'perpetualness' of the medium but it has provided the historical starting point for John Ellis' theory on segmentation in television narratives.

1.1.1.2. John Ellis and Segmentation

It is widely recognized and stated that, unlike cinema and radio, television belongs almost exclusively to the household (and the domestic sphere) and its audience is characteristically distracted and has a scattered attention pattern. One study quoted by David McQueen reveals that people watching television actively stare at the screen only 65% of the time[13]. Television viewing is often be accompanied by some other activity such as having a meal, engaging in conversation, surfing the Internet etc. It should be noted, however, that although distracted viewing practices appear to be the norm for the television audience, they do not necessarily imply an out-of-hand and superficial experience. Complimenting the viewing activity with text-based conversation during and after the fact, in other words 'talking about it', has convincingly been argued as a dominant source of pleasure for (fan) audiences[14]. While household chores do not imply fan activity, simultaneous social engagement related to the text is a staple of fandom. Often, online forums will see posters discussing episodes as they are broadcast with activity increasing significantly during commercial breaks. Furthermore, viewing concentration is also dependent on variables such as gender. David Morley's work on gender-specific viewing habits stresses that female audiences often incorporate other household activity into the time spent watching television because "to just watch television without doing anything else at the same time would be an indefensible waste of time."[15]

Ellis credits this high degree of distraction of the audience with the construction of television's specific narrative structure and forms, of which he identifies 'the segment' as the building block. The segment, lasting no

more than five minutes, is defined as "a relatively self-contained scene which conveys an incident, a mood or a particular meaning […]."[16] Its economy of meaning, which is a result of its self-containment and short duration, renders it highly suitable for a medium that must compete with everything else for the attention of the viewer. Ellis notes the series form as the optimal structure for the assembling of these segments:

> [The form] provides the unity of a particular programme (*sic*), pulling together segments into a sense of connection which enables a level of narrative progression to take place between them. The series is the major point of repetition in TV, matching the innovation that takes place within each segment.[17]

Furthermore, since each segment is not only self-contained but also loaded with a specific meaning, subsequent segments often involve elaborations and analysis of their precedent's repercussions. Their consecutive arrangement then becomes an issue of succession, logic and circumstance rather than causality –contrary to what classic narrative theory would suggest-. Finally, because segments and series are essentially repetitions of a given problematic, the structure of the series "implies the form of the dilemma rather than that of resolution and closure." Ellis comments, "This perhaps is the central contribution that broadcast TV has made to the long history of narrative forms and narrativised perception of the world."[18]

Ellis also distinguishes between the gaze and the look of the viewer. While cinema, for example, enjoys the privilege of the spectator's look, television's casualty suggests that, for the most part, only her gaze –a decidedly more unfocused act- will be engaged. As a result, the medium has a strong emphasis on sound, not only as the bearer of meaning but also as a tool for attracting wayward attention from the viewer. Sit-coms[19], for example, often have an accompanying laugh track that serves to 'clue' the audience back into the ongoing joke. Similarly, commercials rely heavily on jingles for recognition and almost every television program makes use of credit sequences that play the same music at the beginning of each episode. Finally, this heavy reliance on sound is also apparent in the high focus on

'talking heads' –a decidedly un-filmic style- in both fiction and non-fiction programming.

In addition to viewers' scattered attention, television must also compensate for the fact that its image is small and lower grade, especially compared to cinema. Despite the evolving market for HDTV and big screens, everyday television viewing often involves a small screen tucked away in a corner that must compete with overhead lights, white noise and every ornament that adorns the room. Even in cases of intent watching (involving a specific program), the image is smaller than cinema and of lesser quality. Ellis suggests that, as a result, the television image is "stripped-down, lacking in detail"[20] in order to procure optimum results in disseminating meaning with the lackluster tools available to it. He concludes:

> Hence, the material nature of the broadcast TV image has two profound effects on the regime of representation and working practices that TV has adopted. It produces an emphasis on sound as the carrier of continuity of attention and therefore of meaning; it produces a lack of detail in the individual image that reduces the image to its information value and produces an aesthetic that emphasizes the close-up and fast cutting with strict time continuity.[21]

The distinctions of television outlined above arise predominantly from a comparison of the image of the medium to its predecessor, that of the cinema. However, Ellis identifies an additional influence that shapes the medium's specific look. Referring to this as *immediacy*, Ellis argues that television positions itself in a state of "co-present intimacy" at the expense of the voyeuristic look.[22] The television image is persistently framed in the 'now'. It opens a window for the audience, through which she can observe a current situation. Unlike other narrative and visual forms that are imbued with the sense of being pre-recorded, television as a medium has depended, from its origins, on the ability to 'be live' to such an extent that *nowness* and *liveness* are an inherent part of its texts. The immediacy of television becomes increasingly significant in discussions of television's verisimilitude and the viewer's reception of the television image as 'reality', playing an

important part in the fan creation of a fabulated reality that accompanies fiction narratives of television to be discussed in subsequent chapters.

Ellis' work on television narration has proven highly influential in the field, especially in its conceptualization of the 'segment'. However, like Williams' notion of flow before it, the theory is hampered by its efforts to encompass all television texts. The serial form, for example, is decidedly underplayed in Ellis' account and narrative structure is simplified to that of the series; a theoretical decision that overlooks significant variations in the use of different narrative components such as closure and the hermeneutic code. Ellis comments: "There is no real difference in narrational form between news and soap opera. The distinction is at another level: that of source material."[23] While the two genres may coincide in their use of the segment, however, it is difficult to ignore the textual differences they exhibit as well as their differing relations to the viewer. As it will become apparent below during the discussion of the series and the serial, generalizations regarding narrative form are highly suspect and necessitate that care be taken when applying Ellis' theory of segmentation to contemporary American television fiction.

1.1.2. Classic Narrative Theory and Television

It has been stated above that the variety of programming in television renders generalized narrative studies of the medium suspect. A second problem arises when seeking assistance from theories of narration developed for other media and forms. Although such a statement may appear redundant in its blatancy, it should be reiterated that television narration is significantly different from classic cinematic narration. However, as of yet, a narrative theory specific to the structural forms of the medium does not exist. Discussions of television narration utilize the tools of classic narrative theory. As such, an intrinsic problem arises out of this inevitable dependence of the theoretical framework on classic narrative theory.

Typically, the fiction film is a 'classic' text: finite, complete and available for postmortem study. It constitutes "a whole" which, by

Aristotle's definition, must have "a beginning, a middle, and an end."[24] Fiske, in more formal terms, defines the parameters of the traditional narrative thus: "Traditional narrative begins with a state of equilibrium which is disturbed: the plot traces the effects of this disturbance through to the final resolution, which restores a new and possibly different equilibrium."[25] The text is finite, offering its viewer a contained reading experience that will inevitably terminate. In addition, the classic text's exposure to the viewer/reader is an *ex post facto* phenomenon so that the viewer's relationship with the text has no repercussions that reach back to it.

Fiction television texts, on the other hand, are often ongoing structures in the form of a series or a serial. With the exception of films that air as part of the weekly line-up (with slot titles like 'the Friday night action extravaganza' or 'the Sunday morning family hour'), most fiction-based television programming, and especially serials, are episodic, airing at regular intervals and predicated on the assumption that they will continue to air at their specified slot indefinitely. As a result, unlike the classical text, a television serial "has no real beginning or end but only […] 'an indefinitely expandable middle'."[26] Therefore, in a television serial, a point where the act of reading is concluded cannot be reached. The lack of an actual 'end' deprives narrative theory of its point of reference from which to operate in regard to the entirety of the narrative. Furthermore, this lack of 'ending' necessarily implies that television's (serial) texts are texts-in-the-making. They are produced and 'read' simultaneously, rendering them as much processes as final products and empowering the viewers to influence the future of the texts. One extreme example where viewers were able to a storyline directly was provided by the last episode of the sit-com *Two Guys and a Girl*[27]. The two-part episode started by establishing the possibility of one of the three female characters being pregnant. The viewers were then asked to vote, during the course of the episode, on which character, if any, they preferred for the pregnancy. The final scene revealing the answer was shot for all four options (including a false alarm) but the winner of the poll was aired as the official finale.

Another difficulty of employing classical narrative theory in the study of television narratives is its heavy emphasis on 'form' to the exclusion of ideological criticism. Seymour Chatman, in his seminal study, states:

> Narrative theory has no critical axe to grind. Its objective is a grid of possibilities […] It plots individual texts on the grid and asks whether their accommodation requires adjustments of the grid […] it poses a question: What can we say about the way structures like narrative organize themselves?[28]

As such, narrative theory is "inescapably and unapologetically 'formalist'" and does not comment on either the sources from whence the narrative is born (in terms of production elements, institutional concerns etc.) or its influence on audiences.[29] While the disinterestedness of narrative theory encourages film studies to be complimented with other approaches (for example, psychoanalysis) as well, this issue becomes exceptionally critical when considered in light of television's status as the foremost storyteller and mass communication medium of the current age. Television, more so than any other narrative medium, is a predominantly social phenomenon. Its narrativity, in fact, is secondary only to its position in mass media and popular culture. Therefore, its cultural and mass implications cannot be ignored in favor of narrative study. Since the theory of narration, in itself, is insufficient and, more importantly, unwilling to provide answers regarding the effects television as a medium has on society and audiences, television studies must be supplemented by other critical approaches such as ethnosemiotics and audience-oriented criticism. Nonetheless, it should be reiterated that, in the absence of a medium-specific framework, the tools of classical narrative must be used in discussions of television narration as will be the case in this study.

1.1.3. Counter-Acting Tensions

In addition to hosting a variety of programming that resists unified consideration and the dependence on a somewhat unsuitable prior theoretical framework, the question of narration in television is further complicated by the fact that, as the dominant mass communication

technology of today, television is a symbiosis of numerous conflicting, opposing, and multidimensional forces that constantly renegotiate their positions. Among others, forces of "*closure"* and *"openness"*[30], of "repetition" and "innovation"[31], and most notably, of "aesthetics" and "economics"[32] create a persistent tension within television texts. The tension between aesthetics and economics is particularly noted not only because all other counteracting forces that work on the television text could be linked to that essential conflict but also because of the vital role it plays in the narrative structure of television.

Before going any further, it is necessary to elaborate on this statement. Almost all popular texts are consumed simultaneously by two different markets: the viewing public and the producers/marketers. Television texts are no exception. Regardless of its content, scheduling, aesthetic and/or social value, in most cases, a television program's durability depends on its ratings structure[33]. Ratings are the statistical symptoms of the text's marketability and denote its success as a mediator between the two markets per se. As C.M. Condit states: "Mass mediated texts might be viewed […] not as giving the populace what they want but as compromises that give the relatively well-to-do more of what they want, bringing along as many economically marginal viewers as they comfortably can […]"[34] A television program should be able to 'sell' itself to a sufficient number of financially able viewers who represent the target consumer pool for the marketing sector in order to endure. Since television acts as the marketing board for any and all products, the pool of financially able viewers is fairly large. Thus, the medium must also be able to garner itself the largest possible audience. This drive for optimum audience range is noted by John Ellis, who, commenting that "[…] television usurped the place of […] cinema in the affections of the popular audience," states: "Desperately insecure, television has to ceaselessly re-calculate public taste, to push neurotically at the boundaries of what is acceptable, and edge away from anything that might be genuinely disturbing."[35] Aware of its status as the darling of popular audiences, the medium cannot afford to overlook its

status as a double commodity lest it concede its dominance. Instead, to reach the compromise Condit deems essential, it endlessly renegotiates the counteracting tensions between the aesthetic and the economic, between dictating meaning and allowing subversive readings, between comfortable familiarity and exciting new ground.

It is precisely this constant struggle of antithetical forces that has shaped the fundamentals of television narrative structure as it exists today. Challenged with maintaining the greatest number of viewers (who have a plethora of tastes, values and opinions) across institutionalized commercial breaks, which enable its survival, televisual narrative structure has evolved in a very specific way that is based on the constant segmented repetition of highly formulaic structures to the forms of series and serial. The following section will discuss the structural specifics of these forms.

1.2. Basic Characteristics and Structural Forms

As stated, television broadcasting is faced with the challenge of filling endless hours of viewing time with consumption-worthy programming. Since the medium is not only "profoundly domestic,"[36] but also part of the mundane, everyday life, it must succeed in procuring a faithful audience through a consistent structuring of its forms and narration. More importantly, as Sarah Kozloff stresses, its texts must be able to "accommodate interruptions."[37] In practical terms, the television text has to be able to sustain commercial breaks. As obvious as this necessity seems, its quintessential role in the structure of all television programming demands that it be reiterated. Commercial television has historically depended on income from advertisement to sustain itself. The relationship between the 'actual' text and the commercials are so interlocked that it becomes difficult, at times, to distinguish whether the commercial is a tool for the text or if the text is an excuse for the commercial. In fact, the texts themselves have become commercials for products through the use of product placement in narratives.

Commercial cinema depends on ancillary markets such as distribution on television, DVD sales, home video etc. for revenues that will

exceed those from its theatrical release[38]. While film texts can generate income from other media, however, television texts are essentially limited by their own medium and income that is acquired through the original, repeat and syndicated broadcasts. Consequently, commercial revenue remains their primary source of income. To this end, the medium has turned to the series/serial as its primary structural tool.

Serial narration, as Hagedorn points out in his succinct account of the form's historical uses in literary and visual texts, has not originated in, or is exclusive to, television. It is, however, the most advantageous form for the survival of the medium because, as Hagedorn posits:

> At the most basic level, an episode of any one particular serial functions to promote continued consumption of later episodes of the same serial, which is specifically why the cliff-hanger ending was developed. […] More significantly but indirectly, in attracting a large audience to a particular medium, serials also serve to promote the very medium in which they appear. […] When a medium needs an audience, it turns to serials.[39]

The serial form, then, acts as an anchor of audience interest not only for the specific text itself but also for other texts of television. It is possible to find a concrete example of this in the phenomenon of the 'spin-off'. Spin-off is a colloquial television term for a television show that is created by transplanting one aspect of an ongoing, successful serial/series (often a character although it could be a concept) to a second narrative. Spin-offs exist in the fictional world created by their predecessors and partake in the same history. *Angel* is such an example. After three years as a regular cast member on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, David Boreanaz and his character, Angel, were transplanted from Sunnydale to Los Angeles and established in their own show. Supporting characters Cordelia and Wesley were also brought over and the two shows maintained an organic tie including crossovers[40] until the end of their run. Television provides other examples of the spin-off. The *Law and Order*[41] franchise, created by Dick Wolf, is an example where the new show appropriates a concept rather than specific characters from its predecessor. The franchise has adapted its distinct format

into 3 spin-offs: *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*, *Law and Order: Criminal Intent* and *Law and Order: Trial by Jury* all of which use the same format of breaking the narrative into two halves that focus on equally weighted point-of-views (generally that of police investigation and trial). Spin-offs, in short, capitalize on an established audience base with a tried-and-true formula, using the popularity of an existing text to induce its viewers to consume other, similar texts.

At this point, one important detail should be noted. It has been previously stated that Ellis identifies the series as the basic television form. On the other hand, as the discussion above reveals, Hagedorn and Kozloff have pointed to serials as the fundamental form of narrative in television. This apparent discrepancy results partly from a cultural influence and partly from an intrinsic shortcoming of Ellis' framework and requires elaboration.

John Ellis' definition of the series and the serial is mainly based on British television, which has seen the institution develop in a different track than its counterpart in the United States[42]. Comparing the two formats, Ellis states that "The serial implies a certain narrative progression and a conclusion; the series does not."[43] Though this statement may be somewhat accurate for the series, it is partially incorrect for the serial. The quintessential serial, the soap opera for example, is predicated upon the infinite persistence of the text. Soap operas such as *Days of Our Lives*[44] and *All My Children*[45] are among the first examples of the genre and have been broadcast, uninterrupted, since their premiere in 1965 and 1970 respectively. Therefore, while the serial does imply narrative progression, in general, it thrives on the elimination of conclusion rather than progressing toward it. While Ellis does allow for the presence of a gradual move in television to hybridize the two forms, pointing to *Telford's Change*[46] as an example[47], he pays scant attention to the soap opera and the serial form in general. As a result, though his insights regarding the importance of the 'segment' as well as the prominence of sound and the scattered attention of the audience are invaluable, his relative disregard for the serial form –which permeates American television- coupled with the culturally imposed

institutional differences between American and British television necessarily implies that certain aspects of his work are inadaptable to the study of the former's fiction narratives.

Since this study focuses on contemporary American primetime television, the terms 'series' and 'serial' will be used according to their application to American television. To that effect, Sarah Kozloff outlines the distinction between the series and the serial as follows:

> Series refers to those shows whose characters and setting are recycled, but the story concludes in each individual episode. By contrast, in a serial the story and discourse do not come to a conclusion during an episode, and the threads are picked up again after a given hiatus.[48]

Soap operas like *Days of Our Lives*, which infinitely postpone narrative closure and employ continuous storylines, are examples of the serial structure while the sit-com genre often employs the series structure. In hour-long, primetime programming, examples can be provided from primetime soaps like *Desperate Housewives* and *The O.C.* for the serial and procedural dramas such as *CSI* or *House*[49] for the series. Needless to say, primetime programming differs greatly from daytime programming, which is epitomized by the soap opera. This televisual structure is possibly the most momentous narrative form in television and, as such, it has received plentiful critical attention from the academia[50]. However, although the lack of substantial critical enquiry regarding the narrative structure of other forms of television programming has made it necessary to draw upon the significant bulk of critical works on the subject, a detailed discussion of soap operas remains outside the focus of this study. As such, the following discussion of structural specifics and differences between the series and serial forms refrains from making direct references to the soap opera.

1.2.1. Five Act Structure

Before discussing the narrative differences between series and serials, one elemental commonality in the hour-long formats should be established. Primetime, hour-long television texts use a five-act structure that spreads approximately 40-42 minutes of discourse time (broken by

commercial breaks) over its time slot of 60 minutes. It should be noted that the term, act, is used here with a degree of reservation because dividing the narrative to five parts is a commercial choice rather than a literary one. In fact, publicized episode scripts reveal that television writing often consists of the traditional three acts: beginning, middle and end. However, though the episode narrative may progress in three acts on the level of the story, the discourse is divided into five parts by commercial breaks, which irrevocably influence the rhythm and flow of the narrative. Bearing in mind that 'act' is a literary term, in the absence of a proper alternative, this word will be used to indicate the self-contained, intra-commercial segments of episodes in this study; differentiating between the two contexts by capitalizing the word when used in its strict literary meaning.

The first act of an episode consists of a short segment, known as the teaser, which acts as a brief introduction to the episode, presenting either the thematic or the material problem of the episode. The teaser is followed by a credit sequence that uses a specific and unvarying musical piece and presents a montage of shots that accredit the main actors. The credit sequence often encapsulates the theme of the show in general. For example, *Veronica Mars* uses a punk song, which contains the highly connotative lyrics "We used to be friends…", while *Angel* rolls credits over a mournful but energetic remix of a cello piece. In addition to the main actors, the credit sequence presents the title of the show along with the name of the creator: the closest point at which television approaches auteurship. The second act is relatively short and also functions, along with the teaser, as the first Act of the episodic text. The third and fourth acts are relatively longer and constitute the second Act of the text, with the end of the third act usually marking the halfway point of the episode. The final act customarily lasts fairly long and acts as the third Act of the text. With the exception of the final one, each act ends on a mild cliffhanger. If the text is based on the series format, these cliffhangers may employ the hermeneutic morphemes snare or jamming. In a serial, on the other hand, the cliffhangers will often involve an emotionally charged moment of suspended or partial answer. The

conclusion of the final act, and therefore the episode, may employ either a cliffhanger (in a serial) or a denouement (in a series) the particulars of which will be discussed below.

1.2.2. Proairetic and Hermeneutic Codes

This brief outline of the five-act structure reveals the existence of apparent differences between the series and the serial formats. One important structural characteristic that separates the two narrative forms and results in their apparent variance is their relationship to the proairetic and hermeneutic codes as discussed by Roland Barthes[51]. While the semic code is carried through subsequent episodes in both structures, episode-specificity of plots in the series form necessarily implies that the proairetic and hermeneutic codes are engaged anew in every installment. As such, the specific succession of episodes does not involve causality. Instead, each episode of a series, in its purest form, is a variation on the same theme. In the serial form, on the other hand, enigmas –usually involving several concurrent plotlines- are carried through multiple installments to be replaced by new ones in an overlapping pattern. The hermeneutic and proairetic codes, once engaged, incessantly propagate the narrative into further episodes. In its purest form, a serial narrative can continue indefinitely by eliminating narrative closure.

The divergent interaction of the series and the serial structures with hermeneutic/proairetic codes is revealed most visibly in the use of certain narrative devices, notably the cliffhanger and the denouement. Metaphorically named, the cliffhanger is a common occurrence in serials. It refers to the practice of ending the episodic narrative at the point when a (seemingly) kernel event takes place. Thus, the narrative is 'suspended' at a crucial point that anticipates further events arising from the cliffhanger but does not reveal them. The distinction of the event being a seeming kernel is made because serials often use misdirection in regards to the cliffhanger. That is, an event that appears to have great discursive significance is later revealed to be wholly inconsequential. Since the primary function of the cliffhanger is to ensure the consumption of subsequent episodes, the real

weight of the event is immaterial. It must simply appear to be critical to the plot, thereby ensuring the continuity of the hermeneutic and proairetic codes. Furthermore, while the episode's ending constitutes the biggest cliffhanger, each commercial break within a given episode is led into by lesser cliffhangers that ensure continued viewer attention across these breaks. It is important to note that the practice of suspending the narrative at critical points to resume after institutionalized breaks within an episode is common to all television texts.

While serials often conclude episodes on cliffhangers, series employ a narrative device referred to as denouement. Literally meaning ending in French, denouement is the final scene of an episode that takes place after the events have been concluded. Lasting no more than 1 or 2 minutes, it allows the narrative to 'cool down' and accords the characters commentary space. Thus, the hermeneutic and proairetic codes are effectively disengaged from the semic code for the duration of the break in narrative discourse, wiping the slate clean for the new episode. It should be noted that while the cliffhanger connotes a lack of resolution, the denouement is symptomatic of a relative conclusion.

1.2.3. Narrative Closure and the Use Of Character

The relation of the series and the serial to the proairetic and hermeneutic codes is interlinked with another principal point of difference between the two structures: the specific treatment of narrative closure. This statement should not be construed as a difference that arises out of the existence of closure. All television texts resist and eliminate narrative closure through their segmented and repetitive nature; the positioning of the televisual time in the 'now' which necessarily creates a persistent assumption of an imminent future; and the high degree of formulization which enables comfortable security in the text's propagation[52]. Rather, the difference lies in the degree to which narrative closure is resisted or displaced. Serials are relatively more simplistic in this respect. They operate over an endless string of plotlines arranged concomitantly, stretching into the infinite future. Because television in general and the serial in particular

relies heavily on a multiple number of characters and their dealings, the text cannot, reasonably, achieve closure. To clarify, each television text consists of a given group of individuals whose interactions form the heart of a narrative structure that spreads out through time, always situating itself in the 'now' and moving toward the future. Like life itself, such a narrative cannot be concluded in its entirety, only for specific characters unto death. As such, the text has no discursive target in totality and eliminates closure at the narrative level. Consequently, as Robert Allen states, "the absence of a final moment of narrative closure also indefinitely postpones any moment of final ideological or moral closure."[53]

The series form, on the other hand, has a slightly altered relation to narrative closure. Ellis' assertion that the series form is essentially the repetition of a basic problematic and, therefore, an elimination of narrative closure is accurate in the sense that the text refrains from providing a causal move across equilibria contrary to the parameters of the classical narrative format as outlined above by Fiske. Instead, rather than establishing a new equilibrium, the essence of the series constitutes a circular motion which returns the text to its initial state. While this progression may engender closure at the level of the plot, by recreating the initial state, it denies closure at the thematic level of the central problematic. The traditional sit-com, examples of which, in contemporary American television, include *Everybody Loves Raymond*[54] and the long running cartoon series *The Simpsons*[55], provides an archetype of the series form of narration and clearly demonstrates this layered treatment of closure.

1.2.3.1. The Sit-Com: Series Format in Comedy

In a typical episode of the sit-com, a problem is introduced at the beginning of the show, causing a disturbance in the established dynamics of the narrative. The problem usually revolves around a recognized fallacy of one of the characters. The disinterested father of the family may forget a wedding anniversary; a self-centered sister may volunteer her sibling's services –such as for a charity auction- without the other party's knowledge or consent; or an overbearing mother-in-law may insinuate herself to yet

another family affair. The episode proceeds to describe, through a chain of comical events, the fallout from this fallacy and the resulting reactions of the cast of characters that are part of the established narrative. Ultimately, the end of the episode restores order by treating the symptoms of upset: the husband buys an exorbitant gift to his wife; the sister makes a fool of herself to save her sibling; the mother-in-law is bested.

Markedly, the scenarios presented above are borne out of an inherent 'particularity' of the characters. This is often the case in a sit-com. Although the text transforms situations into comedy, these situations originate from the actual shortcomings of the characters. The husband is characteristically disinterested and always forgets important dates. The sister consistently self-centered and disregards the consequences of her actions for other people. The mother-in-law is always overbearing and critical of her son's wife. These 'particularities' are embedded in the characters, perpetual and very familiar to the audience to the point of defining the character. In effect, they are what Seymour Chatman refers to as 'traits'. Chatman defines the 'trait' as "a narrative adjective out of the vernacular labeling a personal quality of a character, as it persists over part or whole of the story […]."[56]

In addition, his discussion of character as an element of narrative, Chatman refers to E.M. Forster's distinction between 'round' and 'flat' characters and identifies the 'flat' character as being "endowed with a single trait – or very few."[57] As such, a 'flat' character is not capable of change. It cannot grow, or surprise the audience. This aspect of the 'flat' character is crucial to the success of the sit-com structure. Because sit-com characters are often 'flat', they do not have memories. They cannot learn from experience. Since the series form is essentially a repetition of a given problematic, the text must return to its initial state at the end of the episode. The 'flatness' of the characters enables this circular movement by eliminating the possibility of character growth. It is important to note that the material problem introduced at the beginning of the episodic narrative is resolved by the conclusion. The birthday is celebrated, the auction is a success and everyone forgives each other. However, since the flatness of the

characters precludes them from accumulating experience, the conclusion of the episodic narrative does not provide a moral, ethical or ideological closure. Instead, it re-establishes the initial *status quo* and enables the continuation of the series by creating the necessary conditions for the next episode.

1.2.3.2. Procedurals: Series Format in Drama

David Marc, in his study of television in American culture which takes the sit-com as its point of focus, states: "The TV crimeshow is a sit-com in which The Law is married to Chaos (*sic*),"[58] thus astutely establishing the structural and social parallelism between the crime drama and the sit-com. Marc's analysis dates back to early 1980s. Nonetheless, the analogy remains accurate in contemporary American television where the recently proliferating procedural dramas provide fine examples of the series format. 'Procedural' is a vernacular television term derived from the basic underlying concept of these shows. Principally set in any given area of law enforcement, procedural dramas follow an investigation (often criminal) to its conclusion. In the more prolific police procedurals, such as *Without a Trace*[59], this conclusion involves the apprehension, or at the very least the discovery, of the criminal. There have been examples of procedurals that are set in other work domains. The medical drama, *House*, for example, revolves around a group of doctors led by the misanthrope Doctor House, who specialize in diagnostic medicine. Each episode introduces a new patient/case whose mystery ailment must be diagnosed and consequently treated before the patient expires. The show is aware of its status as a procedural to such a degree, in fact, that when Dr. House is told that the patient is declining a new course of treatment suitable to her newly diagnosed condition, simply walks off saying "I solved the case. My work is done."[60]

The *Crime Scene Investigation* (*CSI*) franchise is a prime example of the procedural subgenre. The franchise consists of three separate shows, *CSI* (Las Vegas), *CSI: Miami* and *CSI: NY*, which share the same concept: A group of crime scene investigators[61], led by a white, middle-aged male,

investigates murder scenes to discover the identity of the perpetrator(s). Usually, each episode involves one or two murders. The episodes, almost unequivocally, start with the discovery of the crime/body. The choice to initiate the text at a point after the actual crime takes place is significant in terms of situating the primal equilibrium. The *status quo* is thus positioned at a point that establishes that not crime but the lack of its repercussions disrupts the 'normal'. The discovery of the murder triggers a causal link of events by acting as the 'proposal of the enigma' as it is outlined by Kaja Silverman in his discussion of Barthes' hermeneutic code[62]. Since procedurals, like most television texts, are highly formulaic, 'thematization' and the 'proposal of the enigma' are overlapping *morphemes* as well as foregone conclusions. Once the events are initiated, the text devotes substantial amounts of time to showing the investigative processes, hence the genre name. A regular episode will be composed primarily of interviews between the regular cast and guest appearances, which serve the 'whodunit' plot. These scenes are then interspersed with sequences of laboratory analysis heavily adorned with graphic imaging (CGI) that furnishes the camera with an intersomatic gaze. Each scene reveals an additional bit of information that ultimately leads to 'disclosure' – the final *morpheme* of the hermeneutic code.

The texts also employ 'snares' as well as 'jamming', often simultaneously and, more importantly, structured around commercial breaks, to further the narrative. In *CSI*, 'jamming' may appear as the death of a potential witness, the lack of a ballistics match for a newly recovered firearm or the discovery of an alibi for the prime suspect. Due to the nature of the plots, which depend, largely on information revealed through interviews to further their discourse, 'snare' often occurs as defined by "its circuit of destination by one character for another […]."[63] The medical procedural, *House*, also employs similar devices. This is made more interesting by the series' acknowledgement of the devices as a part of its narrative. In the second episode of the series, titled "Paternity", all treatment options fail as a result of what is revealed to be a voluntary deception

(snare) of the doctors by the parents of the patient regarding the fact that he is adopted.

This revelation corresponds with the final act of the series, leading to the resolution of the plot. It is important to note that hermeneutic morphemes in these examples function precisely in the counter-revelatory fashion as discussed by Barthes: "… the problem is to *maintain* the enigma in the initial void of its answer; […] the hermeneutic code […] must set up *delays* (obstacles, stoppages, deviations) in the flow of the discourse […]."[64] Ultimately, the series episodes almost invariably conclude with the discovery and/or apprehension of the criminal (or the recovery of the patient), returning the narrative to its initial equilibrium. As previously stated, this is at a point where crime (or illness) is not only possible but also predictable, thereby ensuring the subsequent repetition of the procedural formula. In the world of *CSI*, crime is the human condition and justice is served every week through computerized sterility, reinforcing a cultural code while remaining acceptably realistic.

As argued in the above, the reinstatement of the initial equilibrium is a mutual and key factor in both the sit-com and the procedural genre. It is through the circular movement of the narrative structure that the series format is enabled its repetitive nature. It is important to note once again that this repetitiveness does not necessarily eliminate narrative closure entirely as Ellis suggests. Rather, it recalibrates narrative progress toward a circular movement rather than a linear one, establishing a constant repetition. Thus, while the basic problematic of the text, be it an inherent character flaw or the predisposition of the society to crime, remains unresolved, the discourse through which the problematic is thematized does reach a conclusion. In other words, as Fiske astutely identifies, the circular treatment of narrative closure implies a layered structure of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axis where "the syntagmatic chain of events may reach a closure, but the paradigmatic oppositions of character and situation never can."[65]

The reaffirmation of the initial *status quo* through the sequence of events has led some theorists -notably David Grote and Horace Newcomb as

discussed by Feuer- to criticize the sit-com as providing what Horace Newcomb refers to as "a simple and reassuring problem/solution formula"[66] that allows the viewer to remain indifferent to any subversive assessment of cultural values. However, as Feuer points out in her analysis of the sit-com genre, the static and predominantly flat characters of the format also provide it with the potential for constructing politically progressive texts[67]. Since the 'flatness' of the characters hinders viewer identification, an alienation from the narrative -in the Brechtian- sense is facilitated, allowing the text to function as a satire.

Since the criticism of the sit-com format stems from the circular structure of the text, it can be applied in equal measure to other series-based formats such as the procedural drama. However, even shows such as *CSI* have increasingly moved away from very 'flat' characterizations. A parallel move is apparent in the world of sit-coms where examples such as *Scrubs*[68], *Arrested Development*[69] and, to some extent, *My Name is Earl*[70] incorporate elements of the series with continuous storylines. This dilution of the repetitive formula –a phenomenon referred to as "serialization" which will be discussed in greater detail below- also undermines the alienation value of the said texts. Indeed, it would be very difficult to argue on a politically progressive reading of the *CSI* franchise. The text's ideology, as personified by the white male leader of the group, is overwhelmingly conservative and consciously works to reiterate the hegemonic value system. Nonetheless, both *House* and, more notably, *Without a Trace*, which is a distinctly serial-influenced text, provide valuable alternatives to the overwhelming re-affirmative strategy of the *CSI* franchise.

1.2.3.3. The Serial Format

It has been argued in detail above that the series as a narrative form is defined by the 'flatness' of its characters, the placement of discursive closure at the point of the initial equilibrium which eliminates the possibility of attaining ideological closure, all of which enable the successful repetition of a basic formula that reiterates an essential problematic. The serial, on the other hand, consists of ongoing plotlines that propagate the hermeneutic and

proairetic codes and deny narrative closure. Because of its dominance in contemporary American television, the form warrants a closer scrutiny on its specifics, in terms of characterization and treatment of narrative closure, that sets it apart from classical narratives as well as the series structure.

First of all, it should be noted that all references to the serial form thus far have assumed an open structure where the narrative can continue indefinitely. However, there is an altered form of the serial form, the closed serial, which assumes an ultimate conclusion to the narrative. While closed serials prolong plotlines across episodes, the discourse moves towards a narrative closure. Brazilian *telenovelas* are premium examples of the closed serial. Unlike their American counterparts, these soap operas have a predetermined conclusion. The protagonistic couple is clearly established from the offset and all kernel events lead to their final reunification. The story, however, is told across a multitude of episodes with secondary plotlines stretching through the narrative. The American soap opera, an open serial form, on the other hand, systematically eliminates closure. The text does not identify a possibility of conclusion and operates on the assumption of infinite continuation. Although classified as a serial, the closed form resembles a filmic narrative more closely than a series because of its drive toward a moral as well as discursive closure. As such, the term serial will continue to be used exclusively for open serials throughout the course of this study.

Sarah Kozloff identifies two challenges serials are faced with in their endeavor to sustain continuous storylines in a fragmented narrative structure: "First, they must bring up to date viewers who do not usually watch the show or who have missed an episode […] Second, serials must generate enough viewer interest and involvement to survive their hiatus."[71] The cliffhanger, which was discussed in the context of the proairetic and hermeneutic codes, is the most prevalent solution the form utilizes for the second problem. The narrative device that is used to overcome the first problem is the 'previouslies'. These are very short and quick montage sequences that precede the actual episode, consisting of a montage of shots

from previous episodes that summarize background information. In primetime serials, these segments often include parts from a wide range of episodes, selected according to their relevance in the upcoming narrative[72].

Serials routinely shift their focus across storylines. Often at a given point in the ongoing creation of the text, one of the concurrent storylines will feature more prominently than the other storylines. This storyline will mostly involve the main character(s), stretching over any number of episodes until it runs its course. During this time, other plotlines may be sidelined or ignored completely. The teen soap opera, *One Tree Hill*[73], provides an industrial example[74]. Once Haley played by Bethany Joy Lenz and Nathan played by James Lafferty are established as a couple, their story arc is given a generous amount of screen time to develop. They go through a number of 'trials' until they get married. Jane Feuer, in her study of melodrama and serial form, states that serial marriages are doomed to failure because "happy marriage does not make for interesting plot complications."[75] True enough, although the reactions to their marriage lead to some furtive tensions in the text, several episodes into the second season, the plotline exhausts itself. The narrative then shifts its focus until screen time allotted to their arc is replaced by other storylines such as Keith's budding romance, Dan's recovery from his heart attack and Karen's business ventures. The Naley[76] arc is relegated to the background until Lenz' character leaves her husband behind to become a rock star. The story arc once more gains prominence as their marriage hits the rocks even though, curiously enough, the character of Haley is conspicuously absent from the show[77].

The shifting in significance of a given plotline, such as the Naley arc, can be traced in any serial storyline. Although the text in its entirety resists closure, individual storylines eventually exhaust their dramatic potential because they choke viewer interest by overly concentrating the hermeneutic morphemes in discursive time. Simply put, dwelling on the same story for too long means that too much happens in too short a time period, undermining verisimilitude. Since television depends to a great

extent on its perception as 'reality', the text cannot afford to sever such identification[78]. As a result, the text intermittently suspends certain storylines at a low-tension point until the hermeneutic code is refreshed. On the other hand, no single story arc can be left unaddressed for a long period of time lest it be forgotten. As a result, the narrative moves its components in a fluid start-stop motion that maintains a general coherence among all storylines while maintaining a degree of novelty.

1.2.4. Lack of Suspense, Storylines, Syntagmatic Axis

The differences between the narrative structures of the serial and the series in terms of their relation to narrative closure and the hermeneutic/proairetic codes have already been outlined. However, there exists a point of difficulty that persists for both forms, which should be addressed before concluding this chapter because of the effect it has on shaping televisual narration and its lack of 'suspense'. It is important to specify to what the word refers. In his discussion of suspense and surprise in classic narratives, Chatman argues that suspense is the result of the anxiety borne from the inability of the reader to communicate crucial information to the characters. This anxiety is engendered as a result of foreshadowing in classic texts, leading Chatman to conclude that "suspense always entails a lesser or greater degree of foreshadowing."[79] Since the main characters will physically survive the episode unscathed to appear in the subsequent one, however, there cannot be effective foreshadowing of legitimate material peril. Hence, the creation of suspense is severely undermined.

Suspense is further diluted by the high degree formulization and the recognition of the narrative structure by the viewer. American television is scheduled in half-hour and one-hour slots, depending on the content and genre of the text[80] with regularly timed commercial breaks spread throughout the narrative. This form is well recognized by the television audience. Commenting on the CBS procedural drama, *Numb3rs*[81], in an online article, a guest star and viewer, Bill Nye, remarks, "…because, after all, Charlie isn't always right. Especially at a quarter after 10. About 10:52, he's pretty dead-on."[82] His remarks echo a general sentiment. Regardless of

the genre in which a certain television text operates, the syntagmatic progression of events is precluded by the segmentation and continuation of the text. The televisual viewer is cognizant of the fact that a primetime show will begin at the start of the hour with a summary of the preceding episodes that is followed by a short segment that often introduces the primary plot of the episode and leads to the credit sequence. She knows that the narrative will be interrupted three more times for commercial breaks, each time ending on a minor cliffhanger and that any potential resolutions before the final commercial break are contrived diversions to further the narrative. The list continues but the conclusion remains that television narrative is "highly formulaic"[83] and recognizable, eliminating uncertainty to a very great extent.

According to Kozloff, "ongoing, scripted, fictional television narratives have learned to compensate for their lack of suspense by proliferating storylines."[84] This compensation is particularly prevalent in serials, which unexceptionally contain two or more story arcs. The presence of multiple storylines, in turn, allows the serial form fluid movement between these storylines. Scenes involving one arc are followed by another from an entirely different arc. For example, the second season of *Veronica Mars* has two main mystery arcs. The first one involves a stabbing which takes place during the events of the first season's finale and is centered on the characters Logan Echolls and Eli Navarro. The second and larger mystery is focused on the school bus crash, from which the protagonist *Veronica Mars* escapes by sheer luck, and which takes place at the end of the first episode of the season. Each episode of the season contains a measure of progress on both of these mysteries that is further complimented by an episode-specific plot[85]. As a result, the episodic narrative constantly moves back and forth between the three plotlines, intercutting scenes relating to each of them with others.

The final result of this constant move across plotlines is a shift in the viewer's focus from the syntagmatic progress of each individual plotline to the paradigmatic interactions within multiple storylines. Robert Allen

observes, in relation to the American primetime soap opera format, that these texts "trade an investment in syntagmatic determinacy […] for one in paradigmatic complexity […]."[86] Nonetheless, as Kozloff also argues, his observations are applicable to most television narratives, which "displace audience interest [...] from the flow of events per se to the revelation and development of existents."[87]

It should be noted that the emphasis on existents is greater in serials than series; the former of which ignore narrative closure to a greater extent than the latter, which maintain a certain level of syntagmatic determinacy in their drive to return to the initial *status quo*. As a result, the former's manner of characterization differs from the latter's. While series' characters are more often 'flat', the serial must embody 'round' characters that can carry the weight of narrative focus without the aid of episode-specific plotlines. Silverman states, "The qualities which constitute a character emerge gradually, over the course of the story, and seemingly under the pressure of the reader's investigation."[88] Because serials stretch over an indeterminate time and their story arcs are constructed almost exclusively around characters, they provide the optimal narrative structure for high characterization, which relies, unlike the series, on entertaining character memories.

The arguments provided above outline a structure wherein television texts resist narrative closure. Even the discursive closure provided by the series structure defies contextual closure by reinstating the initial problematic. That is, as Fiske states, "however completely the plot of one episode is closed off, the situation never is."[89] In addition, there is strong shift of narrative focus from the syntagmatic to the paradigmatic axis. These structural specifics invoke a textual classification which was proposed by Roland Barthes.

1.3. Television: The Writerly Text

Narrative theory has identified two broad categories of texts. Although a similar distinction is also discussed by Umberto Eco –regarding open and closed texts-, the terms as defined by Barthes will be used in this

study. Referred to as 'writerly' and 'readerly', these categories define the engagement and type of reading activity the text encourages with its receptor. Silverman, in his discussion of the 'readerly' text, states: "The readerly text often foregrounds its own stylistic operations as a means of deflecting attention away from the more broadly cultural pressures at work upon it."[90] There is a strong emphasis on homogeneity in the 'readerly' text. It works to move the reader toward a pre-determined, *a priori* signified at the expense of distancing the reader or viewer from its own signifiers. The 'writerly' text, on the other hand, is born from the excess of meaning that is inherent in any text, regardless of how 'readerly' it may be. Referencing Barthes' S/Z, Silverman notes:

> The writerly text promotes an infinite play of signification; in it there can be no transcendental signified, only provisional ones which function in turn as signifiers. It thus denies the possibility of closure. The writerly text has no syntagmatic order, but can be 'entered' at any point. […] The writerly text replaces the concepts of 'product' and 'structure' with those of 'process' and 'segmentation'.[91]

While this definition indicates the television text to exist within the plane of the 'writerly' rather than the 'readerly', it is important to note that such an identification may be misleading. Barthes' concepts are elements of classical narrative theory. Television texts, on the other hand, are not. Chapter 3 will undertake a more detailed argument on the subject and will introduce the concept of the 'producerly' text as identified by John Fiske[92]. Since Fiske bases his analysis on Barthes' concepts, this brief discussion of the 'writerly' text provides the necessary groundwork.

This chapter has endeavored to outline the basic narrative characteristics of television, in particular those of the hour-long television fiction format to which *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Veronica Mars* and *Angel* belong. As a result of the polysemous nature of the medium, the presence of widely varying genres, aims, source material and content, the interplay of opposing tensions that work upon its texts and the dependence on the tools of filmic narrative theory –with its presupposition of closure-, it is virtually

impossible and grossly ineffective to construct a broad and inclusive narrative theory of television although both Raymond Williams and John Ellis provide valuable starting points.

Ellis' conceptualization of the segment as the basic building block of television narration is especially significant in understanding the medium's relation to narrative closure. Unlike most narratives, television texts eschew narrative closure in favor of perpetuity. A successful television show can theoretically go on forever without ever offering its viewers an true moment of closure. Narrative closure also presents the primary point of difference between the two main narrative formats in television: the serial and the series. The latter often adopts a certain degree of classic narrativity through its use of episodic plotlines that are concluded at the end of the episode to revert the narrative back to the initial status quo. The former, on the other hand, carries several plotlines through episodes and constructs story arcs. Another difference between the two forms is in the manner of characterization. While serials rely on round characters that foreground the semic code to present a unity across episodes for continuing storylines, series often employ flat characters that operate as functional semes, which allow the proairetic and hermeneutic codes to be engaged anew at the beginning of each episode without creating a direct link between the cultural and semic codes. Despite the differences between series and serials in their use of narrative devices and elements, however, contemporary American television has witnessed an increasing blurring of the boundaries between the two forms. This blurring is clearly apparent in the structure of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel* and *Veronica Mars*, which embody different elements of both forms. The following chapter will discuss the particulars of this phenomenon and provide a detailed discussion in terms of the texts of these three shows.

Notes to Chapter 1:

1. Television scheduling is often divided into two time periods consisting of 'daytime' and 'primetime'. These distinctions roughly denote the periods from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and 8 p.m. to 11 p.m. Needless to say, as a function of available viewers, programming varies greatly from daytime to primetime scheduling, especially as a result of the presence of the workforce in the viewing public during the latter period.
2. *Desperate Housewives*, ABC, 2004 -.
3. *The O.C.*, Fox Network, 2003 -.
4. *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, CBS, 2000 -.
CSI: Miami, CBS, 2002 -.
CSI: NY, CBS, 2004 -.
5. The franchise includes the original *Star Trek* series featuring Captain Kirk as well as the later installments *Star Trek: The Next Generation, Star Trek: Voyager, Star Trek: Deep Space 9* and *Star Trek: Enterprise*.
6. I have depended on Sarah Kozloff's arguments in her article "Narrative Theory in Television", regarding the presence of narrative influence on a variety of television programming. The article also provides further references from specific works.
7. Sarah Kozloff, "Narrative Theory and Television," *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism*, Ed. Robert C. Allen (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), p.68.
8. John Corner, *Critical Ideas in Television Studies* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.61.
9. Corner, *Critical Ideas in Television Studies*, p.62.
10. Corner, *Critical Ideas in Television Studies*, p.63.
11. Corner, *Critical Ideas in Television Studies*, p.61.
12. The theory of flow and critical discussions on the subject are beyond the scope of this study. Nonetheless, John Corner's book *Critical Ideas in Television Studies*, provides an in-depth discussion of the theory of flow as well as a historical account of counter-arguments including work by John Ellis and John Fiske and may be consulted for further reference.
13. David McQueen, *TV: A Media Student's Guide* (London, New York: Arnold Publishers, 1998).
14. John Fiske, "The Cultural Economy of Fandom," *Adoring Audiences: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (Florence, KY: Routledge, 1992), p.30-49.
See also:
Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination,* Trans. Della Couling (London, New York: Routledge, 1996).
Nancy K. Baym, *Tune In, Log On: Soaps, Fandom and Online Community* (London and Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi, India: Sage Publications, 2000).
15. David Morley, "Television and Gender," *Television: The Critical View,* Ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.478.
16. John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video*, (New York: Routledge, 1982; 1992), p.148.

17. Ellis, *Visible Fictions,* p.153.
18. Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, p.154.
19. Sit-com is the abbreviated vernacular television term for the situation comedy genre. A typical sit-com is allotted a 30-minute time slot including commercials.
20. Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, p.130.
21. Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, p.132.
22. Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, p.132.
23. Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, p.159.
24. Aristotle, *Poetics*, Trans. Butcher.
25. John Fiske, *Television Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1987; 2002), p.180.
26. Jane Feuer, "Melodrama, Serial Form and Television Today," *Television: The Critical View*, Ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976; 1994), p.558.
27. *Two Guys, a Girl and a Pizza Place*, ABC, 1998-2001.
28. Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), p.19.
29. Kozloff, "Narrative Theory and Television," p.68.
30. Fiske, *Television Culture*, p.84.
31. Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, 170.
32. Betsy Williams, "'North to the Future': *Northern Exposure* and Quality Television," *Television: The Critical View* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976; 1994), p.142.
33. The exception is state-sponsored and un-commercial programming such as the NPR in the USA and TRT4 in Turkey.
34. C.M. Condit, "The Rhetorical Limits of Polysemy," *Television: The Critical View* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976; 1994), p.434.
35. Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, p.128.
36. Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, p.122.
37. Kozloff, "Narrative Theory and Television," p.90
38. John T. Caldwell, "Welcome to the Viral Future of Cinema (Television)." *Cinema Journal* 45, No.1, Fall 2005.
39. Roger Hagedorn, "Doubtless to Be Continued: A Brief History of Serial Narrative," *To Be Continued… Soap Operas Around the World*, Ed. Robert C. Allen (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p.28-9.
40. A crossover is a special television event consisting of characters from two different shows making guest appearances in the other series during a two episode-plot line. The episodes often air on the same night in consecutive timeslots although this is not compulsory.
41. *Law and Order*, NBC, 1990 -.
Law and Order: Special Victims Unit, NBC, 1999-.
Law and Order: Criminal Intent, NBC, 2001-.
Law and Order: Trial by Jury, NBC, 2005.
42. Corner, *Critical Ideas in Television Studies.*
43. Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, p.123.
44. *Days of Our Lives*, NBC, 1965 - .

45. *All My Children*, ABC, 1970 -.
46. *Telford's Change*, BBC, 1979.
47. Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, p.124.
48. Kozloff, "Narrative Theory and Television," p.91.
49. *House M.D.*, Fox Network, 2004 -.
50. The collection of essays in *To Be Continued… Soap Operas Around the World* provide a valuable resource. Citation is provided in the attached bibliography.
51. Though my conclusions differ to some extent from his, I am indebted to Roger Hagedorn's brief look at the proairetic and hermeneutic codes for this analysis.
52. John Fiske's argument on televisual narratives in *Television Culture* provides a valuable discussion of the status of television in the 'now' of the viewer. Because closure is eliminated, the future remains uncertain, transforming the narrative from a pre-recorded experience to a 'current reality'. This fact also reinforces the understanding of television as reality in contrast to cinema as fiction as discussed by Schoeffter.
Fiske, *Television Culture,* pp.144-8.
Conrad Schoeffter, "Scanning the Horizon: A Film is a Film is a Film," *Cinema Futures: Cain, Abel or Cable?* Ed. Thomas Elsaesser and Kay Hoffman (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1998), p.113.
53. Robert C. Allen, Introduction, *To Be Continued… Soap Operas Around the World*, Ed. Robert C. Allen (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p.21.
54. *Everybody Loves Raymond*, CBS, 1996-2005.
55. *The Simpsons*, Fox Network, 1989 -.
56. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, p.125.
57. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, p.132.
58. David Marc, *Demographic Vistas: Television in American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), p.69.
59. *Without a Trace*, CBS, 2002 -.
60. "Pilot," *House*, CBS, 16 November 2004.
61. The Crime Scene Investigation unit, as established by the text, is a subdivision of the police force that specializes in evidence analysis.
62. Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (Oxford University Press, 1983), p.257-62.
63. Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, p.260.
64. Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, p.257. Italics in original.
65. Fiske, *Television Culture*, p.145.
66. Jane Feuer, "Genre Study and Television," *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism*, Ed. Robert C. Allen (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987; 1992), p.148.
67. Feuer, "Genre Study and Television," p.138-60.
Feuer's analysis relies heavily on David Marc's study of the sit-com form in his book cited above. Marc provides an in-depth and quintessential study of

American television, especially the sit-com genre, during the 'Quality TV' years of the 1980s.
68. *Scrubs*, NBC, 2001 -.
69. *Arrested Development*, Fox Network, 2003-2006.
70. *My Name Is Earl*, NBC, 2005 -.
71. Kozloff, "Narrative Theory and Television," p.91-2.
72. Primetime serials in Turkish television often only use bits from the last episode that aired. Although it remains outside the scope of this paper, I would like to comment that contemporary primetime television programming in Turkey is strongly influenced by the closed serial structure, differing only in the fact that the number of episodes is not predetermined at the outset of the text. Nonetheless, the lack of memory exhibited by producers in these texts remains aggravating.
73. *One Tree Hill*, WB, 2003 -.
74. *One Tree Hill*, also known as OTH, revolves around two half brothers, their father, mothers, friends and significant others. As per its genre, the plotlines are a maze of dramatic events. Though it is almost impossible to account for every plot development that has taken place in two seasons, I will try to briefly outline the main events. For further information, numerous fan websites as well as TV.com are available with in-depth episode summaries.
The show starts with Lucas joining the school's basketball team, which is captained by his half brother Nathan. They were both fathered by Dan Scott who left his pregnant high school sweetheart –Karen- to go to college on a basketball scholarship where he gets Deb pregnant and marries her. The antagonism between brothers is aggravated by the fact that Nathan's then-girlfriend Peyton starts showing an interest in Lucas who is also being coveted by Peyton's best friend Brooke while Nathan starts dating his brother's best friend Haley as a comeback. Lucas and Peyton are a couple, then Brooke and Lucas is a couple, then Peyton and Lucas is a couple again but Brooke does not know about it. Then, Lucas gets in a car accident with his uncle and surrogate father Keith that breaks Keith and Karen up. In the mean time, Dan and Deb's marriage falls apart; Nathan is emancipated and moves out. Deb and Keith sleep together, leading Dan to have a heart attack. Nathan and Haley get married to have sex. Thus ends the first season.
During the second season, very briefly, Haley leaves Nathan to become a rock star and he crashes a racecar to a wall. Dan gets his revenge on Keith by making him fall in love with a woman he is paying to jilt him at the altar. Lucas gets a heart condition, realizes he is in love with Brooke and decides to get closer to his father to stop him from hurting people. In the end, someone tries to burn Dan alive while Haley comes back.
It should be stated that Nathan and Haley are the canonical couple for the show's fandom. Dubbed 'Naley', their relationship is almost unanimously supported and easily constitutes the starring coupling despite the fact that the main character of the series is Lucas.
75. Feuer, "Melodrama, Serial Form and Television Today," p.559.
76. 'Naley' is a *fannish* nickname for the Nathan/Haley coupling.

77. In an ingenious marketing move, the show's producers organized a concert tour involving musicians whose tracks had appeared on the series. While the character of Haley Scott is away on tour in the narrative, the actress who plays her was also performing for the OTH tour across the United States.
78. Television's dependence on being perceived as reality is discussed in great detail by Ellis in *Visible Fictions*, Fiske in *Television Culture* and Schoeffter in "Scanning the Horizon." All three works are cited in the attached bibliography.
79. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, p.60.
80. Sit-coms and game shows often take 30-minute time slots while news programming and drama series take 60-minute slots. Exceptions occur in such cases as films broadcast on television and live broadcasts.
81. *Numb3rs*, CBS, 2005 -.
82. Katie O'Hare, "'The Science Guy' Counts on 'Numb3rs'," *Zap2it*, 13 December 2005.
83. Kozloff, "Narrative Theory and Television," p.72.
84. Kozloff, "Narrative Theory and Television," p.74.
85. In colloquial speech, these subplots are referred to as B-plots or the 'Monster-of-the-Week' (MotW).
86. Allen, "Introduction", p.8.
87. Kozloff, "Narrative Theory and Television," p.75.
88. Silverman, *Subject of Semiotics*, p.253.
89. John Fiske, "Moments of Television: Neither the Text nor the Audience," *Remote Control: Television, Audiences and Cultural Power*, Ed. Ellen Seiter, Hans Borchers, Gabriele Kreutzner, Eva-Maria Warth (London, New York: Routledge, 1989;1992), p.69.
90. Silverman, *Subject of Semiotics*, p.243-4.
91. Silverman, *Subject of Semiotics*, p.247.
92. Fiske, *Television Culture*, p.95-9.

Chapter 2: Serialization and Hybrid Structures

Having distinguished between the structural differences of the series and the serial in the previous chapter, a cursory look at contemporary American television dramas reveals that most shows combine different measures of episode-centricisim with continuous storylines. While canonical daytime soap operas and old-school sit-coms still provide examples of the two forms, as a result of what Jane Feuer refers to as the "serialization" of the series, it has become increasingly more difficult to find pure examples of these structures in contemporary American television, especially within primetime programming[1]. Furthermore, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Veronica Mars* and *Angel* provide a very specific example of the new hybrid structure. This chapter will first discuss serialization in general, and then attempt to outline the structural specifics of the aforementioned hybrid form through a discussion of *Veronica Mars* and the fifth season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

2.1. Serialization: Blending Forms

Feuer points to *Cheers!*[2] –1980s sit-com centered around a group of adults who frequent a Boston sports bar that gives its name to the series- to exemplify this phenomenon whereby traditionally series-structured television shows incorporate ongoing storylines into their texts to create story arcs across episodes. More up to date examples from the same genre are *Frasier*[3], which was a spin-off of *Cheers!*, *Scrubs*, and as previously mentioned, *Arrested Development*. Although these shows honor the 30-minute sit-com structure, they embody certain serial characteristics such as continuous storylines and high characterization as well as employing the serial device of the cliffhanger. *Frasier*, for example, nurtured one particular secondary story arc throughout its run: The unrequited lustful attraction the title character's brother, Niles, felt toward the live-in nurse Daphne slowly progressed throughout the course of the series into a love affair that ended in

marriage and children. Both *Scrubs* and *Arrested Development* construct their narratives on character-specific story arcs such as Elliot Reid's dysfunctional relationships with men in *Scrubs* and the incestuous infatuation between George Michael and Maeby in *Arrested Development*.

It is possible to trace character arcs across episodes in drama series such as procedurals, as well. One example of this is the blossoming relationship of Gil Grissom and Sara Sidle from *CSI*. Although the series concludes every major episode plot within its allotted time of 40 to 42 minutes, the relationship arcs carry across the seasons. Another example from the same series is the development of the character of Nick Stokes. In the highly publicized and critically acclaimed 5th season finale that aired on May 19, 2005, the character was buried alive in a glass coffin while the CSI team rushes to discover his whereabouts[4]. The 6th season has seen the character try to work through the fallout of his encounter with death while episodic plotlines have allowed him to 'work out his issues'. *Without A Trace* routinely foregrounds character arcs, going so far as to construct an entire episode around the main character's dysfunctional life.

It is important to note that Feuer's concept of serialization assumes a unilateral move from the series to the serial structure with continuous storylines exerting a heavier influence on television narrative than stand-alone, episodic plots. However, contemporary television has also witnessed a reverse flow from the serial to the series. While genres that have previously been associated exclusively with the series format, such as the sit-com, have become increasingly serialized, it is possible to find examples among television shows predominantly structured as serials employing series-based structural tools.

A *bona fide* primetime soap opera, *Desperate Housewives*, for example, earmarks each episode's beginning and end with a voice-over from the narrator, the deceased housewife Mary Alice. Though the main storylines stretch interminably to an unforeseen future, these voice-overs encapsulate episode-specific subplots –B-plots- that resemble the series structure. Although these subplots are linked to the main plotlines, they

exhibit a certain degree of independent unity of action and theme. Each episode presents a specific problematic at its opening narration, which is then expounded upon through the experiences of the five leading female characters. While the events of the episode further the existing storylines, the episode-specific subplots also present internal narrative coherence. At the conclusion of each episode, these subplots, through their interaction with the main storylines, carry each character's personal dilemmas to a new plane, moving the primary storylines along. The episode also sustains a classic narrative move from one state of equilibrium to the next by thematizing the events of the episode through the use of the voice-over narration. It should be noted that the narrative of the series does not depend upon the voice-overs for its functionality. Since the subplots of each episode are connected to the main story arcs, the hermeneutic process can operate independent of Mary Alice's monologues. However, by neatly providing a thematic unity for each episode, these voice-overs present an additional meta-narrative that garnishes the text.

Desperate Housewives also breaks from the structure of the archetypal soap opera, and therefore the serial, by virtue of its use of the denouement in the form of the concluding voice-over. Although the show does employ cliffhangers for each individual plotline, often, they are not paralleled in the visual. That is, although each plotline is interrupted at a critical point, these interruptions are not underlined by the closing shot of a close-up of a stricken face or an equally dramatic framing that is held for a beat longer than is natural for added effect before the conclusion of the episode. The effect of the series structure on serials can be traced in other shows, as well. *The O.C.* routinely uses a social event (ball, homecoming, charity function etc.) to ground its episodic narrative. In fact, these events often achieve enough prominence to lead to metonymic nicknames for certain episodes such as 'the homecoming episode' or 'the prom episode'.

2.2. Hybrid Structures: *Buffy* and *Veronica Mars*

While most television texts incorporate elements of both structures to sustain their narratives, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel*, and *Veronica*

Mars present a highly developed hybrid of the series and the serial forms which operates over a 5-act structure; combines episode-specific plots with a season-long story arc and multiple plotlines surrounding specific characters; sustains high characterization and alternates in its use of denouement and cliff-hangers. This hybrid format facilitates the creation of fan cultures surrounding the texts to a greater extent than its predecessors do. The matter of fandoms and television narratives' role in their creation will be discussed in the following chapter. However, prior to that and as this study is particularly concerned with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars*, their narrative style deserves closer scrutiny.

2.2.1. Types of Story Arcs

The previous chapter has stated that serials often shift their narrative focus arbitrarily across multiple storylines to sustain interest and vitality. Looking at the narratives of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel*, and *Veronica Mars* reveals a varying structure of coherence among the plotlines. Unlike traditional serials whose story arcs have alternating discursive times, these shows identify one primary seasonal arc that spans the entire year. All other episodic plotlines exist concurrently, and often subservient, to this arc, which has a clear syntagmatic progression. In the case of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, this primary storyline revolves around one grand enemy, often colloquially referred to as the 'Big Bad'. The 'big bad' plotline provides the primary story arc for the season. Each season is self-contained in terms of its adherence to this story arc. For the first season, the 'Big Bad' is the Master. The second season's 'big bad' starts out as the vampiric duo Spike and Drusilla but later transforms into Angelus. In the third season the Mayor and the fourth season, Adam and the Initiative are the 'Big Bad'. The fifth season deals with Glory. The sixth season establishes the growing addiction of Willow to magic early on, aided by the hints regarding the extent of her powers in the previous season, but thwarts attention to the 'geek trio' before finally identifying Willow as the 'Big Bad'. The seventh and final season's arch villain is The First. Kernel events related to this arc are scattered across

the episodes, furthering the narrative, until the hermeneutic code achieves conclusion by the defeat of the 'Big Bad'.

The seasonal arc is complimented with two types of story arcs: those involving specific characters and episode-specific plotlines. The latter of these is, as previously discussed, a feature of the series structure. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has spawned a vernacular television term for these secondary plots, referred to as the 'Monster-of-the-Week' (MotW), which encapsulates the redundancy and formulaic nature of the narrative device very appropriately. The character arcs, on the other hand, are firmly entrenched in the serial structure that invests heavily in characterization. They often extend across seasons and run their own course until, like the *One Tree Hill* example, they exhaust their dramatic potential and are put on backburner. Any given episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* blends varying degrees of these three story arcs types with the scenes alternating among them. A careful look at the 5th season of the show, with a detailed examination of the season premiere to underline the flow between different story arcs, will provide helpful in demonstrating the machinations of this hybrid form.

2.2.2. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: Season 5

The season's first episode, aptly titled "Buffy vs. Dracula"[5] for the identity of the MotW, opens as Buffy lies in bed with her boyfriend, Riley. She appears restless and eventually sneaks away from bed to 'hunt'. She fights and kills a vampire in a scene that conveys her thrilled relief. The teaser ends as Buffy returns to lie next to Riley, peacefully closing her eyes as we get a glimpse of the scar on her neck. The scar is significant because of the timing of its appearance. It belongs to a bite she received from Angel at the end of the third season when she convinced him to drink her blood to heal himself from a fatal poison. It has been largely invisible during the fourth season, which emphasizes its status as a symbol of Buffy's discontent and agitation. Thus, instead of immediately establishing the MotW, the teaser works to convey a general mood of restlessness and, by placing Riley and Angel's bite mark in the same shot, it also takes the first step toward

setting up the driving problematic of the season for Buffy: the meaning of being a slayer.

After the teaser, the episode continues along a standard MotW formula. At the end of the second act, Dracula is introduced. Third and fourth acts essentially serve the hermeneutic code and delay the inevitable defeat of Dracula, which takes place during the fifth and final act. However, immediately following the teaser, during a scene that shows the 'Scooby gang' enjoying a summer day on the beach, Willow's increasing powers as a Wicca are revealed when she bursts a barbecue to flames. Although inconsequential to the syntagmatic discourse of the episode, this scene refers to a character-based story arc that will feature increasingly more prominently until Willow transforms into the 'Big Bad' during the sixth season. The next scene then introduces the MotW (without properly identifying him): In the following scene, the narrative focus shifts once more back to another character arc, this time involving Giles: After losing his job both as a librarian and as a watcher at the end of the third season, Giles becomes increasingly destitute regarding his value. The arc extends through the course of the fourth season, rehashed at intervals, and carries into this episode where it is finally resolved. Similar to the beach scene, this is remarkably noncontributing to the hermeneutic of the episode. It essentially works to reveal Giles' mood and the fact that he is planning to leave Sunnydale. This sub-plot will be resolved at the end of the episode. At the conclusion of the scene, the narrative switches again to the Summers house where Buffy and her mother are having dinner. The true purpose of this domestic scene for the season arc can only be determined *ex post facto*. However, it does re-familiarize the viewer with yet another character-based arc concerning Joyce, Buffy's mother, and her growing lack of purpose in Buffy's universe. The final scene of the act finally returns to the MotW arc and identifies Dracula.

The rest of the episode continues in a similar fashion, interspersing scenes involving the episodic plotline with character-based story arcs. Since the episode must also reacquaint the viewers with all unresolved, serial-

based storylines that have carried over from the previous season, there is a relatively balanced distribution of the discursive time. The seasonal plot, the third layer of story lines, is not introduced until the final minutes of the episode. Before this, however, true to the series-based MotW formula, a denouement scene involving Buffy and Giles follows the defeat of Dracula. In the scene, Buffy, following her character arc, asks Giles to aid her in her quest to discover the meaning of being a slayer. This, in turn, moves the character arc of Giles forward by re-establishing his position of wise authority and resolving the sub-plot introduced at the beginning of the episode.

It is the final 30 seconds of the episode that shifts the narrative to an altogether different plane. Cutting back to the Summers house, which has already been visited twice during the episode, the camera shows that Buffy is about to go out. She passes in front of an open door, which reveals a young girl. After Buffy's rather ambiguous "What are you doing here?" directed to the girl, it cuts to Joyce who says, "If you're going out, why don't you take your sister?" The episode ends on a spectacular cliffhanger as both girls exclaim in complaint. Needless to say, Buffy has not had a sister until that point in the show's constructed universe. Furthermore, this sister is conspicuously absent from the rest of the episode and the scenes that take place in the Summers home, clearly establishing her sudden appearance as the potential 'Big Bad'. Through a 30 second scene, the narrative is transformed from a conventional MotW episode to a multilayered text that acts as a prelude to the rest of the season; rendering the Dracula plotline a tool to establish the characters' storylines for the year.

The text waits three episodes –approximately one month in terms of original air dates- before readdressing the burning question of Dawn's origins although the second episode, "Real Me"[6] functions as an introduction of the character to the viewer. The intervening episodes balance a MotW plotline with character arcs that investigate, among others, Riley's growing alienation from Buffy, Xander's efforts to improve on his dismal life, Tara's secretive timidity, Giles' newfound lust for life and, most

importantly, Joyce's growing illness. It is in "No Place Like Home"[7], which initially entertains Buffy's and our suspicion regarding Dawn's possible villainy, that the viewer is introduced to the 'Big Bad' of the season and the mystery of Dawn's sudden appearance is solved.

From this point until the last four episodes of the season when episode-specific plots are almost entirely abandoned, the narrative continues to balance character arcs with MotW plots and the season arc. For example, the ninth episode of the season, "Listening to Fear"[8] deals with an extraterrestrial demon who feeds on the life force of mentally ill people. The episode establishes the demon as a MotW and follows the standard series formula for the resolution of this particular plotline. However, having already established 'crazy people' as having a peculiar insight to the identity of Dawn as the Key, the episode uses the MotW device to reveal Dawn's origins to Joyce. Furthermore, the extraterrestrial origin of the demon enables the re-introduction of the military to the narrative; enabling Riley's departure from the show several episodes later. Finally, the MotW allows the narrative to establish a direct link between Ben and Glory, a kernel event in the progress of the seasonal plotline.

2.2.3. *Veronica Mars*: Season 1

This interaction between different levels of story arcs can be traced not only in other episodes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* but *Veronica Mars*, as well. Currently broadcasting its second season, *Veronica Mars* is a teen drama with a heavy tint of the *noir*. At the start of the narrative, Veronica is ostracized by her peers who are often openly hostile towards her[9]. The first episode of the show immediately identifies the seasonal plotline: the whodunit plot of Lilly Kane's murder. However, while Lilly's murder is fore grounded as the season mystery[10], the pilot also establishes secondary mystery plots, which are then carried through the season and which include Veronica's rape and the whereabouts of Lianne, Veronica's mother.

In addition to the season mysteries, the pilot episode presents a very dominant character-based story arc for Veronica whose quest for the truth of Lilly's murderer acts as a vehicle for her character's gradual re-entry into

society[11]. This story arc is complimented in subsequent episodes with character-based plotlines and MotW plots revolving around cases Veronica investigates. For example, the plotline involving Logan's escapades as a 'sports organizer' in the sixth episode "Return of the Kane"[12], introduces his character arc regarding his physical abuse at the hands of his father and the dysfunction of his family. Logan organizes 'bum fights' among homeless men for his friends among the affluent youth of Neptune which are videotaped by one of the spectators. When these fights are leaked to the press, his father forces Logan to attend a publicity stunt involving dispensing food at the nearest homeless shelter. While there, disgusted by his father's apparent corruption of morals, Logan volunteers half a million dollars to charity in his father's name, instigating a lashing by a leather belt upon their return to the house. While the significance of this particular episode for the character's development as a 'woobie' will be discussed in the subsequent chapters, it is important to note that Logan's story arc plays a very significant role in the hermeneutic progression of the seasonal arc by lending itself to the semic construction of Aaron Echolls who is revealed as the killer in the season finale titled "Cheaty Cheaty Bang Bang"[13].

Each episode's narrative consists of varying blends of the season mystery arcs, the MotW plotline and the character arcs. The interaction of different levels of plotlines, as outlined above in the discussions of "Listening to Fear" and "Buffy Vs. Dracula" (BtVS) is easily observed in *Veronica Mars* as well. For example, in the fourth episode of the season, "The Wrath of Con"[14], the MotW, which has Veronica, working to unveil a fraud plot is given approximately 22 minutes of screen time – almost half of the episode's duration. The rest of the narrative focuses on the secondary character-based plotlines involving Veronica's relationship with Troy and Logan's efforts to make a Lilly tribute video. Like "Buffy vs. Dracula", "The Wrath of Con" does not ponder on the seasonal arc until the end of the narrative when a single shot of Weevil crying is inserted into the tribute sequence[15]. With a single, eight second shot, a previous relationship between the biker and the murdered girl is established that will contribute to

the hermeneutic code for the Lily murder arc in subsequent episodes. In this instance, while the MotW plotline is relatively independent of other layers of story arcs, the text does use Logan's story line to reveal a 'snare' in the hermeneutic code of the season mystery regarding Weevil as well as using it as a satellite event for the impending love affair between Logan and Veronica.

As stated, the MotW plotline in the above example is relatively isolated from the character-based and seasonal story arcs. This is not necessarily a consistent case. The twentieth episode, titled "M.A.D."[16], constructs its narrative on a MotW arc following the efforts of Veronica to prevent a scorned boyfriend from releasing a compromising video of his girlfriend –who wants to break up with him- to the entire school. Although the plotline is cohesive in and of itself, it is also subservient to the seasonal mysteries and functions as a kernel event in the arc of Veronica's rape by revealing that the video was shot at the same time as the rape and that Logan was the supplier of the drugs that led to both girls' predicaments. The next episode, "A Trip to the Dentist"[17], involves Veronica's investigation regarding her rape, transforming a secondary seasonal plot into a MoTW.

Angel's first season provides another example where one story layer is subjugated to another. The tenth episode, titled "Hero", revolves around an episode-specific plot involving a Nazi-like group of demon purists –the Scourge- who are hunting mixed breeds –demons who have human blood-. The MotW follows a traditional progression along the hermeneutic code to its resolution. Running parallel to this plotline however, a character-based arc involving Doyle is introduced[18]. Aligning the emergence of Doyle's visions with his first encounter with the Scourge links the character's plotline with the episode-specific plot. Furthermore, the narrative creates a thematic problematic surrounding Doyle's reluctance to act on his moral principles. At the conclusion of the episode, Doyle sacrifices his life to save the demons from the Scourge, submitting the MotW plotline to the character's story arc. The episode also acts a as a key point in the progress

of the show's narrative by providing the kernel event that enables the transfer of the visions to Cordelia.

It should be noted that, unlike the examples of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Veronica Mars*, *Angel* is decidedly less concentrated on a traditional seasonal arc that will be concluded at the end of the year. For example, the first season of the show mainly works to establish Wolfram and Hart as the archrivals Angel and company. Although the season ends with a minor triumph for Angel, however, the 'Big Bad' is not defeated. The second season continues to juxtapose Angel with Wolfram and Hart but the season's 'Big Bad' is Darla and Angel's own desolation regarding the worthiness of his mission. In the third season, while the character of Holtz is established as the main adversary, not only is he not defeated but the threat he poses within the discourse is eventually overtaken by Wesley's character arc. The most cohesive seasonal arcs belong to the fourth and fifth seasons. The former creates a blend of the 'Big Bad' –as personified by Jasmine-, character arcs and minor MotW plots. However, in this case, the MotW plots are often functions of the seasonal arc in that they are related to the seasonal arc in terms of the fabula, rather than being isolated stories that share a common discourse. The final season of the series, after floundering undecidedly through several episodes of MotW plots, establishes the 'Big Bad' as the Circle of the Black Thorn and subjugates the seasonal plot to all character-based plotlines in order to conclude all of them. *Angel*'s unity and coherence is provided by myth arcs rather than plotlines. Myth arcs are thematic or discursive problems that span the entire run of a television narrative instead of a single season. For example, *The X-Files* bases its entire run of ten seasons on a government conspiracy regarding aliens. In *Angel*, the most important myth arc is the title character's quest for redemption. The narrative in its totality deals with the meaning, means and value of redemption as Angel first doggedly, and then with desperation, seeks his prize until an understanding of the importance of the journey rather than the destination is achieved at the conclusion of the series.

The examples provided above establish a pattern for these shows wherein the episode-specific plots act as narrative devices that serve the hermeneutic code for the resolution of the seasonal plotline as well as enabling the progress of character-based story arcs. The season arcs, in turn, interact heavily with the character-based plotlines, creating a cohesion among all plotlines that is absent from other texts such as *One Tree Hill*. The presence of a seasonal story arc not only provides a baseline for the multiple storylines that are woven through the narrative but also acts as a reference point for the semic code, enabling an organic totality among the characters[19].

Furthermore, each text is laden with well developed, round characters that are more than adequate in supporting the multitude of storylines surrounding the seasonal arc as well as the individual plotlines. In fact, before concluding this chapter, it should be noted that one of the primary determinants of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel,* and *Veronica Mars* is their dependence on an ensemble that constitute the protagonistic group. Although all of them bear the name of their main protagonist as their title, the plots and contextual developments depend greatly on the other characters. The first show has named its core ensemble as 'the Scoobies' while they are nicknamed 'the Fang Gang'. *Veronica Mars* is relatively less focused on group dynamics than the previous two. Nonetheless, the second season has shown a marked move toward a more communal approach, especially by focusing one of the season mysteries on Logan and Weevil to which Veronica remains, for the most part, peripheral. The protagonistic group is also used, to various degrees, in other television shows such as *Prison Break*[20], *Lost*[21], *The O.C.*, and *One Tree Hill*, underlining serials' dependence on characterization and round characters.

The narrative structure of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars* presents a specific hybrid of the series and serial forms. It operates through a three-layer plot structure, which balances episode-specific plotlines with character-driven and seasonal story arcs. The season/myth arc, with the aid of heavy characterization, provides a thematic

unity which allows the shifts between different story layers while the presence of MotW plots and serial-oriented plotlines lend the text a dynamism that is absent in purer examples of series and serials. The most significant consequence of the constant shifts between and interaction among different plotlines as well as the presence of round characters that are able to sustain the weight of continuous storylines, however, is the creation of a story universe that is inevitably multi-dimensional. As such, it lays the groundwork for the creation of 'virtuality' – the basis for fan interaction. This concept of virtuality and its creation by the fan as well as the basics of fandom in general are the focus of the following chapter.

Notes to Chapter 2:

1. Feuer, "Genre Study and Television," p.152.
2. *Cheers!,* NBC, 1982-1993.
3. *Frasier*, NBC, 1993-2004.
4. The two-hour long episode was written and directed by Quentin Tarantino who received an Emmy nomination for Outstanding Director in a Drama Series category for his work.
5. "Buffy vs. Dracula," *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, The WB, 26 September 2000.
6. "Real Me," *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, The WB, 3 October 2000.
7. "No Place Like Home," *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, The WB, 24 October 2000.
8. "Listening to Fear," *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, The WB, 28 November 2000.
9. Although the narrative starts almost a year later, the preceding events in chronological order are thus: Veronica belongs to the 'in crowd' by virtue of her boyfriend Duncan Kane and best friend Lilly Kane. Then, without offering an explanation, Duncan breaks up with Veronica. Soon after, Lilly is found murdered by the pool in her house. When Veronica's father who is the town sheriff suspects Lilly's father –a prominent member of the higher social echelons- for the murder, he is removed from office. Veronica's mother leaves without explanation and she is raped at a party she attends in an act of blind bravery.
10. While the seasonal arc is referred to as the 'Big Bad' in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, it is known, rather unimaginatively, as the 'season mystery' for *Veronica Mars*.
11. The character arc of Veronica as outlined here is open to criticism as it constitutes a move away from the text's *noir* roots. However, the argument is lent credibility by the developments of the later episodes of the first season as well as the first half of the second season. Throughout the course of the investigation, Veronica becomes increasingly more invested in other individuals, such as Wallace, Logan, Weevil and Mac. These relationships gradually re-immerse her in the Symbolic Order until, in the second season premiere titled "Normal is the Watchword", she tells the viewer in voice-over: "Normal. That's the watchword. Sounds good, doesn't it? Senior year begins tomorrow and all appears hunky dory. Best friend? Check. Boyfriend? Check. Lilly's killer behind bars? Check. Normal job, just like other people my age." As a matter of course –because happy protagonists, like serial marriages, do not make for interesting stories- Veronica's 'normalization' will prove counter-productive and she will gradually start moving back to the fringes of the Symbolic Order.
12. "Return of the Kane," *Veronica Mars*, UPN, 2 November 2004.
13. "Cheaty Cheaty Bang Bang," *Veronica Mars*, UPN, 12 October 2005.
14. "The Wrath of Con," *Veronica Mars*, UPN, 19 October 2004. Wallace asks for Veronica's help on a case of tracking down an e-mailing fraud ring to win over a potential girlfriend before the Homecoming dance. The case takes the duo to an underground gaming community and a group

of college students who are conning people out of their savings to finance their extensive computer hardware expenses. Also, Logan agrees to assemble a video of Lilly to mark the one-year anniversary of her death, and the imminent Homecoming dance to which Veronica agrees to attend with her boyfriend Troy brings up memories of the previous dance, scattering flashbacks of Duncan, Veronica, Logan and Lilly at their own private homecoming party throughout the episode.

15. Eli "Weevil" Navarro is the leader of a biker gang called the PCH'ers and belongs to the working class that also includes Veronica. In contrast, Logan and Lily are '09'ers', belonging to the richest socioeconomic class. The narrative eventually reveals that Lilly and Weevil were involved during a temporary break in her relationship with Logan. This fact adds onto the class conflict between Weevil (working class, Latino) and Logan (wealthy, white) that was established in the Pilot of the series, rendering them archrivals.

16. "M.A.D.," *Veronica Mars*, UPN, 26 April 2005.

17. "A Trip to the Dentist," *Veronica Mars*, UPN, 3 May 2005.

18. The episode also explains, through this arc, the origins of Doyle's vision. Unable to accept his demonic heritage, Doyle lives a life of petty crime and indifference until a demon of the same species seeks his help in escaping the Scourge. Doyle denies him but is shortly thereafter sent his first vision, of the Scourge killing not only the demon that came to him but a large group. Though he seeks them out, it is already too late and everyone is dead. In an effort to gain redemption –a general theme of the series- he finds Angel and starts using his visions to help people.

19. It should be noted that this high degree of coherence among plotlines is not unique to the three shows that are illustrated above. Series like *24*, *Prison Break* and *Lost* also exhibit a similar structure. As such, they are equally conducive to textual re-appropriation.

20. *Prison Break*, Fox Network, 2005 -.

21. *Lost*, ABC, 2004 -.

Chapter 3: Fandom and Virtuality

The previous chapters provided an outline for certain specifics of the narrative structure of hour-long television fiction texts in general and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Veronica Mars* and *Angel* in particular. This structure is the primary source of the observable magnitude and intensity of fan activity surrounding these shows because it allows the texts to lend themselves with great ease to a viewing practice that is decidedly fan-like through the construction of its narrative. That is, the narrative structure of these shows and their particular use of certain devices engage the fan viewer in a privileged relationship with the text that enables her to construct meanings that exceed the text. Such a statement requires first that the parameters of the 'fan' especially in relation to television texts and in terms of its construction of meaning be identified; secondly, that the mechanism with which the narrative structure, discussed in the preceding chapters, enables such a viewing practice be outlined. This chapter will endeavor to address these two points while the next chapter will discuss the awareness television texts, and especially *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel* and *Veronica Mars*, exhibit in their understanding and manipulation of the fan as the primary maker of textual meaning.

Before proceeding, it should be noted that, despite the strong visibility of fandoms revolving around them, it would be misleading to suggest that all consumers of the texts of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars* are fans. Such a generalized statement is neither quantifiable nor prudent; not only because a very fine line separates a 'normal' viewer from a 'fan', making it almost impossible to distinguish individuals' situations in the audience, but also because television, being an essentially mundane and cursory activity, often finds a substantial audience base in sporadic viewers that supplements the fan viewing base. As such, while the medium's texts may thrive on the fidelity of fans, commercial

television as a mass medium is consumed by viewers of a wide spectrum of investment, attention and devotion. The audience for the original broadcast of a fiction text such as *Veronica Mars* consists of sporadic viewers as well as fans. In fact, the actual fan potential of television texts is revealed mostly through the ratings of re-runs and syndicated showings, which depends upon the presence of a loyal viewer base.

Another important and somewhat contradictory point is the prevalence of fandom in television despite the medium's dependence on sporadic viewers. Unlike other narrative texts, such as commercial films that may achieve a certain degree of commercial success without the benefit of a fan base, almost all television fiction texts inspire a certain degree of fandom by virtue of the fact that consistent interaction with a given text – insofar as devoting a specific time period every week to the same program is concerned- must imply a non-negligible investment by the viewer that indicates fan behavior. As a result, television's *fannish* quality is differentiated by the intensity, range, and type of fan activity rather than the mere fact of its presence; the theoretical framework of fandom and narrative structure discussed below is easily adaptable to most television fandom and fiction texts.

It is necessary to elaborate on this last point. Different television shows and genres generate different degrees and types of fan activity, the only consistent point being the fact that they all generate some sort of fandom. For example, soap opera fandom is traditionally concentrated on text-based discussion that is heavily focused on the lives of the actors as well as the fictional world, and it would be fairly difficult to spot conventions for *All My Children* where attendees are dressed in the costumes of their favorite characters. Science-fiction shows, on the other hand, traditionally generate fandom that indulges in role-playing while the private lives of the actors (their marriages, pregnancies, addictions etc.) do not necessarily play a significant role, possibly because of their disruptive influence in the construction of the story world. Distinctions exist between texts of the same form and genre as well.

Fan-fiction is the authoring of stories that use the constructed universe and characters of a popular text. Though it existed in the form of fanzines prior to the Internet, fan-fiction writing has become particularly widespread with the influence of the Internet and online journals such as LiveJournal and Blogsome[1]. Fans, primarily women, of all ages and social status engage in the practice of writing fiction that use characters from television shows. The texts themselves range from 'angsty' stories of death and despair to 'fluffy' comedy pieces. A significant portion of fan-fiction is sexually explicit and involves pornographic elements. The Hollywood rating system has been adopted to designate the presence of sexually explicit accounts and/or descriptions of violence: PG, PG-13, R and NC-17 are used to classify fan-fiction texts according to their content. Stories are posted on the Internet with disclaimers regarding their non-profit nature and the authors unequivocally ask for feedback on their work, which is freely provided, often in a cordial and supportive manner.

While fan-fiction is one of the primary categories of fan activity, different fandom's propensity toward this specific tool may point to distinctions among television texts of the same genre as it was stated above. For example, *House*, a procedural drama by genre, has generated an ample collection of fan-fiction (including at least one example of a crossover involving *Veronica Mars*' Logan traveling to New Jersey for a visit with his distant relative Dr. House). Unlike *House* for which the fan-fiction community has been productive for all couplings, the *CSI* franchise has remarkably little story-writing activity involving its narratives and what does exist is almost entirely slash fiction involving two male characters and often wholly unsupported by the canonical text. Unlike other hour-long narratives, the franchise has instead enabled fan activity surrounding technical specifics involved in its procedures; an area of fandom that does not extend to the other procedural, *House*, possibly because of the actual degree of specialization and know-how required.

Even in cases of television shows where fandom is characteristically similar in terms of its choice of activities, variations may be found in the

choice of subject matters. For example, there is a subgenre of fan-fiction, referred to as hurt/comfort, which consists of stories concentrating on the relationship of a particular couple. They diverge from fan-fiction stories involving couples by their particular concentration on the dynamic of hurt and comfort wherein one of the characters is placed in an emotionally and/or physically painful situation, which allows the other character to offer comfort[2]. The WB show *Supernatural*[3] about a duo of brothers hunting demons is similar to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* in its target demographic –teenagers and young adults-, its use of the supernatural elements and in the fact that the lead actors are surrounded by an aura of sexual fantasy. Furthermore, all three shows are surrounded by fandoms that are heavily saturated in fan talk, fan-fiction, and music videos. However, unlike the fandom of the other two examples, the fan-fiction community of *Supernatural* is notably focused on hurt/comfort stories, which involve one of the brothers –usually the elder since he is the protector in the canon of the show and thus offers a greater subversion of character roles- being severely beaten or wounded which enables the other to nurse him to health and offer emotional comfort. Though the high productivity of the fandom for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* dictates the presence of all manners and genre of fan-fiction to a certain degree, however, the particular style of hurt/comfort does not feature as prominently. Instead, fan-fiction stories in the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fandom often involve varying levels of angst and mutual suffering rather than the give-and-take of hurt/comfort. Similarly, fan-fiction stories involving Logan and Veronica, the most popular subject matter of *Veronica Mars* fan-fiction community, are often concentrated around either mutual suffering and angst or sarcastic banter, possibly because the canonic characterization of Logan and Veronica is based heavily on playful sarcasm and precludes the characters –especially Veronica- from showing or accepting explicit sympathy.

Having discussed differences as they may occur in different television fandom, it is important to reiterate the fact that the fandom surrounding *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel* and *Veronica Mars* are not

only similar in their choice of activity, focus of fan production and demographic composition but also highly interconnected and overlapping. Furthermore, all three texts, as well as Joss Whedon's *Firefly*, which only aired for ten episodes before being canceled, have acquired a substantial following despite being relatively unpopular in terms of ratings. It has already been stated that *CSI*, for example, categorically receives higher ratings than *Veronica Mars* do[4]. Nonetheless, the fans of these shows present an unexpected strength and devotion. One need only look at the academic activity surrounding *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* generated by self-acclaimed fans (not only in the academically oriented web journal slayage.net but also in print media) or the re-birth of Joss Whedon's third show *Firefly* as a feature-length film *Serenity* to find evidence of the spectacular magnitude of the fandom and its influence over the television market. Before elaborating any further on the fandom of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars*, however, it is important to define the elemental theoretical approaches to the concept of the fan.

3.1. The Fan: Problems in Defining a Concept

One of the first problems encountered in a discussion of the 'Fan' arises from establishing a point of reference in defining the concept. Different approaches privilege either the texts that spawn fandom or the people who engage in it, both of which have inherent weaknesses arising primarily from the variety of sources that lead to fan interaction.

Concentrating entirely on the sources that generate fandom to the complete exclusion of the audiences involved proves counterproductive for several reasons. First of all, popular culture -and fandom as it exists in popular culture- are fluid structures. Texts move in and out of these categories as tastes and audiences change, gaining or losing fans over time. Texts that have cult status may lose their popularity and become obscure while others that inhabit popular culture can become items of high culture, rendering the classification of 'fan' irrelevant[5]. Furthermore, while certain texts such as *Dallas* have resonated in cultures across the world[6], other texts may yield high viewer interest and fandom in select groups and societies

while being ignored by others. As such, since viewer relations can shift in time, location and society, 'the ability to generate fandom' cannot be an inherent quality of the text[7].

A second difficulty faced in attempting to investigate the sources of fan behavior in the source texts alone is in the construction of an appropriate model for disparate texts. Movie stars, comic books, musicians, pulp authors, films, television shows and sports teams are all susceptible to becoming objects of fan adoration. The basic commonality of the items in this incomprehensive list is the fact of their existence within popular culture. In content, form and -when applicable- structure however, they vary so significantly as to render any other possible commonality insignificant. As such, an account of fandom that concentrates on the texts is susceptible to conflicts and incoherence born from the differences of media, content and style. This fact, coupled with the changing nature of popular culture, leads the discussion of the 'fan' away from its textual sources and towards concentrating on the individuals who engage in it.

An approach that concentrates on the persons who become fans to the exclusion of the texts also proves problematic. Relegating the importance of the text to a distant second often leads to an elitist approach to the study of fandom that polarizes around two outlooks. Either fandom is perceived as a symptom of deviance from the norm, with fans regarded as "cultural dopes"[8] who nurture an undesirable relationship with popular texts that is characteristically passive and exists outside the acceptable modes of relating to texts (artistic or otherwise); or fans are attributed a prejudicially privileged status of productivity and ability to engage actively with the text relative to 'ordinary' consumers of popular texts.

3.1.1. Fandom as Deviance

Regarding the first position, Joli Jenson states: "Once fans are characterized as deviant, they can be treated as disreputable, even dangerous 'others'."[9] As a result, fandom is established as a "pathology"[10] that leads to abnormal, sometimes criminal behavior notoriously exemplified by John Hinkley who attempted to assassinate Ronald Reagan to gain the attention

of Jodie Foster, Mark David Chapman who shot his idol John Lennon and even the infamous Charles Manson who was, himself, a Beatles fan. Both Henry Jenkins and Jenson allude to these examples in establishing a common stance not only in scholarly attitudes they draw upon but also in the mainstream mass media and public opinion[11]. Jenkins states:

> […] the fan still constitutes a scandalous category in contemporary culture, one alternately the target of ridicule and anxiety, of dread and desire […] whose interests are fundamentally alien to the realm of "normal" cultural experience and whose mentality is dangerously out of touch with reality.[12]

Writing more than a decade ago, Jenkins' conclusions may appear outdated if not for the fact that current examples of the popular and widespread opinion which labels fans as 'deviant' or 'weird' and 'abnormal' is easy to spot in the ridicule directed toward 'Trekkies'[13] or their portrayal in fiction narratives such as the teenage comic book fans in the primetime procedural *Bones*[14].

This accounting of the fan as a social deviant that nurtures an unhealthy attachment to items of popular culture disregards the prolific productivity of the culture of fandom as well as its function as a social tool. Constance Penley successfully argues that the slash fandom[15] (a vernacular term for fandom that concentrates on a hypothesized homosexual relationship between two characters, predominantly male), which revolves around *Star Trek*, provides room for women to elaborate on certain social issues like gender, fantasy and technology. She states: "In slash fandom […] we find a bracing instance of the strength of the popular wish to think through and debate the issues of women's relation to the technologies of science, the mind, and the body, in both fiction and everyday life."[16] A similar argument is proposed by Henry Jenkins –again in reference to *Star Trek* fan-fiction- who argues that engaging in fandom provides "marginalized subcultural groups (women, the young, gays, etc.) to pry open space for their cultural concerns within dominant representations […]." Barbara Ehrenreich et al. provide yet another similar argument in their discussion of teenage fan girls who surrounded the Beatles at the

height of their popularity. Commenting on the parallels between the frenzied behavior of 'Beatlemania' girls and sexual excitement, the authors conclude that the experienced provided teenage girls with a "revolutionary" means of acknowledging their own sexuality that was otherwise suppressed by cultural norms[17]. While the conservative outlook to fandom may regard women who write explicit homosexual pornography about the characters of Kirk and Spock as 'perverted deviants'; or the teenage girls who scream until they collapse from exhaustion as misguided adolescents unhinged by hormonal fluctuations; the arguments proposed by the scholars above are irrefutable regarding the empowerment fandom allows the individuals engaged in it.

3.1.2. Fandom as a Superior Form of Reading

The counterarguments to the classification of fandom as a deviancy lead to an alternative, somewhat defensive outlook to the issue, which creates a separation between fans and the bulk of popular audiences. Grossberg states that this approach:

> [divides] popular culture into two groups: the larger segment is still assumed to be cultural dopes who passively consume the texts of popular culture. But (*sic*) there is another segment, much smaller and more dispersed, who actively appropriate the texts of specific popular cultures, and give them new and original significance.[18]

It is important to note that the imagery of fandom as a mechanism for appropriation owes significantly to Michel de Certeau's concept of 'poaching' which is extensively referenced in the work of Henry Jenkins[19]. Jenkins argues that fans, simultaneously "fascinated" and "[dissatisfied]" by popular texts, "actively assert their mastery over the mass-produced texts […]. In the process, fans cease to be simply an audience for popular texts; instead they become active participants in the construction and circulation of textual meanings."[20] According to the second position on fandom, then, "fans constitute an elite fraction of the larger audience of passive consumers."[21]

This approach, which privileges the fan, is problematic for two reasons. First of all, a general conception of fans as superior 'readers' overlooks the fact that not all fan activity is revolutionary or subversive. The fandom surrounding *Buffy the Vampire Slayer/Angel*, for example, has been very prolific in terms of not only producing art, fiction and textual gossip but also academic discussions on the text. *Veronica Mars* is routinely discussed in terms of its *noir* concept in a manner that takes into account not only the semic elements but also the structural specifics of the *noir* genre. On the other hand, the fandoms of television shows such as *One Tree Hill* or *The O.C.* are mainly focused on the fashion, the inter-character relationships and the music featured on the series and do not lend themselves to explicit subversive arguments that are derived from the text.

Here, the former examples –of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Veronica Mars*- demonstrate a relation to the text that fosters a resistant reading and acts as a centrifugal force, directing fans to other texts, concepts and ideological musings. The latter examples, meanwhile, are reactionary relationships with the text that pacify the fans: the force of the *fannish* relationship is centripetal in that the fandom is overwhelmingly focused on the narrative itself to the exclusion of its intertextual potential[22]. A similar argument is also made by Fiske. He suggests that while some *fannish* involvement may lead to social empowerment, others will "remain at the level of a compensatory fantasy that actually precludes any social action."[23] It should also be noted that the difference between reactionary and resistant reading practices can be discussed in terms of the fan's relation to the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. The centripetal direction of reactionary interaction and its consequent preoccupation with the fabula is symptomatic of its status within the Imaginary; the narrative becomes a device to reinforce and redefine the Ego. On the other hand, resistant interaction with the text, which acts as a centrifugal force on the fan and situates the text within the broader context of culture, involves the Symbolic Order. Since resistant reading often yields subversive meanings, it acts within and against the Symbolic, weakening it and striving toward the Real.

A second problem with discussing the Fan in terms of its superior ability to 'read' texts is the somewhat ironic implication that arises as a result: By associating fans with an openly subversive textual reading style, the non-fan audiences are relegated to the status of passive receptors. It is important to note that the individual works of Penley or Jenkins presented above do not necessarily make an explicit argument for the division of popular audiences into 'normal' audiences and fans. Nonetheless, the perception of popular audiences as passive receptors is a longstanding and somewhat flawed view that requires closer scrutiny before resuming the discussion of fandom. As Fiske convincingly argues in numerous instances[24] and Grossberg points out, "the relationship between the audience and popular texts is an active and productive one."[25] Furthermore, insofar as television texts are concerned, this active relationship is divorced from the status of the individual viewer as a fan or 'normal' viewer as a result of the 'writerly' structure of television texts. The heteroglossia imbued in the texts of television necessarily implies that, contrary to the conservative view that regards audiences as 'cultural dopes' who are spoon-fed meanings by television, viewers actively interpret these texts in varying, at times subversive, ways.

Condit's previously cited study on television's polysemy provides a straightforward example for this. Asking two viewers, neither of whom are 'fans', to watch an episode of the 1980s police drama *Cagney and Lacey*[26] that deals with issues of pregnancy and abortion with a decided Pro-choice stance, Condit obtained two very different readings of the same text[27]. Asked the same questions, the two viewers provided similar answers only 10% of the time. Although both viewers shared a similar understanding of the basic particulars of the text as well as the message it attempted to convey –especially in terms of its Pro-choice stance-, the interpretations that originated from the same text differed significantly. While the female viewer, for example, stated that the representation of the events was "fair", the male viewer classified it as "grossly unfair." Again, when asked to interpret the portrayal of family, the female viewer responded that it was

positive while the male viewer stated: "I don't think they take a very pro-family type of response." [28]

As the discussion above has attempted to illustrate, focusing on either the source text or the fan itself to the exclusion of the other in discussing fandom proves counterproductive. While concentrating solely on the text does not account for the fluctuations in audience interests over time, constructing an understanding of fandom from a study of the viewers alone leads to an elitist approach that not only overlooks the fans' ability to construct subversive meanings but also underestimates audiences' active involvement in popular texts. Faced with this seemingly unsolvable conundrum, and keeping in mind the fact that fandom is essentially a relationship between the viewer and the text; it is inevitable that a discussion of fandom take into account the dynamics of this relationship. To that end, Grossberg and Fiske's work on fandom should be considered.

3.2. Speak (For) Me! Authorizing the Text

Although his model of fandom provides valuable insight to the peculiar interaction between a text and the fans, Grossberg has declared "the very idea of a television fan [to be] strange,"[29] because of the triviality of television's existence in the mundane. This apparent discrepancy stems from Grossberg's assumption that all television viewing is "in-different" and casual. He remarks: "It is absurd to think that anyone watches a single television show, or even a single series […] There is, in fact, a significant difference between watching a particular programme *(sic)* (which we all do sometimes) and watching TV (which we all do most of the time)."[30] As Jenkins also points out, however, any single individual relates to different television texts with varying degrees of attentiveness and interest, ranging from *fannish* devotion to cursory indifference[31]. Like Williams' theory of flow, then, Grossberg's analysis of television suffers from excessive generalization. While watching television may be a mundane and cursory activity for all viewers at certain points, there is no denying the utter devotion of fans to different television texts as varying as *Dallas* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer.*

Nonetheless, Grossberg's conceptualization of the fandom, based on the creation of what he identifies as "mattering maps" through the "affective sensibilities" of the fans succeeds in providing an explanation for the origins of, and need for, fandom without falling victim to either elitism or the counterargument for shifting tastes. Grossberg defines sensibility as "the particular relationship that holds any context together, that binds cultural forms and audiences […]"[32] while affect is that which "gives 'color', 'tone' or 'texture' to our experiences."[33] The aggregate of affective sensibilities creates mattering maps that "define different forms, quantities and places of energy." Affective sensibility identifies what differences of form, content and quantity are more significant in terms of the individual's ideological struggles within the realm of culture in general. As a result, they enable and shape "investments" in different social contexts. For example, for a blue-collar male living in an area with a high concentration of minorities, the differences of race rather than gender may bear greater significance. Thus, he becomes 'invested' in race issues more so than gender ones. These investments reflect on the individuals' relation to popular culture and, by granting certain elements within that culture authority over others, empower the fan. As Grossberg explains: "By making certain things or practices matter, the fan 'authorizes' them to speak for him or her, not only as a spokesperson but also as surrogate voices."[34] Once this surrogacy is established, the text becomes a tool for the reader's articulation of popular culture. Through the authority the fan assigns particular texts, her position and the boundaries of her mattering maps are established. Furthermore, the fact that certain items are authorized to speak for the fan implies that these items must embody an 'excess' that would legitimize this privileged position. A text that is deemed worthy of surrogacy must have a surplus of meaning or quality that differentiates it from other, similar text; rendering it suitable for the position of the subject of authority for the fan. It is important to note that Grossberg does not argue that fan texts are objectively constituting of this 'excess'. Rather, he describes a circular flow between investment and excess where in "the investment guarantees the excess."[35]

The investment bestowed on a given text bears testimony to its excess, which, in turn, demands the investment of authority.

3.3. How Does Television Speak (For) Me?

Grossberg's model provides a satisfactory explanation for the process of fandom and the need of popular audiences to create *fannish* interaction[36]. However, it does not address the issue of textual specifics that enable and sustain the excess which preempt fan investment in the text. While mattering maps may determine a fan's initial choice, the subsequent investment must be sustained by the text itself by providing a structural base for the perceived excess. In medium-specific terms, a film text must be able to withstand repeated viewings, re-enactments (and even the devastating effects of sequels). A television text, on the other hand, must be able to live up to the fans' investment by propagating their interest through countless episodes that stretch across years. Since Grossberg's model strives to explain a social phenomenon, its adaptability to a specific narrative medium proves problematic, especially in light of the fact that it does not address the question of what makes intense fan interaction possible in the structure of texts such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel* and *Veronica Mars*. At this point, we must turn to Fiske, his discussions of television's excess, and the three levels of *fannish* production –especially in relation to television narratives- to answer this question.

3.3.1. Too Much of Something Is a Good Thing: Excess

Fiske's discussion of excess naturally differs from Grossberg's use of the word in his model of mattering maps as a result of the varying objectives of the two frameworks. Since Grossberg is concerned with examining a sociological phenomenon without differentiating between different source texts, his use of the word is essentially literal, outlining a perceived surplus of quality as well as meaning in a given element of culture on behalf of the receptor. Fiske, on the other hand, is concerned with studying a particular medium and focuses on excess as a textual element and narrative concept. Excess has been extensively discussed in these terms, especially in relation to filmic texts by theorists such as Roland Barthes,

Stephen Heath and Kristin Thompson. Thompson, following the tradition of the Russian Formalists, identifies excess as "the aspects of the work which are not contained by its unifying forces."[37] Fiske provides a valuable adaptation of the concept to televisual narratives in his book, *Television Culture*. He defines two forms of excess in television: 'excess as hyperbole' and 'semiotic excess'. Both of these forms are credited with allowing a "subversive, or at least parodic, subtext to run counter to the main text, both [of which] can be read and enjoyed simultaneously."[38] Fiske identifies the difference as residing in the fact that while 'excess as hyperbole' is a textual device used selectively, 'semiotic excess' is characteristically present in all television.

'Excess as hyperbole' can be exemplified by the stylistic exaggerations of the soap opera genre. Daytime soap operas feature immaculately coiffed characters whose casual attire resembles cocktail dresses. The lighting is rarely 'natural' but often bright and revealing. Each episode contains numerous instances of dramatic pauses accompanied by swelling music where viewer is shown a close-up of a character's face. Perhaps most significantly, the web of deceit woven by multiple plotlines is so tangled that it puts the Bard to shame. The soap opera does not simply demonstrate 'excess as hyperbole'; it is 'excess as hyperbole'. Every element of the soap opera narrative overflows with excess, opening it up to multiple, subversive readings.

'Semiotic excess' on the other hand, points to the heteroglossia of the medium in general. As it was previously discussed in relation to 'writerly' and 'readerly' texts, television texts are imbued with multiple levels of signification and meaning that is born from the polysemy of the medium. Television texts, in effect, bring together too many textual and audience-oriented variables for them to be completely subjugated to the dominant ideology. Although Fiske does not outline a direct relationship between television's excess and the formation of fandom, the concept provides a valuable link in explaining the interactive and participatory nature of fandom, which will be discussed in relation to fan participation.

3.3.2. The More, the Merrier: Productive Fandom

In addition to and independent of his discussion of excess, Fiske's framework of fandom identifies three levels of fan production: semiotic, enunciative and textual[39]. Semiotic productivity is a component of popular culture in general and entails the production of meanings, whether subversive or homogenizing, by all audiences through the semiotic tools available. Semiotic productivity in fandom often involves repeated readings of the text. It is very rare, if not impossible, to come across a fan of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* who has not seen most of the episodes at least twice. Certain episodes that play a critical role in the show's canon or character arcs often bear countless viewings for their semic and fabula-related significance. Rereading is further facilitated by the fandom by video recording exchanges, DVD copies, computer files as well as episode transcripts and screen captures. Despite this communal support system, however, semiotic productivity is a self-involved activity that establishes a direct and exclusive relationship between the fan and the text.

While semiotic productivity exists within the self, enunciative productivity is the expression of these meanings in a public forum. Fandom unexceptionally involves an interaction with other fans. While the degree of this interaction may change, its presence is imperative to the construction of a fan culture. As Jenkins notes:

> It is this public sharing that shifts fannish interpretations from individual to collective responses. The commercial narratives only become one's own when they take a form that can be shared with others, while the act of retelling, like the act of rereading, helps sustain the emotional immediacy that initially attracted the fan's interest[40].

Enunciative productivity, then, is a staple of fandom. In television, it acts as the primary stimulus for the fan between episodes. Fans talk about not only what has happened but also about what might happen. For example, fans of *Veronica Mars* spend a considerable amount of their interaction time discussing the season mysteries. Since the narrative is driven by the season mystery, this speculative talk is enabled by the structure as well. Each episode provides clues regarding the mystery, which is compiled, assessed

and catalogued by fans[41]. Fan talk is not exclusive to narrative content however and extends to non-fabula areas as well. Fans talk about ratings of episodes, appearances of the actors both in real-life events and other narratives, the music used in the show, and the clothes worn by characters, among other things. Anything and everything related to the show is an element of enunciative productivity.

Furthermore, enunciative production is not limited to simple 'talk'. 'Public sharing' may adopt the form of fashion styles, choice of leisure activity or behavior patterns. For example, online fan sites provide detailed information regarding clothing items worn by the character during episodes that allow fans to dress like Buffy. There exists an online radio that only broadcasts songs played on the soundtrack of *Veronica Mars* and allows fans to make their own play lists. Fans often mimic hand gestures or phrases specific to certain characters[42]. Enunciative productivity enables fans to access the text's virtuality without direct contact with the text itself. It should be noted that this 'talking' and 'retelling' has been vastly facilitated by the Internet, which has provided a furtive ground where fan interaction can flourish. Providing relative anonymity while succeeding in maintaining basic civility, the web has allowed fans to access the widest possible network at very little cost.

The final level of productivity as defined by Fiske is textual and demands a greater immersion in the text's virtuality on the part of the fan. Textual productivity involves, but is not limited to, fan-fiction, fan-art[43], poetry and prose writings and music videos. In the case of television fandom, fans even maintain websites that provide screen captures numbering in the hundreds for every episode as well as episode transcripts transcribed after the broadcast. Furthermore, as in the case of *Star Trek* slash fan-fiction authors, these textual products do not necessarily align themselves with the industrial text's ideology or meaning[44]. In fact, they are often born out of the perceived failure of the industrial text to provide the fan with sufficient or appropriate meanings. This 'inadequacy' may be as ideologically motivated as the desire of the fan to construct a homoerotic

subtext in an otherwise conservative narrative –exemplified by slash fan-fiction-; or as mundane and analytical as the desire to expound on the romantic relationship of a given couple because the narrative itself does not provide adequate satisfaction or screen time –exemplified by countless music videos devoted to the relationship of Logan and Veronica-. Regardless of its motivation, however, textual productivity always involves a form of reformatting the text.

3.3.2.1. Joss Isn't Always Perfect: "If I Owned Them, We Would See More Nekkid!Spike"[45]

One very valuable example of such reformatting is provided by a collection of fan-fiction stories written by *Spirit*, titled "The Clockwork Vampire"[46]. Set during the first season of *Angel* (which corresponds with the fourth season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* featuring the Initiative), the stories are essentially consecutive rewrites of the actual episodes starting with an introductory installment that is set immediately prior to "Hero", the tenth episode of the season. However, this particular narrative relocates Spike to Los Angeles after the cerebral chip is implanted in his brain by the Initiative[47]. Published with a warning for slash content and NC-17 rating for explicit accounts of violence and sexual intercourse, the stories are detailed and substantial in length. They combine a balance of character development, pornographic content and plot reconfiguration: Incorporating a new character into the narrative leads to significant changes in story arcs. For example, the character of Doyle is spared from death when Spike braves the deadly orb that is the cause of the former's demise in the actual episode, "Hero". Doyle's continued presence yields a secondary slash relationship between him and Wesley. Cordelia, whose role is very prominent in the actual show since she bears the visions, on the other hand, is relegated to the background. The stories even relocate Xander (from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) to Los Angeles and additional characters (such as Megan who is revealed to be Wesley's sister and Spike's descendant) are introduced.

In addition to containing plot developments that are congruent to the television show, "Clockwork Vampire" also dwells on character arcs such

as Wesley's alienation from his father, Angel's unresolved feelings about Buffy, and Spike's gradual redemption because and by virtue of his love for Angel. Over the course of sixteen installments, the couple becomes increasingly more invested in and attached to each other. Eventually, Spike voluntarily foregoes his 'villainy' and chooses to fight for the powers of good when he declines to have the chip removed. In turn, Angel renounces his prize –redemption and humanity- for the sake of his relationship and lover[48]. This particular arc is an especially remarkable feat of foreshadowing when considered in light of the fact that Joss Whedon did eventually transplant Spike to Los Angeles as well as redeeming and re-humanizing the character although the transformation was motivated by his love for Buffy rather than Angel.

The "Clockwork Vampire" saga presents an elaborate example of *fannish* reformatting of the canonic text. Using the raw material provided by the series in terms of the syntagmatic flow of events and the basic semic elements, the author has created a profoundly different story. The paradigmatic choices involved in the written text are fundamentally different from the television text, primarily as a result of the author's desire to center the narrative on a subversive reading of the relationship between Angel and Spike. It is important to note that the subversion of the said relationship is not simply borne out of a projection of homosexuality but also involves an unconventional degree of moral ambiguity on the part of its characters. Unlike its source text, the fan-fiction story is not limited by the normalizing force of television, which entails the title character of the series to be relatively ethically sturdy. Indeed, the character of Angel does not face moral ambiguity until the second season of the television series. The fan-fiction story, on the other hand, uses the relationship between the two men to expound on Angel's exasperation regarding his inability to act upon his instincts, his isolation and, above all, an underlying frustration with the fact that he is atoning for the sins of someone so wholly removed from his own self that it is a different entity –as underlined by the change in name from Angelus to Angel-. While the fact that the source text introduces these

themes to its viewers cannot be denied, the fan text is able to dwell on them in greater detail and concentration, even to the exclusion of other themes that inhabit the series.

"Clockwork Vampire" is one among countless examples of fan-fiction stories that reformat the canonic text. While this particular example demonstrates a significant degree of subversion, in other cases, reformatting does not bear an ulterior, subversive meaning. Rather, it functions as a supplement to the source material. This supplementary function is apparent in the fan-fiction stories that are inspired by the time lapse of episode and season breaks. For example, the summer hiatus between the fifth and sixth seasons of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* suspends the narrative immediately after Buffy's death. When it recommences after the hiatus, the lapse in discourse time is reflected in the story time. The first episode of the season is set months after Buffy's demise. This time lapse calls for fan productivity that will write in the missing months of summer when the characters grieve most fervently, especially in relation to Dawn's guilt and pain over her sister's death and Spike's angst over losing his love object. In fact, there exists a pseudo-shipper group in the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fandom that is focused on the relationship of Dawn and Spike –both in romantic and platonic terms- following Buffy's death[49]. The fan-fiction stories that dwell on the fallout of Buffy's death may be speculative or retrospective in nature, depending on whether they were written prior to or following the sixth season premiere. In any case, however, they are efforts on the part of the fandom to supplement the narrative's delays and/or omissions. Furthermore, like the example of "Clockwork Vampire", they constitute a textually productive interaction between the fan and the source text.

The multilayered productivity discussed above in detail involving the semiotic, enunciative and textual relations of the fan to the text implies a key act on the part of fandom: that of participation. Fans participate in the making of the original text by constantly rereading, retelling and reformatting it to serve their needs and desires. It is important to make a clarification at this point. Participation may involve numerous and varying

meanings and acts. In the context of this study, fan participation refers to the proactive manner with which fans engage the text and its meanings. It indicates an active, rather than passive, viewing style that generates a relationship with the text that extends beyond the act of reading both figuratively and materially.

Though it exists in all fandom, the element of participation is especially heightened in television because of the text's temporal relations and discursive structure. Because television narratives are works in progress, the fan is able to insinuate herself into an ongoing effort that, for the most part and albeit begrudgingly, depends on this participation for its survival. The fact that television texts are saturated with an excess of meaning, both semiotically and as hyperbole, further enables this repetitive and interactive relationship between the fan and the text to flourish unhindered of discursive limitations. Finally, the perceived incompleteness or inadequacy in the text is reflected in the segmented, repetitive and continuous narrative structure, which cajoles the fan into a textually productive viewing style. The particular combination of textual excess, perceived incompleteness/inadequacy, fan participation and structural specifics –which will be discussed in greater detail below- has led Fiske to propose that television is a "producerly"[50] medium.

3.4. Embroiling the Viewer: Television as a Producerly Text

The term unmistakably and purposefully invokes Barthes' conception of readerly and writerly texts. Establishing a direct overlap between television texts and fan texts, Fiske states:

> Fan texts […] have to be 'producerly', in that they have to be open, to contain gaps, irresolutions, contradictions, which both allow and invite fan productivity. They are insufficient texts that are inadequate to their cultural function of circulating meanings and pleasure until they are worked upon and activated by their fans, who by such activity produce their own popular cultural capital.[51]

It has previously been cautiously pointed out that television exhibits the characteristics of a writerly medium. However, as Fiske points out, writerly

or open texts -as theorized by Barthes and Eco- are classifications that relate to artistic texts rather than popular ones[52]. The writerly text is consciously de-constructive; it uses stylistic tools to emphasize its discursive structure and draw attention to its heterogeneity. However, the fact that television is a popular medium precludes it from using the avant-garde tools available to highbrow writerly texts. It must depend on discursive techniques that are readily available to its diverse audience. It must, in effect, combine "the televisual characteristics of writerly texts with the easy accessibility of the readerly."[53] The fact that television texts are generally formulaic structures, which accommodate syntagmatic breaks, is what enables the reader easy access to the text: While the interruptions in the syntagmatic axis allow the reader to participate and contribute to the narrative, the formulaic structure renders it legible to all viewers. This broad legibility, in turn, transforms television from writerly to producerly text, a process that reinforces rather than negates Barthes' conclusions regarding writerly texts.

The fact that both television texts and fan texts are identified as producerly by Fiske is not coincidental. As the discussion of the particular mechanism will reveal below, television's narrative structure is perfectly suited to and geared toward sustaining fan interaction. Television texts depend, to a great extent, on the security provided by a fan viewer base that ensures a given level of ratings. In addition, like films, commercial television is most profitable in secondary and tertiary markets; the reruns of old episodes, syndication in network channels and DVD/video sales[54]. Fans provide a readily available market for these products, which legitimatize the industry's investment in any television text. Consequently, all television texts endeavor to construct a fan base and all successful television texts -even some not so successful ones- are surrounded by fans[55].

3.5. Making Fans: Structural Origins in *Buffy*, *Angel, Veronica Mars*

It has already been stated that the narrative structure of television texts plays an important role in sustaining fandom. The previous chapters have outlined the particular characteristics of this structure wherein it emphasizes the paradigmatic, destabilizes the syntagmatic, proliferates

plotlines and focuses on characterization over a segmented structure that parallels the 'nowness' of the viewer's own reality. The primary and aggregate effect of these structural characteristics is the creation –through their interaction- of a fabulated narrative universe -heretofore referred to as 'virtuality'[56]- that exceeds the diegetic and in which the narrative exists as an account of reality in its own right. The construction of virtuality denotes the point at which the industrial text is established as a producerly and fan text. The fact of the virtuality, and consequently the *fannish* quality of the texts, is particularly enabled in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars* because of their hybridization of the series and the serial forms as well as their use of the seasonal story arcs that work to ground the storylines around a central problematic.

3.5.1. A World Is Not Enough, We Need a Universe

The distinction between the classic text's diegesis and television text's virtuality is not only highly significant but also presents a furtive pallet that demonstrates the particular roles different structural characteristics of the texts play in differentiating themselves and establishing their *fannish* quality. Jane Feuer has suggested that the presence of interruptions in the narrative means that "the very concept of 'diegesis' is unthinkable on television."[57] These interruptions have two consequences the first of which relates directly to the issue of the diegesis (the second, to be discussed below, concerns fan participation and has an indirect effect on virtuality). The segmented structure of the television text and the stop-start motion of the sequence of events reiterates the fact of its existence in the 'now' where extra-narrative elements like commercials, live broadcasts and public service announcements are allowed to disrupt the narrative flow and intrude in the story world. Unlike a classic text such as a film, which is pre-recorded, television narratives happen in the 'now'. That it, film diegesis is on a different time plane where the story exists *ex post facto*. On the other hand, television's breaks necessitate that its construction of the narrative universe exist on a congruent time continuum parallel to the viewer's 'now'. As a result, unlike the diegesis, which is a preordained edifice that the text

reveals to the reader, the virtuality of television is an organic and ongoing structure that is built through an interaction between the reader and the text.

In addition to the institutionalized interruptions, the construction of the diegesis is further undermined by the television text's treatment of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axis. The diegesis in the classic text is an understanding of the narrative world that is shaped by the syntagmatic sequence of events and defines the boundaries of the paradigmatic possibilities. It has already been discussed that the television text disregards the syntagmatic drive toward closure and emphasizes the paradigmatic possibilities provided by numerous plotlines. Consequently, the syntagmatic sequence of events is unable to provide the skeletal basis for the diegesis. Instead, the intricate interaction of different levels of plotlines discussed above in relation to the narrative structures of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars* create a web of relationships and paradigmatic possibilities that are brought into a coherent focus by the seasonal story arc and its effect on the characters' story arcs. This structure constantly forces the reader to consider different combinations and permutations of the events and existents. Allen states: "Because serials cut between scenes enacting separate plot lines, the viewer is prompted to ask not only 'where is each of these plotlines going?' but also 'What might be the relationship between different plot lines'?"[58] As a result, rather than an essentially linear structure that exists within the diegesis, the more complex and multidimensional construct of virtuality is rendered necessary to accommodate these questions and their possible answers.

3.5.2. Filling the Blanks: Syntagmatic Gaps, Cliffhangers

It was mentioned that the interruptions of the television narrative yield two consequences, one of which is the embedding of the narrative in the 'now'. The second consequence relates to the *fannish* participation discussed by Fiske and the subsequent construction of the virtuality. Fiske argues, "the segmentation [of the structure] opens up the syntagmatic gaps in television's narrative so that the viewer has to "write" in the connection."[59] This 'writing in the gaps', which are created by the breaks in

narrative flow discussed above, is essentially the very construction of the virtuality by the fan and, as such, underlines the critical element of participation that is required of fandom. The presence of these gaps and the need to "write in the connection" also point to the 'insufficiency' of the text which triggers fan productivity as it was exemplified by the discussion of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s summer hiatus following its fifth season. Thus, in an effort to compliment the canon text's missing information, time gaps and insufficient causality –all of which are a direct result of the insufficiency of the syntagmatic drive- the fan reading of the text creates a virtuality specific to that text.

At this point, two points should be clarified. First of all, the aforementioned interruptions may consist of either complete breaks such as commercials and episode endings, or plot breaks that are cuts to a different plotline. Secondly, the breaks in the narrative do not necessarily imply an omission but may consist of a suspension even though both cases result in undermining the causality of the narrative and rendering it 'insufficient'. Television narratives often use the device of off-screen time to distill their discourse. However, not all breaks constitute a jump in the timeline. Instead, they simply briefly halt the discourse, as in a cliffhanger. Regardless of their nature, however, these breaks not only constitute the mechanism through which closure is persistently denied the viewer; but also act as symptoms of the 'incompleteness' and 'inadequacy' of the television text, cajoling the fan to participate in fabulating the narrative world into a parallel reality. The cliffhanger device demonstrates this point.

The primary object of suspending the flow of events at a crucial point –the cliff-hanger- is to ensure the return of the viewer after the break (be it seasonal hiatus or the commercials). Its inevitable consequence is creating a delay for the cathartic gratification of the viewer. However, since the real time lapse 'cools' the viewer down, this delay inevitably undermines the subsequent gratification, rendering it 'insufficient' and unable to live up to its promise. Furthermore, television texts often manipulate this fact to their own use by using the hermeneutic morpheme of

snare. Most cliffhangers are contrived rather than genuine. Upon the return to the narrative, they are revealed as false moments of suspense that yield no true traumas.

An infamous example is provided by *Veronica Mars* in the 15th episode of its second season. One of the season's mysteries concerns Logan Echolls and his possible involvement in the murder of a biker gang member. When a witness comes forward falsely claiming to have seen him stab the victim, Logan woos the daughter of the man –Hannah- to obtain leverage. Though he reveals his identity to Hannah, she defends him to her mother and continues to see him. The final episode of this subplot concludes when Logan seeks Veronica out and tells her that he thinks he has "done something horrible."[60] This cliffhanger, which was essentially a mid-scene break, was discussed and berated extensively by fans because it promised and failed to deliver a long-awaited sincere interaction between the fundamental couple. The following episode neither concluded the scene nor explicitly addressed the conversation that took place 'off-screen'. The only reference to the event was a mild inquisition by Veronica about whether Logan had talked to the girl. The cliffhanger in this case was a prime example of a snare of the viewer by the text. Furthermore, the gap in the narrative flow was compensated not only by 'fanwank'[61] but also lent itself to textual productivity, which was displayed by fan-fiction stories that concluded the scene. The vernacular term refers to Fiske's "writing in the connections." Faced with gaps and omissions in the canon text, fans fill in the blanks by their own readings of the text.

Gaps in the flow of events are not the only instances where fan participation and productivity are engaged. The texts also provide gaps in the portrayal of paradigmatic relationships, which render the actual text insufficient and require the immersion of the fan in the virtuality. Character relationships that are not addressed by the narrative provide an example of paradigmatic gaps. In service of the plot, certain character interactions are overlooked by the text. For example, until very recently, two of the primary characters of *Veronica Mars*, Logan and Wallace had never shared in a

conversation. Since the former is the primary love interest for the title character while the latter is her best friend, the omission was perceived as highly significant by the fans who openly criticized the fact.

The fact that television texts are 'incomplete' and 'insufficient' may evoke notions of negativity. However, it is these very qualities that lend the medium its greatest strength. Despite its position as a mass communication medium and the hegemonic power structure that controls it, television's 'lacks' instigate the viewer to engage actively with its texts. This participation enables the creation of narrative virtualities that further cement the *fannish* interaction between the viewer and the text by providing the raw materials for fan productivity. As the example of "Clockwork Vampire" reveals, fans resist the readerly tensions of the medium, filling in the blanks of the text with new meanings constructed from their own personal ideologies and experiences, which they are compelled to share with other fans. Jenkins states: "This ability to transform personal reaction into social interaction, spectator culture into participatory culture, is one of the central characteristics of the fandom. One becomes a fan not by being a regular viewer of a particular program but by translating that viewing into some type of cultural activity."[62]

3.6. This Is Your Subtext: Enjoy And Subvert At Will!

The televisual narrative structure provides a prime arena for individuals to transform their cursory reading activity into a participatory and productive one that may yield subversive readings or, at least, empower audiences in the making of meanings. The fan construction of the virtuality is essentially a compromise between the industry's canon text and its fan reading. This compromise is an uneasy one that remains forever volatile because of the opposing interests of the participants. While the industry, being a mass communication tool, tries to normalize the response of its viewers, the fans constantly endeavor to subjugate the text to their own 'mattering maps'. As Jenkins states: "Fans recognize that their relationship to the text remains a tentative one, that their pleasures often exist on the margins of the original text and in the face of the producer's own efforts to

regulate its meanings."[63] Nonetheless, the virtuality enables fans to appropriate the industrial text for their own use by granting them a personal playground created in the image of the canon text and the fan alike. It is a whole universe that operates on a set of rules prescribed by the priorities of the fan, the embodiment of 'mattering maps' and a perfect expression of the fan's ideology and meanings. Through the virtuality, the fan is able to appropriate items of popular culture and make them her own.

This appropriation has proven itself particularly strong in terms of the fandom of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars*. Unlike other examples from contemporary American primetime television such as *The X-Files*, *Lost* and *The O.C.,* these three texts embrace the fan viewer and her ability to create subversive meanings. Rather than constantly struggling with the polysemy inherent in the medium, they embrace the presence of subtexts and incorporate them into the primary text. As a result, most episodes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* can be read either as installments in an ongoing fantasy narrative or as parodies of real-life problems such as alienation, bullying, responsibility, and free will. Taking their cue from the text's own glee with finding and revealing the subtext, the fandom for these shows has been prolific in appropriating the canon for its own use.

"Clockwork Orange", discussed above, provides one example of this appropriation. Though faithful to the basic plotlines, themes and characterization of the source narrative, the stories go further in their exploration of Angel's internal conflict regarding his guilt at past crimes and the meaning of his mission and redemption. This is made possible by the fact that the fan text is unhindered by syntagmatic necessities. It does not need to work on constructing a fabula or furthering the narrative. Feeding from the already available story arcs, the author is free to indulge in psychological explorations of the main character and discussions of a philosophical nature that deal with the meaning of moral accountability that have already been suggested as subtexts in the source narrative. Furthermore, she is free to do so in a manner that contributes to her very

elemental pleasure of the text, which reveals itself in the presence of the pornographic element.

Countless other examples such as the one above can be found in the fandom of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars*. One story "Looks Like An Evil Doer" based on *Veronica Mars* presents an interesting case[64]. The story is categorized as AU –alternate universe- because it deviates significantly from the canon text. Set about five years after the show's current timeline, the story starts as Logan is released from prison where he has been serving a manslaughter sentence for the killing of Felix Toombs. It follows Logan and Weevil as Logan attempts to adapt to life outside of prison and seeks revenge on the people who set him up. As the narrative progresses, it is revealed that Logan was sentenced based on evidence provided by Veronica while Weevil had tried to help him. She later realizes that he was innocent of the charges but does not attempt to contact him or apologize. The story is a work-in-progress with five chapters already published online. As of this day, Veronica remains peripheral to the narrative.

This choice is particularly interesting and speaks directly to the power of the fan to create meaning. Although the story remains faithful to the basic characterization of the title character, it is decidedly less forgiving of Veronica's character flaws. Often criticized for an almost selfish single-mindedness and rashness by the fandom in general, Veronica, as portrayed in "Looks Like An Evil Doer" is sharper in her shortcomings. Her failure to have faith in Logan and subsequent inaction once she realizes her mistake is emphatically unflattering. Though the story may be a simple fan exercise in engaging the source text to perpetuate the virtuality, the writer's distinct slant toward a criticism of Veronica is not only contrary to the position of the industrial text but also, consequently, subversive in its very nature. It is important to note that the canon text enables this subversion by embracing a portrayal of the main character that engenders internal conflicts. Nonetheless, it is the productivity of fandom, finding purchase through the virtuality, which capitalizes upon those conflicts.

Though fan-fiction is arguably the most important means of fan production, there are other formats, most notably music videos, which yield similar examples of *fannish* subversion of meaning. One such video made by 'Rowena' to "Part of the Queue" by Oasis is focused on the character of Logan and his relationship to his father[65]. There are numerous examples of music videos in the fandom that deal with Logan. Most of them concentrate on his abuse, his relationship with Veronica or his tendency toward mischief. All three interpretations are supported by the canon text, which portrays Logan as a character whose misfortunes inspire sympathy almost as much as his attitude inspires indignation[66]. As a result, most of these videos are essentially reactionary fan responses that primarily function to perpetuate the virtuality and allow the fan to engage more intensely with the text.

"Part of the Queue", however, presents a more intricate reading of the father-son relationship and, as such, is distinctly subversive. Rather than positioning Logan as a victim to his father, the video draws a parallel between Aaron and Logan. In several instances, the video cuts back and forth between Aaron manhandling Logan and Logan fighting with other people. In fact, the editing is constructed in such a way that a shot of Aaron forcefully pushing Logan is matched by a shot of a boy Logan is fighting falling to the ground. Shots of both Echolls men in similar aggressive stances are cut together and the video ends with a dissolve from one shot of Logan's eyes on the rear view mirror to another of Aaron's. Similar to the treatment of Veronica in "Looks Like An Evil Doer", the video presents a critical reading of the character. In this, it diverges from the source text, which has consistently endeavored to cast Logan in a favorable light. It also makes a commentary on the propagation of abuse that may very well be born from the priorities and meanings of the maker of the video.

"Part of the Queue"'s treatment of the character of Logan Echolls may be subversive of the source text. Nonetheless, because the character itself is canonically conflicted, this subversion remains somewhat vague. This is not the case in the music video made by 'Nicky' to Linda Perry's

love ballad "Knock Me Out"[67], featuring the coupling of Doctor Simon Tam and Captain Mal Reynolds from Joss Whedon's third series, *Firefly.* This study has purposefully avoided referencing *Firefly* despite the fact that it consists an integral part of the fandom surrounding *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* due to the difference in the target demographic –in terms of the network expectations-, the subject matter –which involves adults rather than teenagers and young adults- and the fact that *Firefly* was canceled prematurely only to be resurrected in the form of a motion picture. Nonetheless, since the fandom surrounding the show organically overlaps with that of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel* and *Veronica Mars*, it is not wholly remiss to discuss an example from the fandom.

"Knock Me Out" is not singular in its thematic structure. Focusing on a slash coupling that is neither supported nor explicitly suggested by the source text[68], it uses scenes and shots that focus on one or both of the characters to illustrate a relationship between them. Unlike most fan videos, however, "Knock Me Out" also uses shots from a different source; Jean Genet's *Un Chant D'Amour* and is almost entirely made in black-and-white. Shots of Mal and Simon are interspersed with those of two naked male bodies, relatively indistinct, in wrapped around each other. There are several instances, during particularly haunting parts of the song, when the image of one character is transposed on a shot of the other and the video uses scenes of fighting between the characters every time the lyrics "you knocked me out" are uttered. Faced with the danger of being embarrassingly juvenile and tacky, the video succeeds in appearing not only visually beautiful but also highly suggestive in its eroticism. In fact, it can easily be posited that a viewer who is unfamiliar with the industrial text may believe in the existence of a love affair between the characters on the show. Like the other examples provided above, "Knock Me Out" presents a primal instance of fan-constructed meaning born form the creator's specific virtuality that subverts and exceeds the industrial text.

Before concluding, one final example should be discussed. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and its spin-off series, *Angel*, have achieved cult status in

popular culture. They are pioneer texts that can be likened to this decade's answer to *Star Trek*. In addition to their position as cult objects, however, the texts have also yielded a notable amount of academic interest. The texts have been studied in terms of their implications in modern culture, theology, philosophy, feminism, psychoanalysis and film studies. More significantly, these studies have often been conducted by self-professed fans. The aforementioned fact that the shows are cognizant of the fan as the primary source of meaning and embrace subtexts renders them intricate and complicated - fruitful to academic study. Nonetheless, without implying a weakness or lack of analytical objectivity, it can easily be suggested that engaging the texts in an academic manner is simply another form of fan productivity that attempts to perpetuate the virtuality through prolonged exposure.

The commonality between the examples discussed above is their function within fan culture as tools to articulate subversive meanings that are extracted from the text. The creation of fan virtualities that are instigated and supported by television's narrative structure enable the fans to acquire safety zones within popular texts where alternative, subversive, often marginal readings of the text are made possible. Within these zones, fans interact with the source text in a productive and proactive manner, perpetuating the virtuality and deepening the initial interaction with the text to a *bona fide* relationship. Stories are written, music videos are made, discussions of varying intellectual degrees take place as fans congregate and share their view of the universe the show creates. More importantly, fans are cognizant of the fact that this relationship is a precarious one that depends on, in equal parts, compromise and insolence. Endlessly correcting the text's insufficiency, fans also correct its dominant meanings; creating couples where there are none, drawing parallels when canon shies away, compromising the perfection of characters when realism demands it and elaborating further on issues when 42 minutes a week is simply not enough. Ultimately, in so doing, fans increase their pleasure of the text by immersing themselves fully in it. Fiske has argued, "the conditions under which

television is normally watched are not conducive to that intensity of experience which is necessary for *jouissance*."[69] Perhaps the most significant function of the creation of virtuality is that it allows fans to transplant the television text from the black box to their everyday lives, ensuring 'conducive' conditions.

This chapter has endeavored to outline the predisposition of the television text to fan interaction and the mechanism with which that is rendered possible. As Jenkins, Penley, Grossberg and Fiske, among many others, have argued, fandom is a tool of empowerment for popular audiences. The fact that television has often been criticized for homogenizing and eroding popular culture is, perhaps, is the ultimate irony of the medium. It seems that in trying to market itself to the greatest number of audiences for the longest period of time, television has constructed a narrative structure that inadvertently nurtures subversive readings and empowers its viewer. However, as popular audiences evolve, so do television narratives. This chapter has described a relationship between the fan and the text that originates from the latter and moves toward the former where it is reworked and redistributed to other fans. The texts of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars*, on the other hand, demonstrate examples where the flow of effect has reversed itself. Television texts have become aware of the fan as the primary maker of meanings and, thus are incorporating these meanings into their processes. The next chapter will discuss this 'hyperawareness' of the television text and its effects on fandom.

Notes to Chapter 3:

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1. Henry Jenkins provides a detailed description of fanzine-based fan-fiction in his study "*Star Trek* Rerun, Reread, Rewritten: Fan Writing as Textual Poaching" cited below and in the bibliography.
2. Camille Bacon-Smith provides a particularly valuable discussion of the hurt/comfort writers in her study "Suffering and Solace: Genre of Pain" cited in the attached bibliography.
3. *Supernatural*, The WB, 2005 -.
4. According to quotes from Nielsen ratings on Zap2it.com and TV.com, *CSI: NY* attracted around 12.3 million viewers for its first season finale, ranking 18th on the most watched shows list for the week it was broadcast. The first season finale of *Veronica Mars*, which had aired one week prior to *CSI:NY* , drew in around 2.8 million viewers.
5. The works of Shakespeare are a canonical example of this phenomenon. While they were popular texts in relation to the Elizabethan audience, they have become items of high culture that have 'aficionados' rather than fans.
6. Ien Ang's seminal book, *Watching Dallas*, provides a comprehensive and indispensable study of the keystone television show that includes cross-cultural interpretations of the series. The work is cited in the attached bibliography.
7. I am indebted to Lawrence Grossberg's discussion of this subject in his article "Is There a Fan in the House?" which was cited previously for my conclusions.
8. Lawrence Grossberg, "Is There a Fan in the House?: The Affective Sensibility of Fandom," *Adoring Audiences: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (Florence, KY: Routledge, 1992), p.50.
9. Joli Jenson, "Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization," *Adoring Audiences: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (Florence, KY: Routledge, 1992), p.9.
10. Jenson, "Fandom as Pathology," p.9.
11. Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* (New York, London: Routledge, 1992), p.13.
Jenson, "Fandom as Pathology,"p.11.
Jenson cites the work of Richard Schiekel while Jenson references Julie Burchill as examples of scholarly attitudes to fan cultures. The citations for all three are provided in the bibliography section for reference.
12. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, p.15.
13. 'Trekkie' is a vernacular term for fans of the television show *Star Trek.*
14. In the episode titled "The Superhero in the Alley", the protagonists investigate the death of a reclusive teenager who, suffering from a second round of cancer, constructs a secret heroic identity and attempts to save the woman towards whom he feels affection. During the course of the investigation, a group of comic book fans with whom the victim 'hung out' are portrayed in detail as being unbalanced, dysfunctional and even devoid of proper ethical principles.
15. The slash fandom in the original *Star Trek* series concentrated primarily on the suggestion of a lover's relationship between Captain Kirk and Spock.

A more contemporary and relevant example is provided by the coupling of Spike and Angel the Buffy/Angel universe. Similarly, *Veronica Mars* has yielded a prolific Logan/Weevil slash fandom. It is important to note that these couplings are not explicitly suggested by the text itself although, as it will be discussed in the next chapter, Whedon has provided fans with gleeful material for their subversive readings. Incidentally, the term HoYAY! is used to refer to instances in the text that lend themselves to subversive readings of a homosexual nature (Abbreviated for 'homosexual subtext, yay!')

16. Constance Penley, "Brownian Motion: Women, Tactics, and Technology," *Technoculture*, Ed. Constance Penley, Andrew Ross (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press: 1991), p.159.

17. Barbara Ehrenreich et al. "Beatlemania: Girls Just Want to Have Fun," *The Audience Studies Reader*, Ed. Will Brooker, Deborah Jermyn (London, New York: Routledge, YEAR), p.184.

18. Grossberg, "Is There a Fan in the House?", p.51-2.

19. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, p.23-7.
See also: Henry Jenkins III, "Star Trek Rerun, Reread, Rewritten: Fan Writing as Textual Poaching," *Television: The Critical View,* Ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976; 1994), pp.448-73

20. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, p.23-4.

21. Grossberg, "Is There a Fan in the House?", p.52.

22. The concepts of reactionary and resistance are derived from Hal Foster's discussion of Postmodernity, cited in the attached bibliography.

23. Fiske, "Cultural Economy of Fandom," p.35.

24. Fiske, *Television Culture*.
See also:
John Fiske, "The Cultural Economy of Fandom," *Adoring Audiences: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (Florence, KY: Routledge, 1992), p.30-49.

25. Grossberg, Is There a Fan in the House?,"p.52.

26. *Cagney and Lacey*, CBS, 1982-8.

27. Condit, "The Rhetorical Limits of Polysemy," p.426-47.
Both viewers involved in the study are college students. While the female student is a pro-choice activist, the male viewer is pro-Life. They both act as leaders in their respective student movements. Condit summarizes the episode as follows: "Police detectives Cagney and Lacey help a pregnant woman (Mrs. Herrera) to enter an abortion clinic where pickets (led by Arlene Crenshaw) are blocking access. Lacey, married and pregnant, eagerly helps Mrs. Herrera, while Cagney, feeling conflicted, resists any assistance beyond that necessitated by her job. When the abortion clinic is bombed and a vagrant dies as a result, the detectives investigate and locate the bomber, who, in a climactic scene, threatens to blow up herself and the detectives. She gives up when confronted with the inconsistency of killing Lacey's 'preborn' child for a Pro-life cause."

28. Condit concludes that 'polyvalence', rather than polysemy, is a more suitable term to characterizing the differences between these interpretations, stating: "Polyvalence occurs when audience members share understandings

of the denotations of a text but disagree about the valuation of those denotations to such a degree that they produce notably different interpretations."
29. Grossberg, "The In-Difference of Television." *Screen* 28: 2 (Spring 1987): 35.
30. Grossberg, "The In-Difference of Television," p.33.
31. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, p.56.
32. Grossberg, "Is There a Fan in the House?", p.54.
33. Grossberg, "Is There a Fan in the House?", p.56.
34. Grossberg, "Is There a Fan in the House?", p.59.
35. Grossberg, "Is There a Fan in the House?", p.60.
36. Grossberg remarks, "what we today describe as a 'fan' is the contemporary articulation of a necessary relationship which has historically constituted the popular, involving relationships to such diverse things as labor, religion, morality and politics." The necessary relationship is that which allows individuals to create affective lives where 'things' matter and ideology provides structure to this mattering. In capitalist society, popular culture presents the only opportunity for individuals to transform consumption to empowerment, rendering fan culture a necessary mechanism of contemporary culture.
Grossberg, "Is There a Fan in the House?", p.63.
37. Kristin Thompson, "The Concept of Cinematic Excess," *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, Ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p.130.
38. Fiske, *Television Culture*, p.90-1.
39. Fiske, "The Cultural Economy of Fandom," p.37.
40. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, p.77.
41. There are several websites that provide progress reports through the episodes of different mysteries, one of the more comprehensive of which is www.MastInvestigations.net although this is not the only such site. Furthermore, although the season mystery is idiosyncratic of *Veronica Mars*, similar episodic progress reports exists for most television shows that provide timelines of the development of relationships, character arcs, significant events in the protagonist's life etc.
42. Two delicious examples of this are provided by Homer Simpson in *The Simpsons*: his exclamation of "D'oh!" and the guttural "Mmmm…" that follows very utterance of a food item.
43. Fan-art consists of oeuvres of plastic arts, primarily including drawings, paintings, and graphic design. For the most part, these artworks depict characters from the source text although they may portray significant events and places. The influence of the Internet on fandom has also affected fan-art. Most examples found on the Internet are graphic designs and may involve quotes and screen captures as well as character images. The primary domain of this form of fan productivity targets computer use and supplies fans with desktop themes, banners, avatars, signature and web designs.
44. Fiske identifies two categories of the text as it exists in popular culture. The industrial text is that which exists prior to its encounter with the fan or,

more broadly, subversive readings. It is a "commodity"; the television show that is broadcast by the network. The industrial text is essentially one that strives to be a 'readerly' text since it is borne out of the production relations of the dominant power structure. At the point of the text's interaction with the fan in specific and audiences in general, it transforms into the "popular" text, which embodies alternative meanings. The popular text is "ephemeral"; it exists at the moment of reception and has no material presence.
See: John Fiske, "Ethnosemiotics: Some Personal and Theoretical Reflections," *Television: The Critical View*, Ed. Horace Newcomb (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976;1994), p.417.
45. Joss Whedon is the creator, and for all fan purposes, God of the Buffy universe. The statement in quotation marks is often found accompanying fan-fiction disclaimers. Nekkid!Spike or any variation of the internet slang composite basically refers to 'naked Spike' and expresses a very carnal desire.
46. The stories are archived at http://www.obsessedmuch.net/clockwork/index2.html .
47. The chip prevents him from inflicting (or intending to inflict) physical violence on human beings by triggering an acute reaction of pain in his brain. As a result, he is unable to feed on humans although it is later revealed that he can attack and kill other living beings including demons. The basic premise of the fan-fiction stories is that instead of seeking help from the Scoobies, Spike goes to Los Angeles to ask help from Angel.
48. In the canonic universe of *Angel*, the title character is cursed with a soul, therefore, is capable of feeling remorse and guilt for the sins of his past. Driven by this guilt, he strives to redeem himself for the transgressions committed by his ulterego, Angelus. At the end of the first season of the series, a prophecy is revealed which claims that Angel will be a key figure in an apocalyptic battle after which, having atoned for his past sins, he will be rewarded by life and will be made human again. Clockwork Vampire also incorporates this prophecy into its narrative but in the fan-fiction story Angel renounces his right to humanity because a precondition is Spike's death.
49. In fandom, shipping and shipper are used to refer to fans that focus on a particular coupling within the text's fabulated universe. Some of the most widespread examples from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Angel and Veronica Mars are Buffy/Angel, Buffy/Spike, Angel/Cordelia and Logan/Veronica. Recently, a new tendency has surfaced wherein the coupling is given an abbreviated nickname such as LoVe for Logan/Veronica. Although shipper fandom exists as a subcategory of the general fan following of a series and most fans will be invested in more than one coupling, it often embodies the essence of a viewer's relationship with the text by providing a suitable outlet for fan interaction. In fact, Grossberg's model of mattering maps and investment can be applied to shipper fandom on a micro level. Not only do shipper fans choose a text to invest in, they also choose one or more specifics aspect of the text, which further specializes their mattering maps. Thus, while some fans will be primarily interested in the more conventional

relationship –in that it is explicitly affirmed by the text- between Buffy and Angel, others like *Spirit* will invest in the alternative coupling of Angel and Spike.
50. Fiske, *Television Culture*, p.95-9.
51. Fiske, "The Cultural Economy of Fandom," p.42.
52. Fiske, *Television Culture,* p.95-99.
53. Fiske, *Television Culture,* p.95.
54. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, p.68.
See also Caldwell, "Welcome to the Viral Future of Cinema (Television)"
55. The notion of success as used here is essentially a measure of the text's survival. A television show is successful insofar as it remains in production. Inevitably, every television show, with the exception of soap operas, runs its course and is cancelled. Often, the cancellation is a result of declining ratings. In other instances, like *Friends*, however, the decision to end a show's run may depend on a fiscal decision arising from increasing production costs, the advancing age of the actors and an overall ennui with being involved in the same project for a long period of time.
56. David Marc identifies this concept as the cosmology of the series. In the fandom of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* it is referred to as a universe, leading to the oft-used term of Buffyverse. The Veronica Mars fandom simply uses Neptune, the name of the fictional town where the show is set, to denote the same construct. I have chosen to refer to it as a virtuality for two reasons. First of all, both 'cosmology' and 'universe' evoke visions of science fiction while the concept of a beyond-the-diegetic construct of the narrative world exists in all television texts. For *Desperate Housewives*, it could be named Wisteria Lane while CSI:NY uses the backdrop of New York City to form a virtuality where police officers dress in impeccable, thousand-dollar suits and have trim and fit bodes.
57. As quoted in Kozloff, "Narrative Theory and Television," p.94:
Jane Feuer, "Narrative Form in American Network Television," High Theory/Low Culture: Analyzing Popular Television and Film, Ed. Colin MacCabe (Manchester, Eng.: Manchester University Press, 1986), p.104.
58. Allen, "Introduction", p.18.
59. Fiske, "Moments of Television: Neither the Text nor the Audience," p.64.
60. "The Quick and the Wed," Veronica Mars, UPN, 22 March 2006.
61. The vernacular term refers to Fiske's notion of "writing in the connections." Faced with gaps and omissions in the canon text, fans fill in the blanks with their own readings of the text.
62. Jenkins, Star Trek Rerun, Reread, Rewritten: Fan Writing as Textual Poaching," p.451.
63. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, p.24.
64. Kur, "Looks Like an Evil Doer," 8 January 2006. The story is archived at: http://presenttense.blogsome.com/2006/01/08/lookslike/
65. Rowena, "Part of the Queue." The video is archived at: http://www.deadbutstillpretty.com/videos.html

66. This conflicted characterization is known as 'the woobie' and is very significant in terms of the industrial text's interaction with the fandom. This point will be discussed in detail in the subsequent chapter.
67. Nicky, "Knock Me Out," February 2006. The video is archived at: http://obsessive24.net/videos.html
68. It would be fairly difficult to argue for an implicit suggestion for a homoerotic relationship between Mal and Simon, as well. The fact that it is a recognized in the fandom must attest to the creativity of *fannish* production.
69. Fiske, *Television Culture*, p.228.

Chapter 4: Hyperawareness of Fan Meanings

The previous chapters have discussed the narrative structure of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel* and *Veronica Mars* and its part in the creation of fan virtualities. The preceding chapter has argued that the virtuality, which is born from a prolonged interaction between the fan and the text and the former's investment in the latter, provides a safety zone where the fan is able to articulate his/her own meanings as spoken by the text. While these meanings may be purely reactionary responses to the normalizing effect of the medium, they often engender an empowerment for the fan, giving rise to *fannish* textual appropriation and resistant reading practices. Despite the subversive nature of fandom, however, television texts have become increasingly more adept at controlling and manipulating fan meanings. Rather than ignoring the fan audience as marginal minorities, the texts of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel,* and *Veronica Mars*, ground their narratives around these meanings. This chapter will discuss the texts' awareness of the fan as the principal source of meaning and the resulting textual practices that seek to reflect these meanings back to the fandom.

Though a household term for all manner of cultural, political and social discussions and a staple of aesthetic and philosophical inquiry, a clear and comprehensive definition of the term Postmodernism is impossible to provide. In fact, the very suggestion of such a definition appears oxymoronic as Postmodernism is ultimately associated with "incredulity toward metanarratives"[1]. Elusive to definition, Postmodernity is more an expression of a state of being than a movement or era. Nonetheless, there are universal themes that have come to be associated with the Postmodern in all its applications. Linda Hutcheon, in *The Politics of Postmodernism* suggests that Postmodernism is "rather like saying something whilst at the same time putting inverted commas around what is being said"[2]. Self-contradiction is not the only introverted quality of the Postmodern. Though

the merits of self-reflexive parody as well as the line that separates it from pastiche have been controversial topics, equally lauded and applauded, the fact remains that self-reflexivity and intertextuality are indispensable elements of the Postmodern and, insofar as they are traced across the texts of popular culture, mark its effect on the human condition.

Television, on the other hand, has been regarded as the quintessential medium of Postmodernity - partly due to the historical placement of the medium's emergence and development and partly because it epitomizes the popular, cultural and production values of the era of "the posts"[3]. It is not surprising, therefore, that the concepts of self-reflexivity and hyperconsciousness as they exist within an understanding of the Postmodern have been discussed in relation to television texts. Jim Collins, in response to the increasingly intertextual nature of 1980s American prime-time television fiction, notes:

> These intertextual references are emblematic of the *hyperconsciousness* of postmodern popular culture: a hyperawareness on the part of the text itself of its cultural status, function, and history, as well as of the conditions of its circulation and reception. *Hyperconsciousness* involves a different sort of self-reflexivity than that commonly associated with modernist texts.[4]

Today, however, the medium has traversed Collins' notion of hyperawareness in such a way as to reverse it: Television texts have become increasingly more active in creating additional meanings by manipulating the marginal readings of the fans. Post-Buffy texts as well as their audiences are not only aware of previous texts; they are also aware of each other, and each other's awareness. Embracing the relationship between the industrial text and the fan as the primary forum of meaning, the medium has not only adjusted and configured its narrative structure to accommodate this relationship but has also learned to take an active role in its creation. Thus, the television serial rejoices in a constant and never-ending reaffirmation of the fan as its primary source of meaning. Gone are the days when Gene Roddenberry merely promised a gay character in *Star Trek* and the only allusion to the homoerotic relationship between Kirk and Spock was a single

throwaway line. Today's television fiction texts constantly acknowledge Fan-based interpretations and meanings. In one example provided by *Grey's Anatomy*, the writers of the show have created a *blog* on the internet where they post about past episodes they have written and interact with fans regarding the plotlines and story arcs in a self-proclaimed effort to explain themselves.

4.1. Return of Spike

Talk, of course, is cheap. After all, what Roddenberry promised Trekkies and what Paramount delivered in the second installment of the series *Star Trek: Voyager* was diametrically opposed. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* on the other hand, does deliver. Almost from the introduction of the character of Spike as a member of Angel's vampiric family, a significant portion of the fandom rallied to (re)unite the two characters. The previously discussed "Clockwork Orange" presents only one example in a prolific area of the fandom that concentrated on an Angel/Spike slash coupling. This desire of the fandom is ultimately realized, albeit in a decidedly more mainstream manner, in the text.

Following the conclusion of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the character of Spike is carried over to *Angel*. The move of the character from one show to the other may be dismissed as a commercial choice, motivated by bolstering the audience base of the struggling series. While this is a valid point, however, the transfer achieves a higher signification when viewed in light of the fact that Spike is literally brought back from the dead to enable the crossover. Obviously, it would be farfetched to claim that such acts of revitalizing the dead is phenomenal in a narrative fiction that has brought its title character back from the dead not once but twice. The fact of Spike's 'regeneration' in itself loses its 'punch' in the face of the text's obvious giddy enjoyment in defying convention but, in any case, that is not what makes the crossover of the character significant. The crux of the matter lies not in the method of transferring Spike to the younger show: The choice to do so *ex post facto* and despite his death is the significant factor in terms of the text's relationship to the Fandom.

At the time of his initial introduction to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in the second season, Spike is an essentially narcissistic character. He is, in point of fact, dead (bodily and, therefore, in terms of the Real) and cannot be subjectified by the Symbolic. Thus, he has no point of reference in the Real and exists primarily in the domain of *need* as opposed to *desire* and *drive*. Unlike most other popular narratives –as well as a lot of fan-fiction revolving around the show- that define an overwhelming and insatiable 'thirst' as the source of the vampiric desire, Whedon refrains from habitually reminding his viewers of this 'thirst'. In fact, drinking blood, for most of the recurring or main characters such as Spike and *Angel*, is portrayed as an everyday activity that is very similar in semic significance to the drinking of coffee by rumpled, haggard-looking police detectives in almost every cop drama. One scene even shows Spike drinking his blood out of a mug inscribed 'Kiss the Librarian' that is owned by Giles. As such, the drinking of blood, in Lacanian terms, remains in the realm of need, arising from a bodily source and able to find satisfaction at the end of an act. Thus, during the initial stages of his characterization, Spike is primitive in his ability to satisfy his needs: There is no desperation in or about him.

Through the course of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the character's development, he becomes increasingly more humanized, to the point of regaining his soul. However, more significantly and parallel to this apparent 'humanization', as his character is incorporated to the protagonistic group the Scoobies, Spike is subjectified. During the course of the fourth season, when he is incapacitated by an external entity, which prevents him from satisfying his needs, he is transposed to the realm of *drives*, which eventually transform into Desire manifesting itself in his obsession with the Slayer: the existential antagonist for his character. In the final episode of the series, Spike sacrifices himself to, quiet literally, save the world from an endless army of 'uber-vampires' and asserts his position as a *bona fide* hero. Having been physically suspended between death and life for the course of the narrative, the character is finally able to reconcile the Symbolic and Real deaths.

Argued very briefly above, the progress of the character through the stages of Lacan's psychic development is an intricate and multifaceted topic, which cannot be discussed fully here. Its point of interest, for the purposes of this study, lays in the above-mentioned reconciliation of the two deaths, which accord Spike a unique sense of closure denied to the remaining characters of the show[5]. In fact, the discursive conclusion of text decisively underlines the fact that each member of the Scoobies have access to stories within the 'virtuality' which are yet to be told: There are new slayers awakening around the world who will require the guidance of Buffy, a new hellmouth awaits in Cleveland, Dawn's initiation as a watcher has begun, Willow is reconciled to her powers as a witch etc. Spike's story, however, is unfalteringly concluded. Having completed his psychic development, he finally satisfies his death drive as well. Succinctly put, there is nothing more to tell.

This complete closure renders the producers' decision to move the character to the younger series, *Angel*, very significant in terms of its implications for the interaction between the text and its fans. Obviously, it would be far-fetched to conclude that the desire for the said coupling by a group of fans was the single factor involved in such a decision. The character to this day inspires devotion from legions of female fans who have a very carnal interest in the matter. Every few months, fueled by statements from Joss Whedon, news spreads across the internet of a possible television film revolving entirely around the character. The hiring of James Marsters by *Angel* is, in this sense, a purely fiscal decision. Furthermore, such a decision by a producer/sponsor to directly influence texts for financial reasons is not a new or television-specific phenomenon. For example, Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* was first published in serial form in the literary magazine *The Graphic* between 4 July and 26 December 1891 (The canonical version as it was first envisioned by the author was only published in 1912). There were extensive differences between the two versions including a fake marriage between the title character and Alec D'Urberville in the earlier publication instead of the rape in the canonical

version of the novel. The variations were chiefly motivated by the fact that the publishing magazine found these plot elements controversial and risky and sought to 'normalize' the text and render it suitable for Victorian audiences.[6]

Despite the undeniable importance of commercial concerns in the casting of Marsters, however, the text does not ignore the possibilities presented once Spike moves to Los Angeles. Though the narrative provides ample opportunities for different episodic storylines and original MotW plots that result from and revolve around the involving the newfound institutional power resulting from the protagonistic group's takeover of Wolfram and Hart, several episodes are focus exclusive on character-driven plots in order to elaborate on the tensions between Angel and Spike. Through the course of the first half of the season, their characters fight, bicker and reconcile over poignant moments much like a love affair. There are odd moments of televisual excess, which concentrate exclusively on the relationship of the two characters and deviate from the traditional myth/season arc structure of the series such as the episode "The Girl In Question"[7] which sees Angel and Spike travel to Italy where Buffy is currently residing. Wholly inconsequential though it may be to the rest of the season, the episode devotes a significant amount of time to the portrayal of a parallel between the heartbreak –caused by the same girl- of the two vampires. Similarly, while neither Spike's emergence as a possible contender for the prize of humanity, nor their constant competition play a kernel role in the resolution of the season arc (and incidentally the myth arc for the series), the text consistently reiterates the conflicted nature of the relationship between Spike and Angel. It is this perverse devotion to the coupling by the text at the expense of its formulaic structure that reaffirms the Fandom's desire.

4.2. Used To Be a Wallflower: Willow the Witch

There are other examples in the text of the Buffyverse[8], such as Willow and Tara's relationship and the development of the character of Wesley, which consciously invoke and support alternative, marginal

readings of the text only to foreground these readings within the narrative later on. For example, the character of Willow is established as childlike, virginal and awkward with the first episode of the pioneering series. Although the character remains remarkably consistent to these attributes throughout (especially the first part of) the series, the text purposefully breaks from the traditional portrayal of Willow in several instances early in its virtuality, such as in the "The Wish"[9] and "Doppelgangland"[10], both of which feature Willow as a vampire in a parallel universe; and "Halloween"[11] in which she becomes a ghost dressed in leather clothes and behaving in a rather uncharacteristic bravado. These diversions could be construed as inconsistencies were it not for the fact of the character's association with witchcraft and later play a pivotal role in the transformation of the character to the sixth season's 'Big Bad'.

Popular narratives have often used the imagery of witchcraft and magic to invoke meanings of feminine mystic, lesbianism and carnal appetites. In fact, in some cases, such as *The Craft*[12] and the movie adaptation of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*[13], the text's handling of these meanings is quiet metonymical. Regardless of intent and awareness, however, it is almost impossible to prevent subversive readings of a text in terms of female empowerment and feminine eroticism in cases where themes of witchcraft and magic are involved. It is not surprising, therefore, that once she starts 'dabbling in the magicks, Willow is sexualized and becomes increasingly more sexually charged as her 'powers' grow. Especially after the character's relationship –with Oz- is concluded, the narrative begins to move away from a portrayal of the character as innocent and childlike. Several episodes deal, directly as the main plotline or indirectly as oblique references within an otherwise unrelated episode, with her growing depression. These turns of the narrative transform the character; making her, in colloquial terms, more edgy.

Having sown the seeds of possibility early on, which create *fannish* subversion of the canonical text, the narrative is able to reclaim these marginal meanings, successfully renegotiating them to the center of the

narrative during the renowned fourth season episode *Hush*[14]. The commentary of the episode on TelevisionWithoutPity[15] illustrates the interaction between the text and the fans in terms of the relationship between Willow and Tara very eloquently. Describing the scene when the girls clasp their hands and telekinetically move a vending machine to block the door against pursuing monsters, the commentator writes:

> Suddenly I'm deafened by the intense racket caused by thousands of fan-fic writers madly typing Willow-and-Tara love stories. But that racket is drowned out by the even louder din of thousands of horny men posting to *Buffy* message boards, salivating about girl-on-girl action.[16]

4.3. Love to See Him Suffer: Logan the Woobie

The conflicted portrayal of Logan Echolls' character in *Veronica Mars*, depicted simultaneously as both morally questionable and sympathy inspiring, has already been mentioned in the preceding chapter in relation to the *fannish* interpretations of the character. In fact, the ambiguity of the character presents a very concrete example of the manner in which the text fosters and encourages a very specific *fannish* reading that, though appearing marginal and subversive, is situated at the very center of the text. The ambiguity of characterization is introduced with the first episode of series, which identifies Logan as "the obligatory psychotic jackass" within the first five minutes. This statement, given by a voice-over of the title character, Veronica, who has already proven herself to be of exceptionally high courage, values and intellect, stands beyond reservation. Since she is the only focus of identification for the viewer, especially at the start of the narrative, her opinions are rendered as unquestionable facts. Nevertheless, the definitiveness of her opinion is also reinforced by Logan's tasteless sexual innuendos and actively hurtful behavior, establishing him as one of the 'bad guys'.

Then, the narrative takes a turn fifteen minutes into the episode during a flashback to the time of Lilly Kane's murder. At this point in the narrative –incidentally a fact that is valid not only in terms of the fabula but the discourse as well-, Veronica has already been alienated from her peers

by virtue of the fact that her father, the Sherriff, is investigating the father of the victim as a possible suspect. When the crime scene video of the dead body is leaked to the internet, Logan confronts Veronica and, in a surprisingly heartrending scene, criticizes her for her family's part in the suffering of the Kane family. The scene does not bear any significant narrative developments aside from the revelation of the leak in the Sherriff's department. As such, considering the seasonal story arc of the Lilly Kane murder, the leak does not constitute a *kernel* but a *satellite*. Moreover, while the exposure of the tapes may play an expository function for the series' narrative, neither the fact of the leak nor the confrontation between Logan and Veronica contribute to the episode's specific narrative arc and, therefore, pose as excessive disclosure. Bearing in mind that the first episode of any television series undertakes to set up a new universe in the span of 40 to 42 minutes that must succeed in creating a sufficient interest in itself to secure a viewer base and therefore has a very tight and driven narrative progress, the inclusion of a seemingly pointless conversation between two otherwise antagonistic characters must be examined closely.

With the exception of Sherriff Lamb who is shown to mock Veronica as she attempts to report her date rape[17], Logan is the only character who remains in conflict with Veronica at the end of the episode and is shown to be unflinchingly antagonistic to her. The aforementioned flashback scene, however, breaks from the pattern wherein all his scenes reinforce Veronica's stated opinion of him. Through the flashback, the character is allowed an intimate rapport with the audience independent of and irrelevant to his relationship with Veronica. Hence, in a beautifully orchestrated move, the text realigns the fan viewer's concentration and introduces the character's primal conflict: he is at once a jerk and a sensitive 'boy-child' in need of protection. The narrative, then, continues to play on this dichotomy in later installments. In the fourth episode, for example, one of the episodic subplots involves the unveiling of a memorial fountain for Lily. Logan –in a scene that reveals more desperate need than martyric acceptance to the act- volunteers to cut together the memorial video. Since

all footage provided by Mrs. Kane depicts Lily in an uncharacteristic innocence of pre-pubescence, Logan deigns to accept the help of his arch nemesis Veronica when she provides him with home video tapes of Lily having fun with her friends. The subplot is concluded with the viewing of the memorial video during which sequence Logan and Veronica share an intimate and sympathetic glance and smile. It is a very brief albeit significant moment, which underscores not only the fact that these two characters were once friends but also the fragility of the character of Logan. The conflicted portrayal of the character reaches its zenith during the sixth episode where Logan's relationship with his abusive and morally despicable father solidifies his character into the *woobie*.

Literally meaning a child's security blanket, the *woobie*, in television-speak, is a character who inspires feelings of protection and sympathy in the audience and whose emotional pain is not only welcomed but also often sought after by virtue of the pleasure it invokes. An online database defines the woobie as

> […] that character you want to wrap in a blanket and feed soup to when he suffers so beautifully. Woobification of a character is a curious, audience-driven phenomenon, divorced almost entirely from the character's canonical morality […].

It is possible to find examples of the *woobie* in other texts. Some candidates are Willow in the early seasons of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Wesley during the first two seasons of *Angel*, Michael in *Prison Break* and Sam in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy[18]. In this sense, Logan is a quintessential example of the character type and his positioning as such finds ample ammunition in the narrative. Having given the fans a solid reference point in the first few episodes of the season, *Veronica Mars* does not flinch from placing Logan in injurious situations. At the beginning of the series, he is, 'merely', an abused teenager who has lost his first love to a violent crime. By the end of the first season, he has been accused of the murder of Lily Kane only to discover that the real culprit was his father who had also been sleeping with her, he has once again been cheated on by his girlfriend, he has fallen for

and been deceived by Veronica and his mother has committed suicide, not to mention the numerous beatings he has received and as well as the two times he has been arrested.

It can easily be argued that Logan Echolls is, by far, the most ill treated major player in the series' universe, well beyond reasonable statistical possibility. Despite an absence of objective sense, however, Logan's suffering is graciously accepted by the series' fan audience precisely because the narrative deliberately constructs the character to convey a sense of the *woobie*. The conflict introduced in the flashback scene discussed above manipulates the character's reading in such a way as to render it almost impossible for Logan to remain completely antagonistic despite the narrative's overt advocacy to that effect. The text's treatment of Logan is easily accepted precisely because, by undermining a simplistic yet concrete interpretation, it allows a more complex and subversive reading. In other words, the narrative plays us, knowing full well that we will fall for it, which we do, knowing full well that we are being played because doing so allows us to revel in the sinful pleasure of falling in love with a "psychotic jackass", moving the fan from the realm of *plaisir* to the realm of *jouissance*.

Veronica Mars's construction of the character of Logan Echolls is meticulous and deliberate and presupposes a specific fan audience that is not only televisually experienced in the broadest sense but is also intimately familiar with previous examples of television texts, most significantly *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* that have nurtured their subtexts and subversive readings. That is, the woobification of Logan is a successful narrative process only because the text can reasonable depend on and, consequently manipulate, a *fannish* investment in itself; an investment which strives to establish the intricate relationship of fandom discussed in the previous chapter and allows the construction of the virtuality that provides the safety zone where textual productivity and subversive readings are made possible. Without the benefit of a well-versed fan experience with the 'normalization' of subversive readings, Logan Echolls would have been

a stock villain instead of the *homme fatale* the self-admittedly noir series plays upon.

4.4. Subverting the Formula in Procedurals

While the texts of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars* provide prime examples of textual manipulation, the hyperawareness of television texts has become a medium-wide phenomenon, traceable across other, more formulaic and conventional examples as well. *Without A Trace* provides one example for this statement. The series is firmly situated in the procedural genre. Furthermore, as a Jerry Bruckheimer production –of *CSI* fame-, it is painfully entrenched in the mainstream ideology of contemporary American society and instilled with a drive toward homogenizing its meaning. Nonetheless, the text often yields subversive breaks within its text. Unlike its more conformist counterparts, especially the *CSI* franchise, the narrative refrains from carrying itself through to a final moral statement and occasionally manipulates the fans' expectations regarding its formulaic to subvert its structure.

In the episode titled "John Michaels," broadcast on May 12, 2005, the team investigates the disappearance of a 71-year old insurance investigator who has disappeared from the rooftop of a downtown building. The episode is immediately established as unusual by virtue of the fact that Anthony LaPaglia, who stars as the lead character Jack Malone, appears as the heavily made-up John Michaels. As details of the disappeared man's life are unraveled, it becomes increasingly clear to dedicated fans that John Michaels is a metaphor for Jack Malone: both men have two estranged daughters from a failed marriage, they are disconnected from people, not on speaking terms with their former wives and obsessed with the suicide of Malone's mother. The narrative provides an added clue by using former guest stars in supporting roles. The manifest symbolism of the episode renders the standard procedural formula irrelevant, an exercise in futility. The primary text of the search is a moot point in this case. The narrative structure that leads to the discovery of the vanished man is a front for what is, essentially, a psychoanalytic study of the lead character. By engaging the

viewer in the formulaic search for a missing person who does not exist, the text, once more, subverts its own structure and creates a free space that allows it to elaborate on non-narrative issues.

It is important to note that all the examples provided above are based on fan interactions around and about a given character. There are two reasons behind this choice. The first one is of practicality. As it was previously discussed in previous chapters, the structure of the hour-long television drama, especially the serial form, relies heavily on characterization. Television serial's narrative structure is unerringly invested in the characters and intrinsically links them to the fabula. Consistent interaction with characters provides an anchor for the storylines, rendering characterization an indispensable component of the narrative flow. In fact, as Porter also suggests, viewers are drawn to the narrative precisely because of their investment in the characters[19]. As a result, existents rather than events bear the burden of significance and should be studied in the television text. Secondly, and somewhat related to the previous point, fandoms, especially as they exist on the Internet, are heavily focused on specific characters and relationships. Often, if not entirely, fan groups focus on a single person or couple from the show's virtuality. Because they are the primary narrative component of television texts, fandom is almost entirely focused on characters and their place within the virtuality. As such, the relationship of the fan audience to any given character bears critical weight and must play a pivotal part in any discussion of television texts and fandom.

The cases discussed above have provided examples where the industrial text is aware of the interpretative potential of the fan and have acted specifically to influence its own productive readings. The 'knowing' of the fan-generated meanings by the text may be interpreted in a pessimistic and modernist approach that casts a dubious light upon it: It can be argued that the text's acknowledgement and subsequent incorporation of the subversive readings of the viewer/fan are efforts that exist subservient to the dominant ideology. This argument finds its support, albeit unwittingly,

in Roland Barthes' theory of inoculation. Defining inoculation as "admitting the accidental evil of a class-bound institution the better to conceal its principal evil", Barthes finds examples of this phenomenon in conventional narrative texts such as the treatment of the army by Fred Zinneman's *From Here To Eternity* (1953) as well as everyday texts such as a margarine commercial[20]. By acknowledging and incorporating some of the alternative and subversive readings by its fans, the text successfully vaccinates its audience to such readings. As previously stated, fan activity is often considered by theoreticians operating within the boundaries of cultural studies –an area of academia traditionally recognized as leftwing- a 'guerilla tactic' of individuals to create safe spaces for themselves within popular culture where they are free to make their own meanings by appropriation. Following this logic, the producer/text's conscious act to utilize the meanings made by the fans can be seen as a defensive attempt by the dominant structure to re-claim these meanings and rob them of their sociopolitical power. That is, by foregrounding the subtext, which inspires subversive readings, the television text endeavors to eliminate the subtext and its polysemous nature.

Such an argument appears almost impossible to refute because it utilizes the 'normalizing' property of capitalistic ideology wherein the oppositional arguments are invalidated by the very structure from whence they are produced. Nonetheless, this argument is flawed in the manner with which it underestimates certain factors. First of all, regardless of their degree of consciousness, television texts are primarily driven by their need to remain 'on air'. Consequently, the desperation with which television is willing to accommodate the viewers in order to bind them to the text should not be underestimated. Incorporating fan meanings, insofar as it is possible, to the canon text is a very practical and simple method of satisfying the viewer.

Secondly, a modernist reading of such incorporation grossly underestimates both the heteroglossia of the television medium and the capacity of audiences to establish resistant and productive relationships with

different texts as discussed in the previous chapter. While most contemporary American primetime fiction may have become adept at normalizing the fandom's reading of its text, and, consequently, rendering most fandom a reactionary practice; the very nature of the medium precludes it from being able to control all fan responses and extinguish entirely the resistant nature of fandom.

This argument proves particularly weak when considering *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel* and *Veronica Mars* and bearing in mind the examples discussed in the previous chapter. After all, Joss Whedon may explicitly and implicitly acknowledge the *fannish* reading of the relationship between Spike and Angel but fans such as Spirit freely dwell upon it. Similarly, it is the same show that not only creates Logan-the-*woobie* but also yields fan texts that question this portrayal, as exemplified by the music video "Part of the Queue". In these shows, homoerotic relationships are not closeted; stereotypes are reversed; issues of isolation, trust, dependability and moral culpability, among others, are laid out and bared: The subtexts are apparent and explicit. The text's drive to incorporate *fannish* readings does not deplete them of their power. Rather, because the subtext is readily available, it opens up the possibilities for productive readings. The subversive reading practice engendered by them enables a resistant interaction with the texts, rather than the reactionary relationship that is characterized by a preoccupation with the Imaginary. Consequently, by acknowledging and legitimizing the subtext, the texts of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars* situate themselves within the Symbolic. Since resistant fandom acts counter to the unifying structure of the Symbolic, these texts essentially function as tools for the fan to chip away at the Symbolic Order and gain freer access to the Real; rather than as Imaginary constructs.

This chapter has attempted to outline the effects fandom has had on television texts, specifically as they are revealed in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel* and *Veronica Mars*. Because the fan viewer is the metaphorical life-blood of television texts, the role fandom plays in textual

interaction is vital to the medium. These texts recognize the fan's power in constructing, negotiating and influencing meanings. In so doing, they 'talk back' to the fan rather than ignoring his/her productive relationship with the text. They incorporate the subversive meanings of the fandom into the canon virtuality. Although this may be viewed as a counter attempt to normalize *fannish* readings, such an interpretation assumes a wholly reactionary nature of the fan. However, in an essentially producerly medium that is saturated with heteroglossia, the hyperawareness of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel* and *Veronica Mars* works to strengthen the virtuality born from the text by emphasizing the invested relationship between itself and the fan. As a result, the safety zone in which resistant reading practices can flourish is bolstered. Fandom is a game played by devoted viewers who commit to and invest in a specific text. In the case of the three texts, the game transforms itself from solitaire to tag, passing meanings back and forth, forever trying to one-up the other side in an easy manner of camaraderie.

Notes to Chapter 4:

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1. Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.xxiv
2. Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p.1.
3. Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things* (New York: Routledge, 1988) as quoted in Brian Donahue, "Marxism, Postmodernism, Zizek", *Postmodern Culture*, February 2001.
4. Jim Collins, "Television and Postmodernism," *Channels of Discourse Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism*, Ed. Robert C Allen (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1992), p.335.
5. An argument to this statement can be made for the character of Anya. Though she is integral to the character dynamics of the narrative, her assimilation by the Symbolic is weaker than the others. Despite her integration into the group dynamics, her character remains in a state of 'in-between' materialized by her constant movement between being a human being and a demon. This failure of the Symbolic is also revealed in the social awkwardness, which defines her character. Along with Spike, she is also the only main character of the group who dies in the final fight; an event, which is foreshadowed in the previous episodes through the narrative closure, afforded her character when she makes a final decision to become human.
6. Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000).
7. "The Girl In Question," *Angel*, The WB, 5 May 2004.
8. Buffyverse is a fan term for the collective virtuality, which both *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* inhabit. The fandom has adopted 'Jossverse' to denote the thematic universe where not only the aforementioned shows but *Firefly* also exist. Although there is no organic link between the former texts and the latter, the ideological stance of Joss Whedon and the thematic commonalities between the series as well as the fundamental problematics faced by the characters pose as a unifying power.
9. "The Wish," *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* The WB, 8 December 1998.
10. "Doppelgangland," *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* The WB, 23 February 1999.
11. "Halloween," *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* The WB, 27 October 1997.
12. *The Craft*, dir. Andrew Fleming, perf. Robin Tunney, Fairuza Balk, and Neve Campbell, Columbia Pictures, 1996.
13. *The Crucible*, dir. Nicholas Hytner, perf. Daniel Day-Lewis, Winona Ryder, and Joan Allen, 20th Century Fox, 1996.
14. Aired as the 10th episode of the season, *Hush* begins when 'the Gentlemen', the sail into Sunnydale and steal the voices of the entire town in order to ensure that their victims cannot summon help as they cut into their chests and rip their hearts out. The bulk of the episode sees the absence of speech as Buffy and Riley separately and unaware of each other's movements endeavor to uncover the mystery of the vanished voices. Before the final battle of the episode is concluded, the two lovers discover each other's covert identities.

15. www.televisionwithoutpity.com is a widely known and read website that provides very detailed episode summaries of selected television shows as well as forums for viewer discussions. However, the summaries, also known as recaps, include heavy commentaries woven into the description. While the site is very selective in the television shows it chooses to recap, the tone of the interwoven commentaries is often acerbic and unapologetic.
16. Ace, "Hush Recap," 15 December 1999; 24 March 2005, http://www.televisionwithoutpity.com/story.cgi?show=12&story=244&page=10&sort=&limit=all.
17 It is revealed in a flashback that Lamb, in his capacity as sheriff and in a manner that is grossly unprofessional, highly immoral and unethical, ridicules, and refuses to consider, Veronica's complaint regarding her rape. As such, he is unquestionable vilified. However, he remains in the plane of existence of adults and does not immediately signify to the narrative. This fact is underlined by the fact that he does not appear in the opening credits and cannot, therefore, be a major player in Veronica's universe. Had the series been titled *Keith Mars*, Lamb would have been the prime candidate for the villain.
18 http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki.php/Main/TheWoobie.
19 Michael J. Porter, "Redefining Narrative Events: Examining Television Narrative Structure," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* (Spring, 2002).
20 Barthes, *Mythologies*.

Conclusion

The current state of affairs in primetime American television, a market that exports its products to the farthest corners of the world and casts its influence across like institutions in almost every country, is not coincidental. Driven by a very real need to market itself, television has turned to the tried-and-true formula of serialization to construct its narratives, resulting in a fragmented narrative structure that is based on persistent postponement of closure, an emphasis on characters over events and a foregrounding of the paradigmatic axis. This structure, coupled with the writerly / producerly quality of the texts, has also rendered television highly dependent on the viewers, especially those, identified as fans, who are willing to invest time, money and energy on the text.

Though the aforementioned is a medium-wide phenomenon, this study has attempted to provide a discussion of the relationship between the fan and the television text and its position as a consequence of the narrative structure in terms of three specific texts: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars*. In so doing, I have endeavored to reveal the intricate relationship between these shows and their fans that is a constant game of give-and-take where meaning is fluid, pleasure is communal and productivity is elemental. Needless to say, in a medium that straddles the seemingly grand, actually rather thin line between the artistic and the commercial as well as the popular and the marginal; a medium, furthermore, that is defined by its intertextuality; it would be foolhardy to draw generalized conclusions from such a limited pool of sources. While *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Veronica Mars* are popularly regarded as pioneers in television for their gleeful embracing of popular culture in a self-reflexive and thoughtful manner, they are also simply parts of a very big picture that is constantly evolving.

As such, a static account of television narration and fandom is not only impossible to provide but also inherently oxymoronic. Any conclusions that can be drawn from this study are subject to reservation and immediately rendered archaic: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* have already become nostalgic texts, leaving their place to *Veronica Mars*. Furthermore, the medium itself is facing significant technological and material changes that influence its narrative structure. One of these primary changes is the increasing shift toward uninterrupted narratives, provided by cable networks such as HBO that are subject to neither commercial breaks nor the broadcasting regulations that effectively censor source material. This shift is further aided by the Internet which provides viewers with less than legal but highly accessible means of watching television shows without commercial breaks; as well as by technological advances, such as TiVO, that enable viewers to record material with a greater ease than ever before.

Since it remains beyond the scope of this study, both in terms of the vastness of the topic and also in the fact that the subject texts are network series that are broadcast in the traditional fashion, this shift has not been discussed here. In addition, since I have mainly focused on the effect of narrative structure on television fandom from a mechanical perspective, I have refrained from commenting extensively on the psychosocial factors that influence fandom. It must be stated that the act of reading a text as a fan inevitably invokes a consideration of the concept of *jouissance* –as opposed to pleasure- for the organic and almost carnal relationship it establishes between the reader and the text. Furthermore, the creation of virtuality is closely linked to the Postmodern need for narratives that is, arguably, born from a weakened Symbolic Order. Lastly, while American primetime television is almost ceremonial in the structure of its narratives, it influences younger institutions across the world. Even in Turkey, where privatized broadcasting has not yet emerged from its teens, the medium is adapting the formulas, which have already been proven worthwhile in the rest of the world, to its own narratives. Examples like Asmalı Konak, Kurtlar Vadisi and Avrupa Yakası present valuable cases of narrative structure and

television fandom. Similar examples exist in the institutions of other countries, especially England, where the *fannish* relationship presents noteworthy variations. Any further discussion that results from this study must attempt to account for these points, as well as adjusting the particulars of the framework on narrative structure to accommodate the shift toward a structure that is less cognizant of its status as a marketer.

It has already been stated that American primetime television fiction is not a happenstance. Rather, it is a culmination of historical, cultural and commercial processes that have shaped the medium in terms of its form, narrative structure, and relationship to the audience. Moreover, like all processes, those that shape television are ongoing ones that continue to affect what is possibly the most important mass communication medium of contemporary society. As such, television texts do and will continue to change in the manner they construct their narratives and with which they relate to the audience. That they relate to the viewer and in a very specific, intimate and prolonged manner, is possibly the only constant of the medium.

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Appendix
The Primary Texts

ANGEL

1999 – 2004 (USA) The WB

Created By : Joss Whedon
David Greenwalt

Cast :

David Boreanaz
Charisma Carpenter
Alexis Denisof
J. August Richards

Plot Summary :

Cursed with a soul, the vampire Angel moves to Los Angeles and helps the downtrodden while seeking his own redemption with the assistance of Wesley, Cordelia, Gunn and Fred who form the rest of the 'Fang Gang'.

BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER

1997 – 2001 (USA) The WB

2002 - 2003 (USA) UPN

Created By : Joss Whedon

Cast :

Sarah Michelle Gellar
Alyson Hannigan
Nicholas Brendan
Anthony Stewart Head

Plot Summary :

Chosen by mysterious forces to be a vampire slayer and endowed with superhuman strength, Buffy moves to Sunnydale and battles the forces of evil with the help of her friends, Willow, Xander and Giles.

VERONICA MARS

2004 – (USA) UPN

Created By : Rob Thomas

Cast :

Kristen Bell
Enrico Colantoni
Percy Daggs III
Jason Dohring

Plot Summary :

After her best friend is murdered and her father is fired from his position as the town sheriff, Veronica is ostracized in school and abandoned by her mother. She starts working for her father's private investigating business and tries to uncover the murderer of her friend.