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IMITATING AND INNOVATING A CRITICAL TELEVISION STUDIES MODEL FOR COMMUNICATION

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

This project imitates a television studies model of criticism by innovating a critical mixed-methods approach for communication scholars. Jonathan Gray and Amanda Lotz posit a television studies model that comprises examination and analysis across four key tenets in the TV encoding/deocoding process: programs, audiences, institutions, and contexts. In order to meet the criteria of these four tenets, I employ genre theory and autoethnography as a way to intertwine these intersecting communication factions. I limit my scope to the post-*Sopranos* or post-Network era of cable television dominance and triangulate focus between three dominate producers of dramatic television output in HBO, FX, and AMC. These three cable networks provide a healthy sample from which I close read or *close watch* and *rhetorically recap* select dramatic series—including *Sons of Anarchy*, *Game of Thrones*, and *Hell on Wheels* among others—in an effort to examine their social, cultural, political, and ideological meaning making. Ultimately I contend that not unlike the television studies model itself, contemporary television programming and cable drama series in particular utilize a unique brand of *genre-mixing iconicity*. In addition, cable series collectively indicate an emerging genre convention I identify in the *rotten aesthetic*. Through a diverse series of critical analyses, I argue cable televisual programs, audiences, institutions, and contexts constitute and communicate multiple conflicting values. Thus these texts and paratexts can be said to contain rhetorically rich polyvalence that individually and collectively warrant a critical television studies model to be imitated and innovated within communication studies.

KEY WORDS: Genre Theory, Television Studies, Close Watching, Rhetorical Recapping, Critical Polyvalence, Cable Television, Genre-Mixing Iconicity, Rotten Aesthetic

Chapter One

Introducing a Television Studies Model for Communication

A Conversation Concerning TV

This project is designed as a way to introduce and integrate a television studies model for communication researchers. Jonathan Gray and Amanda Lotz's proposed *television studies* model privileges analytic admixture between TV programs, audiences, institutions, and contexts (Gray & Lotz, 2012). I design my communication studies approach to included mixed critical methodologies. Limiting analyses to critical methods is intentional in order to help simplify the four-tenet model of television studies while also demonstrating the analytic dexterity within critical disciplines of communication. In addition, I emphasize critical methods to compliment theoretical and methodological extensions that I contextualize in the chapters to come. These theoretical and methodological extensions genre-mix several overarching themes central to this project, particularly discussions of genre as theory/method, the critical polyvalence communicated by contemporary cable televisual texts, and the ways in which autoethnography can compliment critical theories and television studies.

In *Popular Culture—Introductory Perspectives*, Marcel Danesi (2012) contends, "Television is fiction; but its representations come off as real because of its ability to tap into trends and changing ideologies. The meshing of the imaginary and the real have always been part of its power" (p. 190). One on hand Danesi observes television's powerful potency as cultural lens. On the other hand, these comments ignite a conversation about television and communication. Television has always held rich potential as a cultural barometer. Kendall Phillips (2005) theorizes, "television [of the 1950s] functioned as a kind of mirror—albeit an unrealistically positive and optimistic mirror—into which suburban Americans could spend hours gazing" (p. 68). Television

is more than just a lens or mirror as TV carries strong social, political, cultural, and thereby persuasive appeals. Yet television is also capable of generating multiple messages that lead to varied interpretations.[1] In *Communication Criticism*, Malcolm Sillars and Bruce Gronbeck (2001) agree that interpretation "is often considered the heart of critical activity because it is from critical perspectives that human beings come to understand and deal with various dimensions of their collective memory" (p. 32). For this study, consideration of critical perspectives becomes a motivating factor in developing a television studies model for communication scholars. One useful way to approach studying television is to consider it's socio-cultural and political potency as a communicative text.

Sillars and Gronbeck (2001) find utility in processes of *textualization*, where "doing communication criticism, first of all, involves (1) making a *text* out of (2) a *work* so as to (3) provide readers with *critical understanding*" (p. 23). Barry Brummett (2006) defines a text as, "*a set of signs related to each other insofar as their meanings all contribute to the same set of effects or functions*" (p. 34), while Umberto Eco (1979) views a text as "a maze of many issues" (p. 9), thus highlighting, "the pragmatic process of interpretation…[as] a structural element of its generative process" (p. 9). Roland Barthes (1975) agrees with combining textual assessment with subjective criticism, adding, "*criticism always deals with the texts of pleasure, never the texts of bliss"* (p. 21) [original emphasis]. But more than pleasure centers, "Texts are the ways in which we experience culture" (Brummett, p. 35). It is important to reiterate that critical understanding involves informed methods of interpretation, the potential for persuasion, and thus share certain rhetorical qualities.[2] "Because *critical writing is argumentative, it*

is implicitly a social act, and hence dialogic—shared with an audience" [original emphasis] (Sillars & Gronbeck, 2001, p. 32). But who is the audience for this project, considering intended and extended potential? This project is developed primarily for Communication scholars, yet models, analyses, and conversation will extend to outside disciplines. Cross-disciplinary accessibility is a popular trend among television scholars. Raymond Williams and Harold Innis characterize two prominent media theorists and early television scholars that preferred assessing larger medium issues within Media Studies, rather than closer textual analyses. On the other hand, Horace Newcomb represents a foundational television scholar ahead of his time and at the forefront of conversations advocating and legitimizing the study of television under academic conditions. Newcomb's protégé Amanda Lotz may eclipse Newcomb soon in rigorous output. She conjoins disciplines when structuring many of her works, and "draws upon a theoretical approach to media that combines perspectives characteristic of communication, film, and cultural studies but is firmly rooted in a distinctive, nascent scholarly area commonly identified as television or media studies" (Lotz, 2014, p. 15). Lotz's dynamic approach is not distinctive to a single output but instead indicates a research through line in mixed methods that amplifies the central role communication studies can play in/with television studies.

Likewise television plays a central role among contemporary audiences. Caldwell (1995) contends, "The novel, the movie, and the TV program have, gradually but steadily, replaced the sermon and the treatise as the principle vehicles for moral change and progress" (p. 146). Danesi (2012) shares this sentiment broadly as, "Whatever the truth, one thing is for certain—the partnership between media,

technology, and pop culture has turned out to be *the* vehicle that has consolidated the global village" (p. 238). These formerly divergent medias and mediums *converge* in persuasive ways that shape culture (Jenkins, 2013, 2008, 2006a, 2006b). Similarly, emerging models for television studies converge multiple analyses instead of singular strands of interpretation.[3] Thompson and Mittell (2013) aver, "much of television scholarship is focused on understanding the industrial, regulatory, and reception contexts" while advocating television scholars apply "expertise about the medium's history, aesthetics, structures, and cultural importance to provide critical analyses of specific programs" (p. 3-4). What emerges in this project is a response to Thompson and Mittell's call for critical analyses while adhering loosely to and expanding upon the structural conditions of the four tenets outlined in Jonathan Gray and Amanda Lotz's (2012) *Television Studies*. Gray and Lotz identify four areas television scholars should recognize and analyze in connection: *programs*, *audiences*, *institutions*, and *contexts*. There will be much to say about these four tiers throughout these introductory chapters and into the body of this work.

For the remainder of chapter one, I start a conversation that hopefully raises important questions to consider first while answering some potential concerns. The structure of this introductory chapter borrows from a useful template offered by Robert Allen in *The Television Studies Reader* (Allen & Hill, 2004). Allen organizes his introduction as a way to position frequently asked questions in advance and provide responses that both answer those concerns while also framing the direction of the *Reader*. I respond to a series of questions I hope best represent general concerns with the direction and intent of this project. Of course there is always room to expand

explanation and expand research into newer and narrower directions. Television, like research, offers divergent ways of seeing, reading, and experiencing. The intent of this study is an extension of ideas and theorizations that connects previous perspectives while hopefully expanding them into present and future conversations.

Why should studying television matter for academics?

Television arguably posits one of the lesser-emphasized fields of inquiry in the relatively short histories of communication, cultural studies, and mass media studies. Several practical reasons denote why television studies picks up traction within the last twenty-five or so years. These correlating responses offer a halo effect in that they are both interrelated and speak to the core methodological pursuit of this project. I preview these grounds briefly before contextualizing them in greater detail. First, the emerging field of television studies peeks at a time where traditional television live viewing is in decline while televisual content consumption is peeking in cultural interest, global reach, and quality control.[4] Larger audiences are now consuming increased amounts of programming across a greater array of channels and technological transmedia platforms. Second, the ramifications of across-the-board growth speaks to themes related not only to the content of a program but also to the artists and industries that produce them (e.g. the *rhetors*) as well as the audiences, fans, and technologies that create spaces for sustained textual and paratextual discourses. These combined areas and issues communicate the evolution of TV as a medium, which has outgrown its traditional medium format to emerge as a *televisual media*. This technological and socio-cultural shift actualizes the theoretical transformation of Marshall McLuhan's (1967) iconic phrase "the medium is the message" into what some scholars are re-phrasing as *the*

media is the message. McLuhan became notorious for embracing his celebrity as a "public intellectual" and one wonders what his opinions might look like in the age of Twitter or Wordpress or Instagram or Vine. Perhaps we can recognize the value Henry Jenkins provides as a contemporary public intellectual. Jenkins is arguably the largest name in media studies and has curved the language media scholars' use through terms like *textual poaching*, *convergence culture, transmedia storytelling*, and most recently *spreadability* and *stickiness*.[5] Specifically, Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013) assess:

> Spreadability refers to the technical resources that make it easier to circulate some kinds of content than others, the economic structures that support or restrict circulation, the attributes of a media text that might appeal to a community's motivation for sharing material, and the social networks that link people through the exchange of meaningful bytes" (p. 4).

On the other hand, the co-authors draw from Malcolm Gladwell's (2000) *The Tipping Point* to theorize *stickiness* as a broad "need to create content that attracts audience attention and engagement," as well as institutionally "centralizing the audience's presence in a particular online location to generate advertising revenue sales" as well as "the mechanisms motivating people to seek out and spend time at a particular site" (p. 4).

I will play with these theoretical mechanisms of sticky versus spreadable as they apply to interests relating to televisual content, now that TV consumption online rivals its consumption through traditional viewing practices. Certainly a host of contending

scholars proliferate fashionable thoughts on media theory and the growing role televisual discourse/content plays.

What do contemporary televisual texts offer scholars in the way of new and old theoretical questions and inquiries?

Contemporary televisual texts emanate to the masses in ways that no previous technological current has in human history. Egyptian papyrus began a continental shift from oral to written cultures. Guttenberg's printing press replicated language and denotes an epoch toward literacy, which started a Western phenomenon that grew into a global event. Gugliemo Marconi utilized Nikola Tesla's coil, which generated and focused the electricity needed to transmit across radio airwaves (Vujovic, 1998). Radio technologies innovated alongside what would emerge as the television. While Philo Farnsworth frequently receives credit for television's technological advent, Constantin Perskyi coined the phrase at the World's Fair in Paris in 1900 (McPherson, 1996). Soon Scottish inventor John Logie Baird transmitted some of the first moving images in 1925, just as C. F. Jenkins broadcasted images in the U.S. in 1929 (Runyon, n. d.). There is a back-and-forth to who deserves credit for what technological breakthrough and when and what and how each breakthrough occurs. Lewis Mumford (2010/1964) offers a strong perspective toward the phenomena of inventor privilege through his example of magic. Mumford recalls how magic predates science in human history as a means for cultural control and powerful persuasion Yet Mumford also emphasizes how magic as alchemy (e.g. *trial and error*) precipitates a shared learning curve where wrong ideas can inspire great technological progress through processes of theorization, experimentation, revision, and repetition. In essence, the alchemy "herbalists" that

mystified the Middle Ages laid groundwork for the scientific method during the Enlightenment Age (Mumford, 2010/1964), which informed the direction of the Industrial Revolution of Modernity, which upon reformation and transformation provide the reactionary imperfections and global complexities of Postmodernity. Technological history functions like the mythological hydra in that once one current no longer functions properly, it is removed by innovating two more in its place. Just as the hydra metaphor communicates postmodernity's complexities, it is an apt allegory for the expanding directions of Cultural Studies. Similar historical lineage relating to genre studies development will be expanded upon in chapter two.

Why does Communication Studies posit an appropriate venue for exploring the role of contemporary TV dramas?

Communication Studies in its contemporary form occupies an ideal gatekeeper-threshold for themes concerning politics, persuasion, visual/rhetoric, mass media, gender and cultural studies, and newer avenues like industry and audience studies, as well as popular culture studies like film theory and comics studies to name a few. Communication is a gateway term not unlike rhetoric. If rhetoric encompasses "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (*Rhetoric*, chapter 2, book 1) as Aristotle suggests, then Communication ought pride itself as an interdisciplinary hub connecting disciplines within the humanities and the social sciences. Communication implies connectivity in its theoretical design. The *communication model*, a lighthouse beacon of a definitional term employed in every communication textbook, comprises the interactive functions where "senders" communicate "messages" along "channels" to "receivers" that "interpret" messages

while providing simultaneous "feedback." These messages may or may not be "received" and/or *perceived* accurately due to "interference" or "noise" which can be "internal" or "external" thus distorting the intended message.

It is worth repeating that variations on this base vocabulary term appear in every single communicate introductory textbook and yet the field seems divided at whether peripheral interdisciplinary areas of cultural studies belong within the communication fold. To clarify, every message communicated by humans or by human means is *communicative* and thus qualifies as an artifact or text for potential analysis. Social Sciences epistemologies privilege quantity via quantitative methodologies whereas many Humanities epistemologies privilege close readings and rigorous research that denote richly informed details or qualitative values.[6] There is and should be room for an appreciation of both, and while some scholars thrive in areas of mixed methods, mixed methods approaches can also occur within the same epistemological camps. For this project, I engage mixed methods approaches that fall under the qualitative branch of research. More specifically, the tools I employ draw upon mixed critical methodologies that arguably represent a third tier depending on who or which scholar you ask.

For this project, I connect a host of critical methodologies that collectively support my communication extension of Gray and Lotz's (2012) television studies template. In *Television Studies*, the authors' television studies method calls upon scholars of TV to consider multi-faceted approaches instead of traditional single-lens analyses. Specifically, Gray and Lotz theorize researchers of a television studies methodology should simultaneously investigate areas or content, context, audience, and industry. In an effort to practice television studies methodology but also extend it within

communication studies, I explore these TV Studies tiers through critical methodologies used by several prominent divisions in communication today. For early chapters, I employ combinations of ideological criticism (popular among rhetoric circles) with genre analysis (a prominent method for critical/cultural theorists). During the middle chapters, I combine audience studies with material cultural analysis (utilized in material culture studies, popular culture studies, and art history circles), theories of audience/reception/fan studies and autoethnography toward what could be broadly identified as ideological criticisms. In later chapters, I return to rhetorical lenses relating to public sphere theory (again rhetoric) and gender studies notions of a post-feminist emergence of *raunch culture* to explore the political messages embedded within contemporary televisual dramas. Finally, I combine feminist-rhetorical-ideological-genre theory to propose a theoretical extension that would service each of these communication camps. The goal and execution of this project include: interdisciplinary praxis, theory-bridging, methodological extension, and theory-building. Throughout the project, I insert anecdotal autoethnography as a companion tool that sutures not only the contemporary themes that resonate across the cable drama mediascape but also connects the interdisciplinary tissue that fashions this critical mixed-methodological body of work. Critical methodologies clearly align closer to qualitative work, and indeed autoethnographic anecdotes combine critical areas of close reading with pedagogical reflexivity and qualitative ethnographic investigation.

If the introduction to these ideas appears titanic and overtly complicated, it is because they are reflective of what Lyotard and Jameson and Brummett and others call the *Postmodern Condition*. Linear thought and single-method approach is as

endangered as thinking of television as one-way communication, much less an "idiot box." This project is not designed for novice thinking but it will reward patience and attention to detail. At the risk of sentimentality, this work is as reflective of its author as it is those that mentored and influenced the theories and ideas at play. That said, ideas are presented in consumable and digestible chunks, and each chapter closely ties together individual themes while also communicating themes resonant of larger project goals. This project will educate and inform. It is critical and thus practices social action (Sillars & Gronbeck, 2000). Television Studies also challenges its scholars to think deeper and harder about the interrelationships that must function symbiotically to achieve effect and sustain popularity amidst fickle audiences and social media publics, particularly at the critical juncture of a post-global world with increasing wealth disparity and hyperbolic ideological conflict.

Scholars cannot engage television studies accurately by worrying about simplicity. Simplicity is important in so far as rules and structure and organization are important. Adherence to those principles formulates the crux of the traditional public speech, the clear communication act. I provide clear adherence to structure, organization, and execution. Yet I caution these complex arguments reflect by nature the complex subjectmatter under analysis. Television is *complex* as Jason Mittell (2012, 2015) puts it. Methods of production and consumption are complex. Audience and industry practices constitute messy, discursive sites of imitative and innovative ritual. Rules of genre are complex, evolving, but also *involving*. John Frow (2005) notes how *genre* "works at a level of semiosis—that is, of meaning-making—which is deeper and more forceful than that of the explicit 'content' of a text" (p. 19). When assessing the

texts within genres, Brummett (2006) asserts, “Critics are *meaning detectives*; their role is to explain what texts mean” (p. 94). Contexts are not clear, they must be framed and interpreted. Television is a mass medium, but it is also an intimate experience.

How do other adjacent and/or interdisciplinary fields complement or contrast studies of television programs?

Television Studies appeals to a numbers of fields and disciplines in qualitative and quantitative circumstances that either compliment critical perspectives via mixed methods approaches or work alone producing data vital for contemporary media, industry, and audience studies. Statistical analytics generate the “bottom line” for industry producers and studios. Statistics function as a catalyst for determining what authors, directors, celebrities, and content represent worthwhile investment and maximal capital opportunity. For example, movie theater industry report site *BoxOfficeMojo.com* transmits and translates significant quantitative statistics to the public as a means of communicating which Hollywood properties are generating what amount of currency and how those figures compare to the films released within a similar window. *BOM* goes even further by offering hypothetical statistics that purportedly compare contemporary movie profits with “All-Time” status. Not only does the site compare rankings of top earners across decades (and now between two centuries), but also the site adjusts older films for contemporary economic inflation, thus denoting how newer box office “record breakers” actually fare when positioned against iconic titles and brands in cinema history.

The Nielsen Group posits another tent-pole example wherein data gathered serves industry purposes but also reflects quantitative sensibilities. For decades, the

television industry has relied on Nielsen ratings to designate which shows are "hits," which shows are "misses," and which shows earn renewal versus cancellation. Nielsen ratings help propagate TV-driven periodicals like *TV Guide* and *Entertainment Weekly* among others. Newspapers like *USAToday* made a point to publish a Top 5 or so listing of hits each week. Now these statistics and numbers are projected and reported with far greater frequency than once a week, thanks to Internet proliferation, overnight sample ratings, and updated analytic predictor software. There is even increased debate as to Nielsen's *legitimacy* given its traditional (e.g. biased) data collection methods. Numerous quality shows have been cancelled early due to poor Nielsen ratings as a result of uncalculated figures and factors including *time-shifting* (via DVR, TiVo, etc.), alternative viewing habits (DVD/Bluray rentals/sales), OnDemand services, and non-traditional viewing patterns like Internet streaming directly from a network's website. While numerous shows arguably faced early exits from TV airwaves due to insufficient data analysis, most networks and media producers seem to be showing newfound flexibility, developing in-house techniques rather than relying on Nielsen's late-adaptor practices.

Through these two examples, ample cases can be made for the valuable research available to quantitative researchers in academic and industrial professional roles. On the other hand, qualitative data can be found in abundance on several levels. First, the TV text by nature often comprises a large sample size due the voluminous production slate of many programs. If the average TV show runs four seasons with 22-episodes produced per season, then the four-year schedule yields a potential 88 episodes worth of content in the show's run. Many researchers would agree an 88-episode sampling

comprises a rich field of data from which numerous research questions and observations can be obtained. Now consider a more popular show like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* that runs for 7 seasons at 22 episodes per season, or another highly researched and published television sitcom in *The Simpsons*, which has produced 26 seasons and counting, with each season offering at minimum 22 episodes per fiscal year and 564 episodes and counting. When sister cable channel FXX rebranded their programming slate in 2014, complete *Simpsons* series marathons coincided with an all-*Simpsons* app to rejuvenate the spreadability of the text. The data available with TV programming offers a staggering output for researchers in a number of qualitative camps. In addition to the *volume* of episodes produced by a single show, contemporary technological methods of *access* increase content availability far greater than at any point in television research history. Online databases offer professional and novice archives of television content and data information. Shows new and old can be obtained through a variety of avenues including traditional live broadcasts, time-shifting recording technologies, DVD/Bluray box sets, Internet streaming services, and even meta-industrial broadcast archives like cable's Turner Classic Movies, which strategically plays up certain eras and Hollywood studio portfolios with quasi-historian bumpers that layer cultural and historical depth before and after film airings (a technique FX uses less elegantly to explore contemporary blockbusters).

These examples demonstrate a fraction of possibilities for researchers varied in methodological epistemology. Just as qualitative and quantitative scholars could proliferate given the copious databanks of material to draw upon, television's growing national and global influence situates this medium come media as a central site for

critical scholars. Not only does the mass popularity of such content thus represent a need for close reading and textual analysis of the potential hegemonic values TV may purport, but also the texts as singular *and* collective units grow in richness and complexity as waves of artists, producers, and investors converge toward televisual production from alternative storytelling mediums. "Television" holds various meanings to various stakeholders. TV holds certain ideological resonance for elder generations in ways that MTV once held for Gen X'ers or mobile streaming apps hold among Millennials. Television studies breaks between these invisible ideological-generational-socio-cultural boundaries just as emphasis on critical methodologies strings together numerous supposedly unrelated events, only to re-read these texts and contexts, audiences and industries as *interrelated*, *intertextual*, *interwoven* and *interdisciplinary*.

This project seeks to interweave critical methods with critical texts and disciplines and a shortened connection between these overlapping camps is warranted. Focusing on text and content, authors and audiences, this project also relies on the visual. TV is nothing if not a visual medium and media. With the visual always in the mind's eye, scholars of art and visual culture emphasize the role visuality plays in transmitting and rewriting human history into a visual event. Kramer (1994) identifies cultural preferences toward *visiocentric* phenomena. Whereas radio once posited only an auditory medium—both TV and the Internet have changed radio's limitations—radio met a certain stagnant plateau until satellite technology and the Internet (and to a lesser extent TV) ushered in a convergence epoch. Televisual content benefits from the Internet's quickened fluidity and visual alignment as a spreadable media (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013). Media scholars toggle between a variety of perspectives that span

qualitative, quantitative, critical, and mixed-method approaches. In comparison, media scholars may produce research vital to broad interests, yet media studies recognizes vitality in both the technical or industrial roles in producing content as well as the audience reception or methods of interpretation at stake. Media studies benefits from expanding between perspectives that greatly reflects media studies close relationship with cultural studies.

Terms like genre remain vital to both media and cultural studies. Media and cultural studies branch out of sub-disciplinary fields just as scholars outgrow these molds to legitimize emerging sub-disciplines like audience studies, film studies, genre studies, fan studies, comics studies, and now television studies. Cultural studies scholars discuss the role(s) power plays in the creation and dissemination of social influence. Power often plays a key role in gender negotiation. And thus gender studies branches out of cultural studies to emphasize ways in which culture reinforces and/or resists gender normative behaviors, beliefs, and practices. Issues of gender, as with issues of power and ideology often function well within conversations of rhetoric. To paraphrase, Aristotle's lasting definition contends that rhetoric comprises all the available means of persuasion. If this premise is to be supported, then Rhetoric arguably posits the foundational critical arena in Western history and thought. Greek (and later Roman) thought developed and sustained due to the technological transference of rational and existential wisdom translated onto written form. Early rhetorical thought outlines a means for argumentation and critical reflection upon physiological and philosophical phenomena (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2001). Rhetoric also concerns issues relating to the *political*. Political thought emerges out of theories of argumentation and thus rhetoric

must play an active role in parenting and policing realms where political messages, frequently ideological in nature, attempt to communication messages, often to mass audiences (Black, 1978). Rhetoric comprises a foundational tier of human communication and its history and definitions again appear in nearly every introductory textbook in and out of press. Given this brief rationale, communication studies offers a dynamic field where television studies can compliment the communication field while also expanding its interdisciplinary scholarly terrain.

How does a Television Studies model offer rich theoretical and methodological potential for examining the polyvalent messages and meanings embedded in cable TV dramas?

A number of useful theories and methods help construct this overarching television studies-styled critical-cultural communication analysis. Notably, the chief goal with this project is to evoke genre theory's binary opposition between imitation and innovation with my approach to a television studies methodology. By imitating a television studies perspective, I aim to go beyond individual selection of either a text, an interpretation, or a singular method of encoding or decoding the text. Instead, I follow Gray and Lotz's (2012) call for combined analyses that critically investigate and interrogate four key areas and/or approaches: *programs*, *audiences*, *institutions*, and *contexts*. Often single chapters will combine one or more of these four areas for a couple of reasons. First, analyzing a contemporary TV program may also include acknowledging the kinds of authors, auteurs, and producers that craft a text's message. In other words, rhetorical criticism always accounts for the role of the rhetor just as

semiotics highlights the *role of the reader* (Eco, 1979). Even if the interpretation goes against the text's overt meaning, the context of the overt meaning allows space to formulate covert or oppositional readings. Second, given the ways in which television audiences interact and exhibit paratextual agency, the kinds of media and the contextual borders in which fan-audiences communicate often speaks directly to the kinds of institutional boundaries that sponsor such sites of discourse and/or texts of interest. Thus these two broad examples demonstrate the natural overlap that can and will occur within chapters and units. That said each unit is organized to highlight one of the four TV studies themes with closer attention while the other three themes play peripheral roles. This rotation allows each master theme (*programs→audiences→institutions→contexts*) room for further methodological imitation and theoretical innovation. Theories and methods draw upon a wide body of scholarship that reflects various interdisciplinary tools and perspectives. Early units draw from visual culture, sociology, communication, film theory, genre theory, mythology, and contemporary media theory. The middle unit explores TV texts comprising interests and areas that concern material culture, mythology, rhetoric, audience and fan studies, industry studies, Western film and genre studies, and autoethnography. The final units examine rhetorical theories that include public sphere theory, postfeminist theories, medium studies, genre studies, and theoretical debates concerning raunch culture. These combinations may at first appear highly unlikely in their cross-disciplinary utility. A secondary overarching goal is to demonstrate theoretical elasticity and interdisciplinary dexterity. In other words, these theories and methods—imitated for individual analysis—will be innovated by combining into

experimental combinations. The results yield a postmodern pastiche that is as much reflective of postmodernity, interdisciplinarity, transmedia convergence, and contemporary globalism as it reflects the densely layered and multi-purposed televisual texts at the analytic core of this project. Imitation and innovation.

What markers signify cable TV dramas as rich and rigorous and robust texts for TV scholars (as opposed to news programs or sitcoms or reality TV)

News: A few reasons I opt cable dramas over news content includes daily broadcasts, topicality in constant flux, oversaturation with scholars of political science, political communication, journalism, etc. News also posits a medium at crossroads and in clash with itself particularly in the last decade (see ideology, imitation, farcical discontent, format experimentation, rating emphasis over public wellness, relative nature of truth, Internet dominance, etc.).

Sitcoms: Sitcoms by generic nature are opaquely episodic to a degree that homogenizes the product beyond uniqueness. In the history of TV, new conventions have greater difficulty emerging. As well, "serious" actors and TV writers pay less attention to sitcom discourse and thus far TV critics and media scholars produce less cultural currency.

Reality TV: Issues include mass saturation, appeals to generalized masses and lower class aesthetics (not an argument against analysis but evidential of a homogenized and thus less-layered production), while it generates narratives that supposedly reflect "reality," low-cost production values and casting of less trained actors suggesting again

a kind of cheapened spectacle more in line culturally with professional wrestling than Dostoyevski or the populist novelists like Arthur Conan Doyle or Charles Dickens.

Contextualizing *Sons of Anarchy*, *Game of Thrones*, and *Hell on Wheels* as focal points in contemporary cable content history.

With so many televisual texts circulating through streaming services and audience discourses, what sample or samples might best represent TV's creative and cultural surge? On one hand, it is important to examine the innovators that led the charge across the cable landscape. Specific cable networks played specific kinds of creative roles that persuaded audiences to abandon the safety of traditional network programs in lieu bold new experimentation in content titillation and storytelling complexity. Most conversations along this curve begin with Home Box Office's [or HBO] grand experiment, and *The Sopranos* (1999-2007) in particular as, the text to cross a threshold of critical acclaim and audience viewership in ways that forever changed the role cable plays. Psychological complexity, charmed ugliness, and violent humor helped *The Sopranos* carve out a grand position atop the cable mediascape. Yet fewer recall how HBO's first drama *Oz* (1997-2003) previously paved much of the same gratuitous momentum. *Oz* televisualizes one of the bleakest realities ever depicted on TV. Its allegorical nihilism forces audiences to identify the worst in humanity as a perspectival viewpoint. In addition, audiences could rarely predict outcomes beyond violence and suffering (physical, sexual, psychological, televisual), particularly concerning the "safety" of its cast. This ultraviolent brand of chessboard narrative realism re-presented TV as an *un*-safe space for characters, worlds, and audience expectations. From *Dragnet* and *Police Story* to *Hill Street Blues*, *NYPD Blue* and

Homicide: Life on the Streets, TV dramas continually work to reassert contextual definitions of dramatic narrative and realistic aesthetics just as they play with the form of generic convention (Mittell, 2006).

Just as *The Sopranos* softened the nihilism distributed throughout *Oz*, HBO softened its genre approaches from prison and mafia conventions to richly detailed but bizarrely off-centered family dramas in *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005) and *Big Love* (2006-2011). In contrast to the bleak worlds depicting death row inmates and New Jersey criminals, *Six Feet Under*'s mortuary setting and *Big Love's* just-left-of LDS polygamists in Salt Lake City suburbia each expands TV's familial focus into nontraditional settings. Between these two hard and soft styles of drama programming, HBO also experimented with mixed success in period genre storytelling. Dust Bowl era's traveling circus in *Carnivale* (2003-2005) emphasizes family through fragmented freak show.[7] *Deadwood* (2004-2006) revisits and revises the American Western as a hard-edged civilization hanging onto humanity through shoestring connections that interplay interpretations of American capitalism as period patriarchy. Finally, *Rome* (2005-2007) offers an early precursor to HBO's massive success with *Game of Thrones* by genre-mixing heavy combinations of lavish period spectacle, histrionic ultra-violence, and ample portions of sexual content. Other shows have appeared and disappeared across HBO's televisual landscape, but each of these series helped carve a path for HBO's behemoth hit and first truly transnational drama, *Game of Thrones*.

Game of Thrones (2011-present) not only imitates popular elements from each of these previewed dramas in HBO's canon, but the series also innovates in ways few TV shows have on HBO or television at large. Emphasis here is not to heavily

summarize *GoT*'s narrative strengths, production values, or fan/critical acclaim. Much of this work will be contextualized within the framework presented in later chapters. The goal here is to acknowledge HBO's history as an iconoclast TV production brand and to establish the rich lineage *GoT* benefits from in ways that secondarily contributed to its massive success. Without the cultural clout built by *The Sopranos* or the fan fervor and outrage espoused online by *Deadwood*'s early cancellation or the expensive European location shoots and period set designs invested in the short-lived *Rome*, *GoT* largely benefitted from the industrial (e.g. *institutional*) cultural and economic portfolio amassed by HBO. For these reasons, as well as the now fact that *GoT* surpasses *The Sopranos* historic status as HBO's most-watched and buzzworthy drama,[8] the text represents an *ideal* case study along numerous points of consideration throughout this communication of television studies analysis.

Furthermore, HBO influenced industrial changes in standards and practices across the board for cable. While HBO maintains elite status via its *paid subscription* format, other cable companies have trail-blazed programming strategies that echo HBO's adult-driven brand. Two such cable networks will serve as additional comparisons and thus offer a triangulation of contemporary cable TV's mediascape climate. The Fox Entertainment Group broadcast network and 20th Century Fox film studio (now 21st Century Fox) premiered the cable offshoot channel FX as in the late 1990s. The channel served a tertiary function for rerun programming from Fox Studios and later B-movie oldie cinema in the late 90s/early 2000s period up until the channel invested in original programming starting in 2002. 2002 marked FX's premiere of the antihero cop melodrama *The Shield*, a show that wore its TV-MA rating more like a

bloodied badge than a scarlet letter. Themes habitually usurped traditional network storytelling, including recurring police corruption, purposive police brutality and onscreen criminality, prolonged depictions of male-on-male sexual encounters, lewd sexual content including underage statutory rape, and even onscreen forced rape the likes which previously only appeared on HBO. *The Shield* was an instant hit, and courted controversy and critical acclaim alike.[9] The following year, FX repeated its pattern and in some cases upped its gratuitous ante with the narcissistic sexploitations of two male plastic surgeons in *Nip/Tuck* and post-9/11 firefighters drifting between fraternity machismo and post-traumatic melancholia in *Rescue Me*. FX captured lightning in a bottle through identifying and capturing the attention of young male audiences, a demographic in remission on television since the rise of the video game industry.

For FX, 2002 serves as a programming epoch not merely because they invest in original programming but because the graphic nature of its programming aroused interest among key young male audience demographics and cued a turnaround for a fledgling cable network. Like HBO, FX branched into dramatic and comedic content. Series like *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* and *Archer* helped legitimize FX's raunchy comedic brand enough to warrant the media company's relatively new sister channel FXX. Again as with HBO, the network locates certain storytelling *typology* and exploits it across numerous genres. For these two networks as well as AMC, the typology rests heavily in the antihero archetype. FX's plays with antihero masculinities in each of its aforementioned dramas, but the network reached surged beyond critical acclaim and into mainstream audience recognition with 2008's biker melodrama *Sons of*

Anarchy. Whereas *The Shield* at least pretended to maintain an ethical status quo through the thin veil of law enforcement tropes and conventions, *SoA* unabashedly revels in outlaw culture and contemporary criminality. *SoA* takes the antihero tradition established by *The Sopranos* as again asks audiences to identify with men and women who perform ill will with regularity. While FX boasts other antihero dramas in recent years like *Justified* and *The Americans*, *SoA* showcases a unique form of rebellion in high demand among all televisual programming, *audience growth* (Kondolojy, 2014). Collectively, HBO's *GoT* and FX's *SoA* have experienced ultra rare audience increases each consecutive year on air. Both programs grew from previous seasons and both shows now represent the most popular products released under their respective network banners. It is noteworthy to report that research on each of these programs began years before these top-status ascensions. That said, increased popularity further demonstrates the global reach these narrative properties command and thus expands their potential political persuasiveness. In addition, audience growth and critical acclaim together bolster each text's legitimacy as a site worthy of study, particularly in diverse arenas impacting programs, audiences, institutions, and contexts.

A perfect combination and compliment to HBO and FX's cable growth and popularity can be observed in American Movie Classic or AMC's surge in "quality TV" during the same period. Like FX, AMC held a notorious reputation for rerun culture on cable, coupled with an unappetizing habit of extending movies to almost unwatchable lengths with calamitous breaks for commercial advertising. Yet following HBO's paycable lead and FX's cable portfolio, AMC stole cable TV's golden crown with the one-two punch of former *Sopranos* writer Matthew Weiner's *Mad Men* (2007-2015)

and former *X-Files* writer Vince Gilligan's *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013). Collectively, *Mad Men* and *Breaking Bad* have won six of the last seven Emmy's for Outstanding Drama Series, and AMC now regularly breaks cable ratings all-time highs with horror hit *The Walking Dead* (2010-present). All three of these dramas exude patriarchal potencies and transgress TV's traditional normative boundaries while camouflaging under pretenses of "family." Indeed most shows on TV emphasize familial themes in ways that abstract these most basic of human identifiers. "Family" holds sacred value in culture and may posit the last bastion of acceptable conservatism in an increasingly progressive programming slate. Thus what better ways to play with *familial form* than to simultaneously identify with and fatally transgress familial themes?

Transgressing the family unit starts with putting the traditional patriarch, "the father," into compromised ideological limbo. Thus enters the antihero, a replacement for the traditional trustworthy dad, who simultaneously acts as champion and goat, the would-be righter of wrongs, if not the ultimate harbinger of great tragedy. The antihero is flawed and often tragically so. He survives but frequently at the cost of the well being of others. The antihero's family is chief among those under great suffering, and his pain for causing such suffering is diametrically opposed to the camera's affection for him. Especially among AMC's brand of antihero convention, the central men of *Mad Men*, *Breaking Bad*, and *The Walking Dead* allegorically typify cultural change and the harsh ideological erosion of the American Dream along past, present, and post-apocalyptic future narrative timelines. While any one of these three shows could make a strong case for inclusion in this project's triangular analysis between HBO, FX, and AMC, these dramas already yield saturating attention from TV critics, bloggers, and the Hollywood

industry as a pop culture machine. Thus, for the third unique text I select AMC's underdog Western *Hell on Wheels*. *HoW* functions well within AMC's antihero conventional canon and thus speaks to traditional American themes that I also recognize in both *GoT* and *SoA*. *HoW* also posits an allegorical caveat just as potent as *Mad Men* and *Breaking Bad* but so far receives far less attention. For this reason, *HoW* arguably represents a fine contrast to the massive and immersive popularity that enshrines *GoT* and *SoA*. Hence, *HoW* offers a bit more intimacy as a text and thus will connect a more intimate use of theory and method.

To clarify, other dramas spanning the contemporary televisual mediascape will interject (or *cameo*) at opportune intervals, primarily when emphasizing the broad connectivity these polyvalent texts communicate. Broader TV programming trends play important roles in the theory-building chapters that bookend the middle series of individual analyses. Individual analyses work to support strategic critical methods as means to innovate a Critical Communication brand of Television Studies just as theory-building chapters examine a wider scope of shows in order to generalize and formulate new language for identifying and theorizing the ways these programs communicate cultural values. Examples will not be excessive as much as contextual, always toward generating a deep understanding for prevalent themes, recurring conventions, and contemporary televisual trends. Master themes remain in play throughout this project, including ideological constructs of family, culture and politics, and autoethnographic anecdotes communicating the roles these texts play in contemporary cultural contexts.[10] To clarify, I insert overarching familial reflections that connote how these texts reinforce and transgress (e.g. communicate) themes of family. This exercise lends

support and legitimacy to scholars that may find autoethnography a divisive interdisciplinary tool. Fortunately for those scholars, alternate critical tools perform the majority of analytic duties.

How do *Sons of Anarchy* and *Game of Thrones* represent cable dramas in ways that highlight the texts as unique and similar to the post-*Sopranos* drama?

I have previewed some similarities that mark *GoT* and *SoA* as similar to other each other in terms of unique and consistent audience growth among network and cable dramas. But why are these shows popular and just who is watching? The long-argument of this project is one of many attempts at exploring academic rationales for what kinds of rhetorical power these texts communicate and generate along cultural lines. The primary focus of this project is critical work, and mixed-methods approaches to critical work in particular. There is clearly a need for quantitative data that might surveys why audiences now grow into TV series as opposed to start with them. And there are several logical deductions that could be hypothesized: a show's theme, the competitive number of broadcast, cable, and paycable channels overstuffed with 24-hour cycles of programming, the comfort or conformity of a text to audience anticipation versus the draw of unpredictable and thus excitable entertainments. These types of questions suggest enough potential data to fill many competing volumes. But for theoretical purposes, this project remains focused on expanding and connecting critical methodologies.

In addition to critical methodologies, I frequently draw upon qualitative components that play into close readings. The three texts I detail include surveying two shows with episodes that currently span four seasons and counting (40 and 43 one-hour episodes) and seven seasons (91 one-hour episodes) respectively. I compare these texts with other popular and unpopular texts—popularity a relative term in many ways—and thus connect overarching themes that denote televisual trends and conventions while also heightening an awareness of the cultural resonance generated by these texts. But back to the question of *who* or *what kinds* of audiences watch these programs. This project is not about audiences as a primary focus. But as a tier of television studies, audiences remain an important focal point. There are many ways to gage audience interest in a post-Internet/post-social media, post-fan studies culture. Social media websites, and this includes "the biggies" not just niche sites, now regularly report their top-trending stories. This applies to all current events but speaks to sustained interest when these televisual texts dominate the popularity statistics (e.g. "trending" and buzz) in and around seasonal airdates. One way a text can gain exposure and legitimacy is through cultural currency. I acknowledge audiences according to a show's ratings, the paratextual modes or contexts with which fan audiences communicate, and theorize the role(s) researchers play as informed interpreter.

For example, if a program is on the eve of its seasonal premiere date, a quality or popular text will be accompanied by an advertising campaign to herald its return. Yet many cult shows excite fan fervor in ways that no network crime procedural can. Social media buzz is particularly rich between *GoT* and *SoA*. I am surprised each year—given the gratuitous, misogynist, and anti-social/ultra-violent content on display—what kinds

of friends or acquaintances feverishly champion these texts. As a native Oklahoman, my circles of friends and family move along an atypical continuum of neoconservative and highly religious social media friends to progressively liberal academics, peers, associates, and so on. It does not surprise me to see a liberal acquaintance in the Northeast promote a progressive kind of content. I am "friends" with numerous comic book artists and creators that dwell within creative fantasy and progressive entertainments for a living. What does surprise me is the overt connection a text like *SoA* has with conservative, blue-collar folks that churn away at tough jobs far more than they watch TV.

Take for instance, a guy that attends local church but comes from a rougher-than-average background. This man wears his spotted history through his non-conforming beard that is in no way an attempt to be young or edgy or trendy or ironic. He works as an ironworker and may leave town for long projects so that he can put food on the table for his family. As quiet as he is in church, exclamation points stylize his comments like painted flames when *SoA* comes around each cycle. Similarly, there is a former coworker from my early years in advertising. This woman is a young mother-of-two, divorced due to an abusive husband with a criminal history, but is also one of the fiercest and most honest people I've ever met. She continues to battle cancer for the last six or seven years, her fighting spirit a direct reflection of her naturally rebellious personality. She goes berserk with enthusiasm and passionately *shares* stories and content in anticipation of *SoA*'s return. Finally, my half-brother. We are largely alienated due to a considerable age difference, geographical separation, and as a common familial reverberation among broken homes, we share an entirely different

emotional experience tethered to the relationship we have with our father. My brother emphasizes hard work and puts in unconventional nightshifts in a factory. He's not religious but he is conservative and loves guns about as much as he loathes big government. For any combination of reasons listed, it should be clear by this point he too watches *SoA* with vested interest.

These and similar types of qualitative examples serve as ornamental reminders of the power TV texts possess as cultural currency. In addition these personal examples also combine elements of qualitative ethnography with the intimacy or personalization autoethnography affords. And if not outright autoethnography, then samplings of personal anecdotes that compliment critical analyses to come. Samples are not intended to be representative so much as they will accentuate a text's virility across socio-cultural lines. Just as *GoT* has built-in fan fare with fantasy readers and role-playing gamers, it is a favored text among the elite wealthy class including President Barack Obama and even television's business elite like *SNL* and *30 Rock* creator-producer Lorne Michaels. Thus when highly motivated or culturally inspired, television production can tap into and elicits undergirding emotions shared across audience demographics. This is executed through the human power of storytelling at a creative epoch for this medium, yet to be sure there is an Aristotelian sense of *kairos* in what and how and to whom these texts communicate their messages. The contemporary cable drama is more than conventional form. Its output weighs heavily on and in the cultural consciousness or *zeitgeist*. Cable content plays for post-*Sopranos* audiences but speaks to post-9/11 anxieties. These anxieties are not necessarily due to 9/11 as already scholars decree this event's cultural resonance as almost deceased (Lotz, 2013). Instead,

what 9/11 represents is a paralyzing live media event, a violent and powerful critique, an ideological harbinger, a political and cultural epoch, a paradigm shift in the ways we think and fear and consume. Just as Americans did not need to *be in* New York City to feels the gravitas of the situation or fear the threats of continued attack or notice the economic impact at airports and gas stations and so on, audiences do not need to be members of outlaw biker gangs or roaming medieval countryside's with severed limbs or baby dragons to appreciate and identify, even subconsciously as is often the case, with the weighty themes mediated by contemporary television.

Why is family an important theme?

Marcel Danesi (2012) theorizes, "Television programming meshes fictional narrative with moral and social messages for the entire family," so much that "television is a locus for discussing moral issues, acted out upon a media stage that has replaced the pulpit as the platform from which they are discussed publicly. Television hosts, like medieval priests, comment morally upon each case deriving general moral principles from it" (p. 187). TV is a historically family-orienting medium (on the outside) and a fragmenting divider on the inside. For example, *Mad Men*'s ritualistically re-presents the 1960s nuclear family imploding without noticing due to their collective concentration on TV when at home.[11] The drama plays with nostalgia by means of critiquing the past. Yet perhaps its messages say as much or more about the present. Before *Mad Men*, sitcoms like *All In the Family, Married With Children*, and *The Simpsons* have each played with deconstructing idyllic televisual portrayals of family, which functions as a hallmark convention in TV history. Yet Lembo (2000) interprets, "television programming [as] symbolically complex…can mean different things at

different times to different people" (p. 105). That said, despite family affirming or disaffirming messages, television is an American tradition with increasing persuasion. Spatially, Americans homes are collectively witnessing the disappearance of the second living room or social "den" in favor of *media rooms* that capture the spectacle of in-home theaters (Spigel,1992).

TV is traditionally a familial enforcer, from *Father Knows Best, Leave It To Beaver, and I Love Lucy* to *Family Ties*, *Full House*, and *Modern Family*. Even the workplace becomes familial, as noted in *M.A.S.H.*, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *Cheers*, *The Office*, and *Parks and Recreation*. The TV drama also posits an archetypal enforcer for familial focus. Cop dramas like *Miami Vice*, *NYPD Blue*, *The Wire*, *The Shield*, and now *Justified* borrow from the hard-boiled detective genre conventions in ways that suggest the workplace is a more stable and familial environment while the home in contrast offers empty space, depression, and the temptation toward downward spiral brought on by isolation and self-reflection. A drama like *Lost* re-presents notions of family while the similarly written/produced *Alias* disguises family drama under genre dressings of *spy* and *action-adventure*. Networks in particular reinforce this theme of family but cable is showing sly reinventions of what audiences consider "familial." And while networks reinforce healthy notions of family, cable seems interested in fragmenting ideals of both "family" and "community." Notions of family and community each suggest core ideological values traditionally protected by Americans. Questions concerning *why* and *why now* will be explored through analyses on context to come. With this teaser in place, it is appropriate to next consider various notions of genre, as well as a method for televisual consumption with a critical eye. These

conversations set up an exploration of cable TV texts, and how these dramas imitate purported values of family while innovating gratuitous ways to devalue them.

Mirroring TV's *familial function*, Critical Theory offers a family of critical perspectives and methodologies that, like cable dramas, questions the establishment, reframes the status quo via investigations into issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, and above all positions of power, particularly those relating to political economy (e.g. the intersection of politics and capitalism). Like the positive charge of family, critical theories can work together to create economy for marginalized or underprivileged voices (Tyson, 2006). Yet unlike marginalized areas brought into light most televisual content and output remains ironically centralization on privileged White male pro-/antagonists. This recurrent theme will be assessed progressively.

What can be gained through examining cable TV dramas from diverse critical perspectives?

There are numerous themes, theories, conversations and contexts examining cable TV dramas from critical perspectives offers. Exercises in mixed critical methods, demonstration of polyvalence, exploration of critical/cultural themes circulating post-9/11, post-Bush, post-globalist, post-*Sopranos*, post-Network, post-Millennial and now perhaps *post-TV* themes. These examples represent a small sampling of themes scholars could engage and reflect, which I hope to expand upon throughout this project. In the next chapter I engage conversations of genre and offer theoretical groundwork toward extensions of genre studies that coincide with a television studies model for communicate scholars.

Chapter Two

Understanding Genre as Theory

The TV Pilot as a Metaphor for Literature Review

Pilots are tricky business. TV critics acknowledge the risky nature of launching a "pilot" episode for any given series. The pilot must offer a certain dénouement of exposition and introduce the audience to the world of the text (e.g. its *diegesis*), as well as the characters that inhabit it. The pilot must propose some course of action or status quo to be upheld (or protested). The pilot must establish through mise en scène tone and project foreshadowing through any combination of actors, set design, lens selection, lighting, music, direction, and each of these must be in tune with the written word of the script. The script ought offer a grounding component that anchors each of the aforementioned elements together cohesively. Thus the visual language of the text follows the written language. The breadth of media studies, cultural studies, and communication theory and methods could effectively exhaust, derail, and conflate an already aggressive attempt at combining ideas, issues, texts, and interpretations under one project. For these and other practical reasons, there are limitations that must be noted and embraced in the interest of cleanliness and clarity. I list and discuss contributing scholars, theories and methods, while perceiving a holistic history of each of these fields would surely subvert the goals and focus of this project. Like the TV pilot, it is a delicate balance deciding what to leave in versus out of a literature review. Smart pilots tease information promising later fulfillment if an audience-viewer patiently plays along. On the other hand, a pilot heavy on exposition and slow to action may ward off audiences so quickly that a show never recovers. In this instance the pilot's imbalance opens a void whereby fleeing audiences results in low ratings and high probability that a show cannot make good on its pilot's narrative promise.

For this reason, I design a literature review that covers some historical basics, while balancing contemporary scholars and scholarship that this project hopes to extend. There is a danger in bridging too many ideas into one project. Likewise similar dangers can be exciting not unlike numerous contemporary TV texts. One of the reasons *Lost* captured the social imagination of critics-scholars-audicnces is due partly to the text's *genre elasticity*. Forget how the show ended, the energy with which it began communicates a template for the kinds of *textual hybridity* that elevates televisual discourse into cultural currency.[1] *Lost* functions at base as a network TV drama. Specifically, it is an *adventure* drama of *Robinson Crusoeian* influence, yet episodic emphasis on single character flashbacks tether a key component to character dramas. The absence of detail concerning characters, and the incremental "reveals" of key background information fashions the series into a *mystery*, while present uncertainty of character fates and alliances denotes the *thriller* genre. *Lost*'s musical score toggles between *science fiction-action thriller* and sentimental *human drama* as well. The tropical location denotes again the *adventure* setting while the makeshift huts, beaches, and oceanic trappings connote meta-TV history with numerous intertextual and paratextual comparisons to *Gilligan's Island*. This works well with some of *Lost*'s sillier moments and humorous self-aware reflections from characters such as Hurley and Sawyer. *Lost* evokes the TV's past through its televisual present. In scholarly terms, *Lost* communicates nonlinear fragmentation closely associated with postmodernity. The goal of this project is not to argue and extend claims about postmodernity, although such claims are contextually demonstrated. Rather, *Lost* exemplifies aesthetic liveliness, an attractiveness or allure that is both symptomatic of and speaks to contemporaneity.

Audiences and critics are *drawn to* the text's genre elasticity and the text becomes a cultural beacon as a result. Love or hate the text's inability to survive its own success by show's end, the text's *cultural currency* or *social impact* on the television medium resonates in the most successful texts on air today.

HBO's *Game of Thrones* may not have survived past its geographic and multi-cast complexities if not for *Lost*'s scattegorical approach to narrative hybridity. *American Horror Story* could not transgress audience expectations and cultural norms to as large an extent if not for *Lost*'s unsettling fragmentation of diegetic space and narrative time.[2] *Lost* was not a perfect text, and indeed the ailments that tested showrunners Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse continue to haunt their narrative present in film and TV.[3] Coupling *Lost*'s inability to please all audiences and critics, this project cannot successfully encompass the complete academic landscape in conversation. To borrow from a familiar scholarly saying, this project *genre-mixes and is genre-mixed*. There are expectations readers will understand certain conversations just as audiences recognize genre conventions. Literature is explored when contextual. Some scholarly references are contextual to respective chapters. Other theories span multiple chapters or units. Larger themes central to understanding a "television studies model" will be surveyed throughout. As with *Lost* sometimes a backstory can reveal *too much*. A story's need to "satisfy narrative curiosity" extends into such vivid detail that audiences, critics, or readers can be turned off entirely or unsatisfied by the narrative limitations such specificity precludes. This preface constitutes an attempt to move beyond our pilot episode and into the action of the story.

Denis McQuail compares the role critical theory plays as a deductive rationale for media studies scholars. McQuail (2006) notes how, "critical theory seeks to expose underlying problems and faults of media practice and to relate them in a comprehensive way to social issues, guided by certain values" (p. 11). This media-centered approach to critical theory is useful when considering how to frame critical perspectives of mediated content, critical perspectives on mediated audience discourse, and a critical approach to understanding cultural contexts and industry preferences. Thus, critical theory sub-categorizes various mixed-methods when applied across various texts, contexts, audiences, and institutions. For this reason, it is important to reemphasize this project suggests a hybrid television studies model, a *critical television studies model*, useful for communication scholars but also extendable to an array of interdisciplinary studies. Embracing mixed critical methods also affords a critical television studies model the potential to display scholarly strengths offered through critical inquiry. Communication is a potent field due partly to its cross-disciplinary utility ranging from social scientific to qualitative to humanities-driven critical approaches that span numerous divisions and interpretations of communication as human social action. Each of these broadly defined divisions offer rich potential insight into television's social and cultural history. Refining this study to critical inquiries allows a single epistemological branch increased theoretical and methodological dexterity. Critical emphasis does not seek to alienate scholars and readers of social scientific or qualitative inquiry so much as add to understandings of critical potentiality for future studies.

Analyzing Audiences Through Reception Studies

Reception Studies as an interpretive direction for examining "audiences" in television studies' programs/contexts/audiences/institutions paradigm. Allen and Hill (2004) appropriately refine audience studies into three areas of emphasis. The first or traditionally quantified *audiences studies* focuses on volumes of viewers, audience demographics, and other industry-economic factors that gauge a program's vitality and longevity. This project does not rely on statistical evidence so much as interpretive messages and coded meaning. To reiterate, statistics play a useful secondary function supporting a rationale for studying a text rich in popularity or critical acclaim (e.g. ratings, currency generated, industry numbers, etc.). A second area of audience studies emphasizes *media studies* storied relationship to effects studies. *Effect studies* draws upon and attempts to capture "behavioral and attitudinal effects upon particular audiences of television viewing" (p. 457). Effects studies connotes a contentious history where debates over issues like media portrayals of violence and/or inappropriate content are never quite able to fully generalize a purported social impact. Effects studies are historically practiced by social scientific methodologies although ethnographic studies can offer unique case studies highlighting significance viewed in individual reports.

A third area in *reception studies* shares the broad interest of audience studies but differs in methodological approach. Reception studies:

> [E]ntails viewing and listening to television (raptly, casually, intermittently, or accidentally), but also talking about what we have seen/are about to see, being addressed as a viewer by television's programs and scheduling practices (late afternoon for kids; late night for

> adults), and encountering television through other media as well (articles about television programs in the press, official or fan-sponsored websites) (Allen & Hill, 2004, p. 457).

The reception studies approach values the unique interpretive abilities viewers possess while not just quantifying *which shows audiences watch,* at *what time of day*, or *in what capacity or medium they consume content*. Rather, reception studies places primary importance on inquiring, "how do people understand, make pleasurable, and use the television they watch?" (p. 457). This framework for analyzing audiences is extremely useful for and in conversation with the theoretical techniques applied to patterns of reflection, consumption, and generating online discourse in the section on audiences.

Television Studies as Television Criticism. In their introduction to *How To Watch Television*, editors Thompson and Mittell (2013) emphasize the role *critical analysis* plays in television criticism. The authors-editors offer four descriptive criteria that easily translate into processes utilized for this study. Thompson and Mittell (2013) observe the following:

> 1) TV is complicated
>
> 2) To understand TV, you need to watch TV
>
> 3) Nobody watches the same TV
>
> 4) Criticism is not the same as evaluation (p. 6-7).

These four criteria underline important criteria any scholar investigating television should be privy to. Their first tenet constitutes the continued argument that television is not a simple medium, and its processes of production and consumption, authorship and interpretation only grow in complexity over time. The second tenet is practical but also

stresses how out of sync some perspectives might appear if a scholar lacks an authoritative familiarity with TV. The third tenet is a claim denoting subjectivity. TV is as private as it is public, as personal as it can be impersonal. It is a foremost subjective experience in that audiences receive its many messages based on an orientation of individual informed-interpretive capabilities. Finally, the fourth tenet communicates a calling for television scholars to move beyond mere evaluation, a subjectively informed process, toward academically sound processes that embrace rich and rigorous theories and methods. But before I begin critical analysis, it is pertinent to examine the theoretical complexity of genre.

A Brief Genre History

In *Film/Genre*, Rick Altman poses an important question—"If the existence of a genre depends on general public recognition rather than on individual spectator perception, then how does that public recognition come about?" (Altman, 1999, p. 15). One response to Altman's concern is through informed criticism. Sillars and Gronbeck (2001) concur that, "In our time, the association of political purpose with critical-cultural methods created criticism that differs from the neoclassical and epistemological views. Critical-cultural criticism in this era has taken on an activist role, making criticism itself a political act" (p. 18). But before I can proceed with conjoining critical-cultural criticisms with theories relating to genre, it is essential to outline an understanding of what genre is, what it previously meant, and what contemporary and future uses it holds for scholars. In this section, I explore four areas specific to theorists, theoretical perspectives, and uses of these theories/perspectives within the realm(s) of mass communication, media studies, cultural studies, and even some of the sub-

disciplines like film theory, television studies, comics studies and genre studies. These questions investigate and review processes of genre.

I first describe *what a genre is* and *how understandings of genre change over time*. Demonstrating this point requires connecting larger movements in Western history and mass communication history with arrows denoting how understandings or uses of "genre" shift with cultures. Second, I offer a healthy explication of how genre functions as a fragmented discourse of meanings and interpretations along current uses in postmodern climates. This historical overview will help describe the second question I assess, *why genres exist*. A historical/contextual understanding will support significant "So what?" concerns that scholars might have for why genre is a convenient if not contextually relevant and culturally significant field of inquiry. This line of thought transitions into how genre functions differently among media producers, audiences, and cultures. Third, I examine Stuart Hall's (1980) benchmark essay "Encoding and Decoding" as a way to connect discussion of genres back to larger questions of cultural codes. This will open up a discussion of myth and how both theorists and cultural groups use myths to create social order. Comparison and contrast will abound. Finally, I address a fourth question of genre through a theoretical example in Will Wright's (1975) *Sixguns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western*. Using Wright's research as a starting place, I examine how he reads social construction through the Western film genre. I conclude by lifting some of Wright's structuralist theoretical framework to examine modern cable dramas that might exhibit similar structural codes. Wright's text thus extends a contemporary conversation relevant to this study of how texts like cable TV dramas experiment with genre as socially coded mythical, ideological, and

intertextual artifacts of spectacular persuasive appeal—In other words, a critical television studies examination involving genre-mixing iconicity.

Defining Genre

Definitions of *genre* vary according to who is using them and for what purpose. A "true" understand of genre posits a misleading response as genre varies in accordance to temporal and contextual use. For example, I might approach lay audiences and ask them what their favorite "genre movie" is, to which their responses might include "romantic comedy," "horror," or "science fiction." These are lay understands for how moviegoers relate or segregate common understandings of film form. Similarly, if I ask media audiences what their favorite media genre is, responses might include "television," "radio," "the movies," and so on. If I asked of a favorite genre of TV programming, typical responses might include "sitcoms," "reality TV," "news," etc. Thus, through simplified logical reasoning, we see how genres at a social-entertainment level act as categorical systems with particular modes of operation. These modes of operation are often called *conventions* and help create meaning-making for audiences or *readers* of these texts.

The term "genre" finds etymological roots in *genos*, which is also French for "class". Another way to think of genre is to compare it with common understandings of genes. Scientific reasoning—based partially on cultural acceptance of the scientific method—creates a shared belief that genes or microscopic particles of life, represent a foundational building block of life. Frow (2008) calcuates how, "Accounts of taxonomy tend to take as their prototype the powerful and rigorous models that have been developed in the sciences: the periodic table of the chemical elements, the Linnaean

schema for organizing the orders of the natural world, the Darwinian model of the evolution of species" (p. 51). Or without getting too far off track, genes compose a categorical area of differentiation and identification for mankind. If you share genes with a family member, our culture contends this sharing *means something* or has *value*. Frow compares genre to biology and emphasizes how biological genres are traditionally recognized as closed genres whereas the genres of literature function openly with greater parametrical fluidity. Thus through example, we understand the value of categorical information in helping humankind (and producers, audiences, and various co-cultures specifically) make sense of their environment. Yet as Frow helps clarify, taxonomy renderings of genre offer greater stability versus the evolving kinds used as cultural currency among audience and institutional spheres.[4]

On the other hand, genre linguistically connotes a bevy of meanings to cultural theorists that study the term from an array of diverse perspectives. But before I examine a few of those more common academic uses and understandings of genre, I summarize a historical reading of how genre evolved in select periods of Western history. The [ancient] Greeks, among the forefathers of Western thought, divided their forms of storytelling the areas of *prose, poetry,* and *performance*.[5] Indeed Aristotle classified distinctions between what he understood as *epic*, *comedy, tragedy, and parody* (Brummett, 2006, Herrick, 2005, Bizzell & Herzberg, 2000). As Greek supremacy waned, the Romans embark on a cultural shift (and generic distinction) from oral to written culture. In *Orality and Literacy*, Walter Ong (2002/1982) notes how storytelling during this time would have been categorized unofficially; sometimes *as shared experience* other times as *religious ritual*, and of course the intermingling combination

of these two groups which Joseph Campbell (2008/1948) identifies as "myth" in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. In *Connections,* James Burke (2007) places special emphasis on the evolution of communication technologies. Burke observes that around 500ad, the *codex* replaces written scrolls in Europe, water-powered mills produced mechanized paper which is manufactured in Chinese and Middle Eastern Muslim cultures. As The Church gained prominence and thus power throughout the Middle Ages, generic distinctions were a significant barometer among the few [or *elite*?] literate. Thus, genres served a function between *religious* or *sacred* texts and *secular* and/or *profane* texts. This hierarchy between the sacred and profane *genres* of written documents led efforts toward mass extinction of non-religious/non-*Christian* materials. As historical connections co-create meaning, "Genres create effects of reality and truth which are central to the different ways the world is understood in the writing of history or philosophy or science, or in painting, or in everyday talk" (Frow, 2008, p. 19).

Around 1450, Gutenberg advances the printing press that enables mass production capabilities and promotes an uptick in literacy, first among the elite, but gradually expanding among the masses. With the advent of a printing press, technology naturally progresses. With the upswing in literacy, new innovations in written language expand. A term used to signify this epoch is the Enlightenment and Renaissance eras of European history. This includes advances in art and art history where terms like *perspective*, *dimension*, etc. refers to specific individualized theories on how to create and interpret or "read" art. With flexibility via individuality on the rise, diverse creative output requires categorization for shared understanding. As secular culture gains footing with private presses and early forms of pre-industrial models of capitalism, storytellers

like Shakespeare develop literary techniques that update and "modernize" understandings of genres like comedy, drama, and tragedy. With innovations in literature, the bourgeois culture emphasizes art criticism.

For simplification, I present a hybrid timeline whereby certain theoretical and ideological qualities *leads to* (or →) innovations in theory and practice. I draw on both James Burke's multiples works around "connections" as well as Marshall Poe's *A History of Communication* to inform a dramatized temporal flow chart. The following stages thus develop in overlapping succession as the scientific age of enlightenment broadens to include and impact Western thought: Industrialization→Rise of Capitalism→Rise in Free Market Print Production→Diversification of Creative Avenues and Literary Innovations→Development of new Medias and Mediums in the late eighteenth and through the twentieth century→New Shifts in Thinking *about* Literature→Increase use of and attention to Literary Criticism and Literary Theory→New Wave of Leftist Thought→The Frankfurt School→Emergence of Critical Theory→Critical Theory expands to Cultural Studies→Media Studies→Film Theory→Genre Studies→TV Studies. This fast-forward flow chart allows us to observe technological mass mediated advancements that certainly impact the emergence of *genre* as a theoretically viable term with a rich history embedded in form. It also provides a chronology of Western thought as paradigm shifts situate a context for where genres come from and why they exist.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, as media(s) and mediums including film, radio, TV, and the Internet arrive and innovate, emphasis on genre plays a pivotal role in economic-cultural categories comprising institutions, programs, audiences, and

their contexts. However, with so many competing media(s) and mediums, takes on genre divide decidedly between scholars and schools of thought. I mention media and mediums for significant reasons. First, theories and perspectives on genre occur within media scholar circles. These circles expand and contract but can include: communication, journalism, media studies, cultural studies, television studies, film studies, comics studies, literary studies, English, history, sociology, psychology, philosophy, cultural anthropology, art and art history, and other areas of the humanities and social sciences. Scholars in conversation (and contention) over the last 75 years include Marshall McLuhan, Raymond Williams, Harold Innis, Horace Newcomb, Tsvetan Todorov. Cantankerous critical pessimists like Kenneth Burke, political dissenters like Theodore Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Antonio Gramsci, Walter Benjamin, and later Michel Foucault, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Frederic Jameson, and Neil Postman. Philosophers, Structuralists, and Semioticians include Roland Barthes, Claude Levi-Strauss, Judith Williamson, Northrop Frye, and Umberto Eco. New Left innovators of television discourse in John Fiske, Stuart Hall, John Hartley, Lyn Spigel, Stuart Kaminsky, Rick Altman and John G. Cawelti and Will Wright (who I will address in more detail shortly), each spinning out of ground laid by film theorists like Christian Metz, Tom Gunning, John Berger, Gilles Deleuze, Sergei Eisenstein, Andre Bazin, Judith Mayne, Richard Dyer, Thomas Schatz, Jane Feuer, and Michael Chion. Contemporaries TV scholars emerge (often within Communication Studies); scholars like Jonathan Gray, Laurie Ouellette, Cornel Sandvoss, Alan McKee, Amanda Lotz, Matt Hills, Jason Mittell, Jeremy Butler, Brian Ott, with many more showing interest and output each year. These scholars merge minds with media studies theorists that

follow televisual flows alongside convergent technologies; scholars like Henry Jenkins, Mark Deuze, Steven Johnson and Derek Johnson. I minimize these camps and scholars for two reasons. I do not possibly have the space here to detail all of the marvelous theoretical innovations each of these scholars offer this project. Rather, I employ a contextual "postmodern understanding" that simplifies this conversation by looking to Stewart Hall's 1974 essay "Encoding/Decoding".

Encoding/Decoding as Paradigm Shift for TV Studies

How does Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model and his discussion of cultural codes inform our understanding of genre? How about the concept of myth or perhaps mythologies? To what extent are genres culturally bound versus universal? These are some of the questions that come to mind when considering the impact Hall's work leaves on interdisciplinary-subjectivist-critical scholars and scholarship. In "The Television Discourse: Encoding and Decoding", Stuart Hall (1974) interprets the symbolic power coded into texts/artifacts by challenging traditional views favoring primary shared meaning. As I examine Hall's essay, discussion will expand to consider how myth and ideology function, along with that turbulent term *fragmentation*, in the co-creation of meaning making. Hall observes, "We must recognize that the *symbolic form* of the message has a *privileged position* in the communication exchange: and that the moments of 'encoding' and 'decoding', though only 'relatively autonomous' in relation to the communicative process as a whole, are *determinate* moments" [my emphasis] (Hall, 2008, p. 908). In other words, Hall argues while traditional communication models note how senders/encoders send messages (let's say TV writers) and receivers/decoders receive messages (let's say TV audiences), the process does not

guarantee the receivers/decoders *read* or interpret a message in the way it was *intended* by the sender/encoder.

For example, Vince Gilligan's characterization of Walter White in *Breaking Bad* undergoes dramatic transformation from sympathetic cancer fighter to sociopathic criminal mastermind. Yet despite the showrunner's claim that *Breading Bad* seeks to answer the question, "How did Mr. Chips become *Scarface*?" (Frenan, 2010) audiences actively continued to root for White well after his dark descent. Audience identification with White's brooding antihero persona led to actual real-life hate-speech against White's fictitious wife Skyler on message boards and Twitter but some of these negative comments even extended beyond character toward actress Anna Gunn. Gunn (2013) even contributed a *New York Times* Op-Ed addressing hate speech that transcended the character Skyler rage fueled at the actress. Despite Gilligan's twisted sympathy for the characters he created, he could not control audience identification and the inability for some viewers to interpret White as evil and deserving of empathy. For Rocky Mountain viewers that advocate legalization, *Breaking Bad* reads in an entirely different way than perhaps Midwestern Bible Belt conservatives. Yet television dramas can be dynamic in their open-coded framing and ambiguous meanings.

Hall (1974) theorizes, "The 'object' of production practices and structures in television is the production of a message: that is, a sign-vehicle, or rather sign-vehicles of a specific kind organized, like any other form of communication or language, through the operation of *codes* within the syntagmatic chains of a discourse" (p. 8). Hall draws upon the TV Western, a genre that often makes its signs and symbols as explicit as they are implicit. "Conventionalizing the Western means that a set of extremely

tightly coded 'rules' exist whereby stories of a certain recognizable type, content and structure can be easily encoded within the Western form" (McQuail, 2002, p. 305, & Hall, 1974). Thus, drawing again from the *Breaking Bad* example, producers and audiences have the ability to *construct* and *interpret* (e.g. decode) multiple messages based on a *preferred meaning* continuum that runs from *dominant-hegemonic position* to *negotiated position* to the most resistant form in the *opposition position* (Hall, 2006/1980). Thus from *preferred meaning* continuum we return to terms like *denotative* (primary) and *connotative* (secondary) understandings and interpretations. John Fiske emphasizes this theoretical lens in his 1997 essay "Intertextuality," whereby coded texts, because they are symbolic and exist in a fragmentation of backgrounds and belief sets, have the potential for multiple readings or interpretations. Let's further consider the negotiated position using a hypothetical example of class difference. At the risk of regional stereotypes yet again, perhaps the local Albuquerque viewer appreciates the production design that highlights New Mexico's natural western beauty while the angry Texas politician sustains a rationale to fight for tighter restrictions on border patrol and increased funding for the war on drugs. To role reverse this scenario, perhaps the working class Albuquerque native feels uneasy about depictions of the city as a criminal underworld while the upper class Texas politician revels in the dramatic tension with urgency and intrigue. The New Mexican has *coded* the symbolic value of "mythic landscape" in *Breaking Bad* as validating to space and place and both are sacred in the human desire for safety.

John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett (2002) perform a similarly subjective close reading of Westerns and American action cinema in their *The Myth of the*

American Superhero. They read multiple pop culture texts with inherent similarities (although occasionally diverse genre identifications) as aligned with what they identify as "redemptive violence," an innately Judeo-Christian mythological interpretation. In effect, they identify a secular *redeemer myth* recurrent in twentieth century literary, film, and TV texts.[6] Ultimately, through these examples I hope to demonstrate how Hall's encoding/decoding model helps provide meaning to terms like genre. Specifically, when the *dominant cultural codes* of a text, like the Western landscape, use of sixshooters, horses, cowboy hats, shootouts, etc. repeat and recur enough in content and form, these tropes and conventions come to constitute a genre in combined visual and iconographic form.[7]

Frow assesses that genre "works at a level of semiosis—that is, of meaning-making—which is deeper and more forceful than that of the explicit 'content' of a text" (19). Thus, to return to *Breaking Bad* for one more comparison, the final season frequently broke the genre conventions of *crime-drama* to evoke the spirit of the western. The conventions of the series' as crime drama became trumped by the fifth and final season's emphasis on overt western coding such as a literal train robbery out in the desert in *Dead Freight*, to a "Mexican standoff" between competing factions in various episodic recurrances to a series finale entitled *Felina* after Marty Robbins's song "El Paso." *Felina* even follows a plot structure similar to John Ford's *The Searchers*, which Gilligan copped to on the interview post-show *Talking Bad*. Thus, we see how genre conventions do matter to a considerable degree, and perhaps the *Breaking Bad* example helps start a conversation in understanding the polyvalence produced when contemporary dramas evoke multiple conventions across iconic genres.[8] We might call

this phenomenon *genre-mixing iconicity* for the admixture approach to experimental formulas.

While *Breaking Bad* may be read as tied to dominant-hegemonic positions of nostalgia as a subversive take on the American dream, texts like HBO's *Game of Thrones* subvert traditional sentiments of "classical" mythologists like Joseph Campbell. Campbell developed interest in universal storytelling similarities among various cultures and people groups. This doesn't mean cultures tell stories in the same manner so much as the *form* these stories communicate share similar *functions* and overarching themes. This is how Campbell arrived at his understanding of the "hero's journey" and the term *monomyth* in particular.[9] Campbell reduced all of the similarities recurrent in cross-cultural myths to arrive at recurrent themes of *departure, initiation,* and *return*. These three elements of the hero's journey draw upon *rites of passage* (Turner, 1988, 1982) as well as repetition of larger than life stories that embed cultural values through *ritual* (Doty, 2000). Campbell's attempt at a universal understanding can be linked to Carl Jung's theoretical emphasis on the *collective unconscious*—a point of theoretical psychoanalysis that drove a crucial wedge between Jung and Sigmund Freud's professional/personal relationship. In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes presents a semiotic explanation of myths that situates closer to Hall's structuralist-influenced "encoding/decoding" position. Barthes (1978), originally writing as a series of short reflections on culture for individual publication, looks at various objects or ideas that exist and theorizes how they become mythic when read as a *second sign* of something else. For example, Barthes acknowledges the semiotic triangle of *sign, signifier, signified*, where a second-order semiological system emerges out of the original

semiotic triangle, thus converting how something like western landscape comes to symbolize "freedom" and "individuality" throught its double-codedness by the western film genre. In this way future uses of such imagery across genre types retain the mythologically coded visual symbolism and thus often carry over the ideological values as well.

Yet Barthes argues within the mythic system a second strand of the *sign/signifier/signified* equation evolves out of the sign of the first set. In one example, Barthes demonstrates how through various advertisements and cultural communications wine takes on the symbolic representation of good health. Yet he argues this kind of cultural myth is problematic as wine holds the potential for vices and unhealthy consequences as much as it represents celebration and vitality. Barthes performs similar readings of toys in how they mark and indoctrinate youth toward certain societal predispositions like understandings and social practices of masculinity and femininity, or how style and fashion function to promote new meanings in bourgeois societies. Barry Brummett (2008) offers a more rhetorical yet comparable reading of "style" and gun culture in *A Rhetoric of Style*. This useful scholarly text will prove useful when exploring the political potency of *Sons of Anarchy* in chapter eleven. Joshua Gunn (2007) makes a similar rhetorical move with occult myth misperception in *Modern Occult Rhetoric*, a premise handy when evaluating the mythic qualities brand merchandise suggests in chapter nine. But Barthes' reading is significant in the event that readers/audiences/cultures begin to ascribe counterfactual values for objects, belief sets, social practices, and so on. This is what Hall (1980) refers to as an oppositional position. Thus, Hall's work communicates the postmodern shift from understanding

genre as a controlled set of formal codes and conventions to contemporary approaches that value variant crossover in genre conventionality and reader reception.[10]

Understanding Genre Through the Lens of the Western

In this section I describe some of the major themes and conventions that identify the Western as a genre. As examples, I preview how some contemporary cable television dramas incorporate these themes and conventions. These examples will be useful in setting up definitions and conversations for later chapters and analyses. Given a look into the mythological framework that influences genre, and its history from formal convention to more hybrid-fused production and interpretation (e.g. encoding/decoding), I return to the former in the case of Will Wright's structuralist take on the Western genre before I conclude with the latter, implications toward postmodern intertextual examples in cable TV dramas. Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Levi-Strauss posit two seminal theorists in structuralism. They are also joined by Gerard Genette who emphasized the term *narratology* to describe how narrative functions help formulate genre conventions in literature (Guillemette & Levesque, 2006). Vladimir Propp (1968) emphazes literary genre *functions* in his *Mythologies of Folklore*. Propp painstakingly deconstructs copious samplings of Russian folk stories looking for similarities in form and *function* more than content (a contrast to Campbell).

Propp's *Folklore* is considered a seminal structural analysis example borrowed heavily by Janice Radway in *Reading the Romance* (1984) and Wright's aforementioned *Sixguns & Society*. In *Sixguns*, Wright (1975) looks at "how myths of particular society relate to its social actions" (p. 19). In particular, Wright pulls from theoretical understanding of dualistic tensions or *dual binaries*.[11] Wright identifies four

areas of dualistic binaries that inform his structuralist reading. These binaries exist between: *inside/outside, good/bad, strong/weak,* and *hero/everyone else* (also noted as the *wilderness vs. civilization* contrast). The binaries join Wright's segmentation of four main *types* of Westerns—*The Classical Plot, The Vengeance Plot, The Transition Theme, The Professional Plot*—of which primary focus gears toward the *classical* and *professional* Western. Wright performs a close-read explication of plot from various Westerns chosen for their high box office returns. The selectivity privileges texts that have a higher circulation with audiences, critics, and thus cultural claim and arguably social influence. The structuralist approach is valuable for creating a system of understanding for a genre's given tropes, conventions, repeated form, similarities and recurrences among its producers, the talent involved, etc.

Traditional structuralism, while detailed and methodical, may not be as significant as it once was. Like Hall, Fiske (1989), Mittell (2004), and others note genres habitually evolve, mix, compare and contrast, evoke intertextuality among producers and users. Wright is very much *coding* these artifacts and in their coding he demystifies their form. He also communicates how some conventions remains while others fall away. For instance, the archetypical signs of "good" and "bad" in John Ford's Stagecoach diminish throughout the Western deconstructionist films of Anthony Mann and Sam Peckinpah. Wright does acknowledge this by sorting out his four eras, but the structuralist approach could be moved further or run the risk of becoming highly reductive. But Wright does serve as a primary source to various Western scholars like Jim Kitses, Richard Slotkin, Patrick McGee, Bryant Keith Alexander, and others.

In a televisual example I look at ways these combinations of myth, genre, and embedded coding function with contemporary TV dramas. Numerous shows evoke the spirit if not the direct conventions in form, content, and structure of the Western genre. FX's *Sons of Anarchy* and *Justified* both suggest the western in diverse forms. *SoA* adheres to numerous tropes and conventions, steeped in the latter tradition of outlaws, but bathed in tensions between Wright four binaries: wilderness versus civilization, good versus bad, strong versus weak, hero versus everyone else (we examine *SoA*'s western conventional functions closer in chapter six). FX's *Justified* explores each of these binaries as well but from a different, lone wolf position (versus *SoA*'s wolfpack-esque motif). Yet both texts queer these binaries in numerous ways, testing and challenging traditional forms through more antihero and outlaw-type interpretations of what constitutes the "West" and "justice" in the modern world. AMC has a couple of dramas that do similar experimentation. *The Walking Dead* is in some respects a post-apocalyptic horror western with its antihero "sheriff" leading the community to an unknown search of the prospect of utopia (amidst dystopia). *Breaking Bad* also plays with the iconography of Western lore with its habitual reliance on interior/exterior contrast and mythic landscape filmed on location in Albuquerque, NM.

Finally, AMC attempts to resurrect Western lore through its postmodern genre-hybrid *Hell on Wheels*. *HoW* follows the drama of the transcontinental railroad race-in-progress through the grim-and-gritty imagery and lewd aesthetics of race, class, gender, and political tension between post-Civil War Southerners, Northerners, Blacks, Whites, whores, Irishmen, congressmen, and even apocalyptic "Christian" false prophets and kamikaze Native American war tribes. *HoW* throws Western tropes at the screen like a

Jackson Pollack painting but suffers the bastard child status of having to exist on premium cable under the would-be patriarchal father shadow of David Milch's HBO Western *Deadwood*. *Deadwood* similarly roots in as much filth as possible, and supplants verbal vulgarity when the budget can no longer sustain the mise en scène filth. Each of these dramas play with form, offering postmodern reflections on the western, its history, Western *mythic* history, and America's collective consciousness in dealing with factual history versus mediated western iconicity (what genre scholars refer to as *meta-textual* history). With several traditional perspectives and scholarly works on genre unpacked, in the next section I debate a handful of contemporary conversations and draw from similarly recent TV texts to assist this assessment.

The Genre Debate: Structure versus Fluidity, Immateriality, and Spectral Nothingness

"While some genres represent established categories of studio production…recognized by both producers and consumers, others are ex post facto designations constructed by critics…No producer in the 1940s set out to make a film noir." – Robert Stam, *Film Theory*

In Robert Stam's *Film Theory* (2000), the author challenges the traditional notion of *genres* as categorical systems when he identifies "four key problems with generic labels (in relation to film)…*extension* (the breadth or narrowness of labels); *normativism* (having preconceived ideas of criteria for genre membership)…*monolithic definitions* (as if an item belonged to only one genre)…*biologism* (a kind of essentialism in which genres are seen as evolving through a standardized life cycle) (Chandler, 2014 & Stam, 2000, p.128-129). Acknowledging these four key problems of

extension, normativism, monolithic definitions, and *biologism*, I discuss the implications of these four terms within the context of several questions. First, I explore the advantages and disadvantages of using a notion of genre to discuss texts. This discussion will broaden from Stam's emphasis on film genre to include modern transmedia notions that exist in and between film, TV, Internet, and other relevant media. Second, discussing these diverse yet converging media contexts will allow me to weigh the strengths and weaknesses of Stam's problematic ways of looking at genre. Finally, Stam's genre terms and media contexts extend discussion for critical/cultural studies of audiences (as consumers) and storytellers (as producers). I intend to engage multiple perspectives, theorizations, uses and processes that genre constructs for societies. At times these questions and my responses interweave. While a much longer essay might better categorize sections, I argue these discussions work well in conversation within one another.

I begin a conversation of advantages and disadvantages of using the term genre. Addressing various perspectives offers understanding into genre's uses and vantage points. In *American Television Genres*, Stuart Kaminski (1985) draws upon Foucault's work in *The Order of Things* when he suggests, "the word *genre* simply means order" (p. 17). But Kaminski goes on to note a contra critical readings that suggest there is "no such thing as order…only chaos," that order is "arbitrary" (p. 18). By presenting two dualistic perspectives on order, of which genre arguably suggests, Kaminski thus theorizes "genre/order exist as *cultural truths*" (p. 19) (my emphasis). Kaminski's point here is similar to what Hall observes in "Encoding/Decoding," where Hall (1980) theorizes the symbolic significance of *cultural codes*. In *Mass Media Perspectives,*

Denis McQuail (2010) defines *codes* as "systems of meaning whose rules and conventions are shared by members of a culture or by what has been called an *interpretive community*" (p. 371). Thomas Schatz is also interested in structural themes in which cultures code meaning. In *Hollywood Genres*, Schatz (2011/1981) hypothesizes that, "the determining, identifying feature of a film genre is its *cultural context*, its community of interrelated character types whose attitudes, values, and actions flesh out dramatic conflicts inherent within that community" [my emphasis] (2011, p. 455). Finally, Jane Feuer (1993) also writes from a traditional approach in her book *The Hollywood Musical*. Feuer offers a classification system and argues, "The urge to classify is fundamental, and although it involves difficulty…classification is necessary to language and learning" (p. 151). Feuer, like her contemporary Richard Dyer, is awestruck with the categorization of Hollywood's postwar emphasis on easily identifiable film genres like the Musical and the Western especially. Each of these scholars argue classification is a form of *meaning making*, whether it takes the form of symbolic cultural codes or organizes social order.

Yet Stam's decidedly postmodern position worries that too stringent of definitions limit an understanding of genre's potentiality. While simply reading "genre" as structural forms of categorization, a more unique notion emerges in genre's ties to cultural codes, classification systems, and social contexts. In *Film/Genre*, Altman (1999) argues genre constitutes, "multiple meanings," (or I might add lenses) including genre representative as *blueprint*, *structure*, *label*, and *contract* (p. 14). Thus, already the diversification of genre's utility begins to emerge and contests Stam's first issue, that of *extension.* Indeed each of these uses for genre constitutes progressive ways for

scholars to move and negotiate meaning-making in the human condition. Stam warns too much classification betrays the inherent elasticity and flexibility genres communicate in alternative modes of use and interpretation.

As Stam and Chandler observe, genre functions as a hotly contested term. I define Stam's terms in accordance with Daniel Chandler's layout in his online chapter, "An Introduction to Genre Theory" (Chandler, 2013). The initial term *extension* refers to "the breadth or narrowness of labels." So far I have listed several perspectival uses where scholars employ genre in the effort of classification. But not all scholars adhere to this utility. In *Clint Eastwood: A Cultural Production*, Paul Smith (1993) claims that genre "subsists…in a dialectic of repetition and difference" and even attests genres to be "imaginary" and "phantasmic" (20-23). The terms repetition and difference suggest a kind of binary opposition all to familiar to traditional genre theorists in Literary Theory/Criticism, but Smith goes even further to call genre *impure*. "There is never a "pure" textual instance of a genre, and there is never an act of reception that can be said to follow perfectly the outlines of genre" (Smith, 1993, 23). Smith uses the diverse career of Clint Eastwood as his theoretical lens for demonstrating how genre elides tidiness. In *Horizon's West*, Jim Kitses (2007) underscores this critique of Eastwood as a "pure" western icon in his chapter "Clint Eastwood: Tightrope Walker." Both scholars observe how Eastwood's onscreen/offscreen persona does not situate within a singular genre, the Western, when considering the iconicity of his *Dirty Harry* persona, or the then-dominant box office appeal of *Any Which Way You Can* (Smith, 1993). Thus, these scholars offer close readings of both the content of supposed "genre films" and the exterior contexts of the Hollywood Star system (Dyer, 2011/1977). These two readings

might reinforce Stam's warning that genre notions regarding *extension* should be approached carefully and with caution.

Another way to incorporate advantages and disadvantages of traditional criticisms is to consider the ramifications of what Henry Jenkins calls *convergence culture*. Stam views genre within the confined discussion of film theory, but already he commits his own sin of narrow extension. In *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins (2006) emphasizes the broad horizon of *participation* and *collaboration* in modern transmedia. These concepts grow out of Jenkins' (1992) prior book *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture*, where the author explores the many diverse ways that audiences indulge in generic content through innovative experiences like *fan fiction [fanfic], costume play [cosplay]*, and through genre-based media conventions that endorse a kind of transnational community for diehard fans (Note how even the term "convention" finds a way back into the genre fold here.).[12] Of course, Hollywood's culture industry has taken notice of the embedded passion genre fans ignite, and now once intimate communal-commercial spaces like San Diego Comic Con function today as overcrowded test markets for producer-driven repetition of genre-laced commodity fetishism and geek chic exploitation.[13] Jenkins' work in *Textual Poachers* points to a newer form of *extension* in the advent of fan communities, while *Convergence Culture* prophesies contemporary media conglomerations across medium formats. Indeed digital *transculture* medias like the Internet, smart phones, tablets, and companies like Netflix, Amazon Prime, or HuluPlus function as liminal gateways where traditional barriers between genre mediums erode. On the one hand, we could consider differing mediums like TV, film, radio, and newspapers each their own form of media genre. Yet with the

emergence and cultural dominance of the Internet, all of these formats now crossover in content availabilities and audience uses. As foreseen in Roland Barthes's (1967) essay "The Death of the Author" and John Fiske's "Intertextuality," audiences/consumers now challenge notions of genre extension and Stam's fourth term, *biologism* or, "a kind of essentialism in which genres are seen as evolving through a standardized life cycle" (Chandler, 2013). On the other hand, genres themselves, due in part to what we might call *hyper-cultural intertextuality*, now frequently crossover in their conjuring of genre conventions across a multiplicity of texts and medias. Hyper-cultural intertextuality gets at the haeart of recent undersanding of media texts as spreadable (Jenkins, Ford, Green, 2013), where "Complex forces shape the flow of media" (xiv) and "If it doesn't spread, it's dead" (p. 1).

For example, consider Joss Whedon's short-lived TV series *Firefly* (2002-2003). Whedon already established himself a "genre" storyteller in his popular cult series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and *Angel* (1999-2004). Each of those respective series performed a similar genre splice, the former a combination of vampire-horror subgenre and coming-of-age teen soap, and the latter again vampire-horror and supernatural-detective-noir, a subgenre of the mystery and child/grandchild to *The X-Files/Kolchak: The Night Stalker*. In addition, both series eventually opened up to beyond the vampire-horror subgenre to endorse numerous horror tropes across the genre. Tying in genre modalities of convergence culture, each of these two respective series extend beyond their cancellation in comic book/graphic novel formats. But back to *Firefly*, here is a text that lasted half a season before cancellation. Then, due to postmodern media's ability to resurface limited and even failed texts—in addition to the combination of

diehard cult status and repetitious social discourse—*Firefly* now constitutes one of the largest active fan bases at conventions. The show even received a cinematic feature film to offer closure years later. Naturally, spinoff comics have resulted and even the show's protagonist Nathan Fillion cosplayed his *Firefly* character on his current ABC detective dramedy *Castle* (2009-present). Thus, we see the convergence of intextual/extratextual-layered multi-genre narratives extending across multiple genre medias across mediums.

All three of Whedon's mentioned TV series live on in comic form while Whedon transitioned his career to directing film adaptations of comic book properties. And of these Marvel movies, Whedon's young brother Jeb serves as showrunner to ABC's televisual spinoff of cinematic adaptation of Marvel's *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* (2013-present). *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* even features many of Whedon's stock character actors and plays off his cult TV style of banter-heavy wink-wink dialogue despite the director's absence from the series production staff. These media texts now perform across platforms, instantly streamed without traditional televisual temporal constraint. These texts thus demonstrate spreabibilty in various fashions. So we see in the instances of Joss Whedon's cultural products examples of cross-cultural convergence at the content level, the audience level, and thus at the production level. These examples also communicate *extensions* (genre branding at an economic level and genre-mixing iconicity at a rhetorical level) beyond traditional borders and parameters between media genres, programs, audiences, (con)texts, producers, and institutions.

In fact, Whedon's TV canon verifies each of Stam's four concerns. First, I noted how the Whedon texts *extend* beyond their traditional boundaries. Second, by queering traditional boundaries of TV storytelling—through genre-bending characters, genre-

challenging narratives (e.g.*Buffy's* "realistic" depictions of parent death in episodes like "Gone" to meta-textual *Twilight Zone* ventriloquist exorcisms within the same storytelling universe on *Angel*), and even medium-defying plot devices (*Buffy* Season Four's "Hush" is two-thirds silent cinema)—Whedon defies "preconceived ideas of criteria for genre membership" or *normativism* (Chandler, 2013/Stam, 2000). Third, Whedon's genre-hopping texts exhibit a social protest to traditional *monolithic definitions* of genre, instead embracing conventions and tropes only to upend them. For example, Whedon's fourth series *Dollhouse* (2009-2010) concluded each of its two seasons with a post-apocalyptic time jump that excluded its primary narrative. Fourth, Whedon's canon of TV series illustrates a break from traditional genre notions of *biologism*.

Or does Whedon's protocol reinforce biological evolution? For Stam, biologism represents "a kind of essentialism in which genres are seen as evolving through a standardized life cycle" (Chandler, 2013/Stam, 2000). This life cycle likely refers to what Schatz (1982) identifies as the *four-stage evolutionary cycle for any* genre: the *experimental stage* (conventions established/isolated), the *classical stage* (conventions reach "equilibrium" between artist/audience), the *age of refinement* (formal/stylistic details embellish the form), and finally the *baroque stage* (embellishments become substance/self-reflexiveness) (p. 37-38). While Schatz purported four-stage lifecycle can be observed to a certain extent in some film genres, Whedon's televisual social protest of genre and TV norms communicates a break in Schatz form and reinforces Stam's problematic theorization. In *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jaques Lacan through Popular Culture*, Slavoj Zizek (1992) emphasizes how the genres must adapt

and innovate or rust and expire. Thus, the Joss Whedon canon of cultural production teases the directional morphing, stylistic experimentation, and traditional/unconventional narrative mixtures that genre constitutes in transmedia culture predicting contemporary global capitalist trends toward media hybridity.

Transmedia evolution effects genre content and genre criticism. Amanda Lotz (2011) theorizes about this transmedia evolution in *The Revolution Will Be Televised*. Methodologically, Lotz combines the boost in production values and content-driven improvements on television with analysis that bridges multiple televisual mediums, including dramas, reality, and the sitcom. Lotz orchestrates an analytic *method* that demonstrates how scholars are reacting to these technological and cultural changes. Jason Mittell (2004) seeks scholarly innovation with genre in *Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture*. Mittell contends, "Television genres matter as cultural categories," (xi) which suggests a recombination of Hall, Schatz, and Kaminski. But Mittell also alludes to genres multiplicity of implications whereby, "genres work within nearly every facet of television—corporate organizations, policy decisions, critical discourses, audiences practices, productions techniques, textual aesthetics, and historical trends" (xi). Like Jenkins and Lotz, Mittell (2015) extends his theoretical assessment into future works like his newly released *Complex TV*.

Genre studies not only responds to changing mediums and media, but also reacts across disciplines. Rhetoric and Communication scholars agree that genre holds advantageous implications for these fields. In *Techniques of Close Reading,* Brummett (2010) adheres that "Genre is a natural extension of narrative…recurring type of text within a context" (p. 62). Rhetorical scholar Carolyn Miller (1984) posits that as

rhetorical artifacts, genres function "as social action," a point Miller extends out of Bitzer's seminal 1968 essay "The Rhetorical Situation." Jeremy Butler (2007) links a bevy of interdisciplinary methods and terms to genre study that includes: function, mythic analysis, ideological analysis, structuralism, codes, and self-reflexivity (see Chapter 13 in *Television: Critical Methods and Applications*, 3rd ed.) and thus does not settle on the need to compromise singular epistemological positions.

I note these examples not to refute Stam's concern but rather to concur with his criticism toward maximal flexibility. On one hand, traditional structuralist approaches to genre have historical and contextual value. One cannot disregard the history of a form even if early theorizations are shown to be limiting. What would modern film theory look like if it did not rely on Jaques Lacan's psychoanalytics? And what would Lacan's psychoanalytics look like without the architectural influence of Freud's psychoanalysis? Just because Freudian psychoanalysis does not posit an ideal practical model in contemporary professional psychiatry does not demerit its intellectual vitality for the theoretical realm. Similarly, Johnson (2005) correlates how "the rules and conventions of the reality genre are in flux, and that unpredictability is part of the allure. This is one way in which reality shows differ dramatically from their game show ancestors" (p. 93).[14]

Critical scholars frequently assess America's postmodern turn in entertainment. For Phillips (2005), *postmodern* entertainments in their reflections of American cultural concerns embody several recurrent themes. First, postmodern ideals are steeped in skepticism. This derives from the idea that "Western civilization began to lose faith" (p. 170) as seen in a "general drift away from modernist faith…evident in the history of

horror films" (p. 170). Second, postmodern texts exude "unique aesthetic style" most identifiable in self-referential Generation X channels like MTV and texts like *The Simpsons* (p. 170). These trends continue in contemporary texts that emulate and expound upon the cavalier trailblazing beseeched by these popular brands. The third marker among postmodern texts is reliance upon *pastiche* or "a style that draws bits and pieces from other styles to form a kind of artistic collage of disparate chunks" (p. 170). Marcel Danesi agrees with the contemporary text's reliance upon pastiche but also adds popular culture's additional implementation of mass *bricolage* or "a type of collage that emphasizes disproportion and ironic admixture" with "no unifying structure" (Danesi, 2012, p. 30).

Perhaps if *The Simpsons* evokes formulas that follow pastiche and *intertextuality*, then other animated sitcoms like *Family Guy* function along this understanding of bricolage, particularly given the show's brazen willingness to abandon plot lines completely in favor of random intertextual references and lowbrow digressions. Cable comedy *South Park* even lampooned *Family Guy*'s narrative disparity in a two-part episode that revealed manatees moving random balls with jokes underwater as the writer's strategy for *Family Guy* scripts (Lubin, 2014). Yet *South Park*'s cross-channel referential bit practices the same self-aware intertextuality that gives animated sitcoms their cultural potency. Furthermore, a rumored story that the *Simpsons* writing staff sent "thank you" flowers to the *South Park* staff recognizes the role paratextual discourses play in building pop culture mythologies outside of a text (I explore the paratextual roles further in chapter eight). Fast-forward a decade and the 2014 *Simpsons/Family Guy* crossover otherwise undermines if not puts to rest years of

tension between respective writing staffs' (mis-)perceptions of cleverness and originality from one other. Intertextuality is a particularly savvy component among postmodern texts. For Phillips, "Watching [for intertextual references] becomes kind of a game, and this is an important part of postmodern aesthetics. The often-rapid mix of cultural images and ideas adds playfulness to the overarching skepticisms of the postmodern attitude" (p. 171). Indeed, Phillips's third postmodern convention can be identified in its "critical edge" (p. 171). Specifically, "the postmodern era is an important step away from the rigid optimism of the modern age," (p. 171)

Likewise, postmodernity may revel in the fragmentation of social discourse (ironically amidst growing conglomeration of media), but such discourse cannot function without the former shadow of modernity and structuralism. Without dualistic binaries, one cannot generate resistance from oppositional notions. Likewise, current scholarly uses of genre, genre studies, and genre theory in method and practice owe a debt to the agreed upon structures that formalize "classical" understandings. Western scholar Jim Kitses (1969) perhaps puts it best when he notes that genre "is a vital structure through which flow a myriad of themes and concepts" (p. 8). Flow posits a choice term in that genre shows both the propensity to mold and be molded. But the *fluid* nature flow suggests connotes a final consideration between audiences as consumers and storytellers as producers.

In "Carnivale: TV drama without TV genre," David Marc (2008) smugly remarks, "although "genre" is a French word that few Americans can pronounce and fewer yet can define, the concept it embodies is generally considered crucial to a work's success in the American entertainment industry" (p. 101). While I might otherwise

begrudge Marc's high culture/low culture insinuation, the author identifies the economic impact genre beholds upon culture. This is an extension from more theoretical claims of genre's *cultural codes* and potential for *social action*. Marc's claim points to the Hollywood machine as an *all-seeing eye* ready to meet consumer demands for genre (ad)ventures. Schatz (1981) avers that, "a genre is a privileged story form, 'part of a limited number of story forms that have been refined into formulas because of their unique social and/or aesthetic qualities'" (p. 16). The interesting word in this context is *privileged*, which implies hierarchy and thus class system. Critical scholars of political economy point to this connection as an ideological or *hegemonic* code (McQuail, 2010, Baker, 2009, Butler, 2007, & Hall, 1974). Yet the power of form compels audiences. Brummett (2010) argues that *form* "is an itch we never tire of scratching, so repetition is less likely to reduce its impact" (50). But what about when audiences co-create the genre experience? For example, consider the Marble Hornets fan-made films that replicate and extend this horror urban legend. Cross-format technologies and cross-media textual explorations constitute a unique myth-making space where genres offer a cultural collective creative space.[15] Such an example touches upon what John G. Cawelti notes wherein genres proliferate "between two essential elements: conventions [e.g. the familiar] and inventions [e.g. the unexpected]" (Marc, p. 102). Newcomb (1975) notably argued for the artistic extension of genre into television in the 1970s with his *Television: The Most Popular Art* and subsequent *Television: The Critical View* anthologies. With examples like Marble Hornets and the fandom-fused *Firefly* communitas mentioned earlier, genre denotes a structural history just as it

connotes an innovative present through multiple forms for multiple audiences toward multiple purposes and pleasures.[16]

Twilight and *Harry Potter* fans embrace their "genre" fare into individual/collective enjoyment that transcends literature and film. George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice & Fire/Game of Thrones* series/drama show similar promise except this time the translucent border tethers between literature and TV. E-book evolutions erode barriers between the not-new-in-the-least-bit "mainstream" BDSM-romance *50 Shades of Grey* and its vicarious e-readers, audiences/consumers no longer "shamed" to buy the book at the grocery store checkout, or pass the book around the break room with covert giggles as seen in *Mad Men* first season. In fact, it becomes "difficult" to even apply a proper title to *50 Shades*. Is it literature? eLit? Is it pornography? What is "pornography" in cultural terms? I know Supreme Court Justice Stewart tells us, "I don't have a definition, but I know it when I see it." Stewart's comments communicate the cultural fluidity with which language codes develop yet also gets at the complexities that arise between denotative and connotative associative understandings. Perhaps genre scholars could apply the same sage words toward commentaries on genre. Whether structural or flexible, transparent or translucent, it is a practice, a *form* of meaning-making that offers scholars, audiences, and producers a window or frame from which they observe, reflect, produce, consume, and critique human communication.

Genre as ways of organizing and theorizing

Already I've noted the broad ways genre functions to organize and categorize information for human understanding. In addition, I've looked at the ways genre works

as a theoretical form of linguistics and as a cultural mode for negotiating dimensions of aesthetic understanding and appreciate under the umbrella of institutionalized products and audience-produced methods of consumption and interpretation. In this way, genre as a term innovates from previous understandings and becomes commodified for contemporary creative industry modes of cultural and global capitalism. Recognizing, understanding, and appreciating genre's evolution is necessary for the justification of this study. Indeed just as genre evolves in communicative understanding and use value, it expands in dynamic new ways across the contemporary TV landscape, a medium that in only a few short years has now evolved into a televisual mediascape. This is one of the reasons referencing TV texts as televisual texts becomes an important next-step in the discussion of televisual socio-cultural impact and political persuasion. If a TV is defined by some readers as a woodpanel box on four legs with a turn knob dial and a two-prong antenna, then televisual helps advance a communal understanding of both how a program is broadcast (simulcast, streamed, etc.) and how this shift should be reflected in the theoretical language used to discuss television as a mediated force of/for communication.

In addition, updating terms such as "TV" to coincide with contemporary uses reinforces the goal of this project to innovate conversations of how genre functions in this post-*Sopranos*, post-9/11, post-Millennial, post-Network, post-Netflix, post-global and all-around *postmodern* orientation and negotiation of human communication and televisual interpretation. This logic reinforces the call television studies scholars have made to distinguish this sub-discipline and its theoretical language from fields like film studies and media studies which use specific and strategic terminology that does not

always translate accurately and appropriately to conversations of television. This project thus assumes this responsibility and calling to distinguish and demarcate new terms and ways of seeing and speaking about television, the cable television drama, and its relationship to genre.

This project answers the call to extend conversations of television studies and genre studies while also extending a television studies model for communication scholars using *techniques of close watching* and *rhetorical recapping* to explore the polyvalent messages and meanings open to interpretation for critical scholars. In chapter three, I outline the aforementioned model for analyzing televisual texts, a method for close reading that I rename *close watching* to better align with the unique process of TV textual analysis. In addition to introducing a method for close watching, I preview the process of *rhetorical recapping* that allows scholars a mode of TV criticism distinct from those produced by TV critics and industry-sponsored TV bloggers. Ideally, the two models refocus techniques of close reading specifically for critical scholars evaluating televisual content. Discussions of genre will continue throughout the project. After chapter three outlines a method for organizing research relating specifically to serialized televisual content, chapter four presents a broad theorization of how genre functions in relation to time in TV dramas. Specifically chapter four theorizes how time functions as a cross-genre convention and also implicates the extra-textual way "TV time" becomes a contemporary mode of cultural imperialism for audiences.

Genre is used in a more conventional style in chapter five, where the biker drama *Sons of Anarchy* is analyzed against the cinematic biker sub-genre that inspires much of its production design ontology. Chapter six uses the same text again to

demonstrate how *SoA* also fits strongly under the genre conventions of the western. This chapter-to-chapter demonstration highlights how contemporary dramas evoke polyvalent qualities that communicate different meanings and ideological persuasions to different audiences. The back-to-back comparison also emphasizes the rhetorical power texts wield due to their produced nature as symbol systems (similar to what Levi-Strauss (1964) and Williamson (1968) refer to as *cooked*). Chapter seven switches texts but maintains partial emphasis on the role western conventions play in contemporary televisual storytelling. Chapter seven examines the content of *Game of Thrones* by charting the literary-western-feminine polyvalence exhibited through a single character's journey through the first four seasons. This chapter specializes in detailing the layered complexities and traditions involved in contemporary televisual storytelling.

Chapter eight switches units to the second areas of interest under the television studies model, audiences. This chapter again draws upon *GoT* but this time pulls away from the narrative content to theorize how audiences interact and generate online discourse. Chapter eight focuses not on the text but instead the paratexts produced and consumed by industry and audience. This chapter is informed by fan studies and seeks to extend recent discussions relating to theorizations of fandom rituals and the influence institutions have on these trends. Chapter nine continues a broader emphasis on audience and institutions not by studying audiences or texts but by examining the kinds of messages and meaning-making suggested by fan memorabilia. Chapter nine contrasts chapter eight's large scale analysis of *GoT* fandom by focusing solely on a kitsch piece of *SoA* memorabilia, a show-themed table lamp. This chapter extends ways of thinking and analyzing audiences and institutions by interpreting the potential values souvenir

objects possess or suggest. Chapter nine offers the first of two innovating proposals for critical directions that audience/fan/reception studies can take. Chapter ten returns to western genre conventions, but this time examines a straightforward TV western in *Hell on Wheels*. Yet chapter ten innovates audience and reception studies by demonstrating the critical potency autoethnography offers scholarly analysis of TV texts. Chapter ten ends on a politically personal note that transitions the unit on ways of analyzing audiences into the political polyvalence TV texts communicate.

Chapter eleven returns to *SoA* with strategic emphasis in the text's negotiation of critical-rational thought, conservative counterintelligentsia evocations, and political persuasions that evoke segments of public sphere theory. This chapter highlights how complex political discourse becomes embedded in contemporary texts that audiences might initially interpret as casual entertainment. While chapter eleven mostly emphases the *male*-dominated politics in *SoA*, chapter twelve performs an oppositional reading of postfeminist discourse exhibited by females within the same text. Chapter twelve employs several strands of feminist discourse that ruminate throughout initial *SoA* seasons. Yet an underlying reliance on what Ariel Levy calls raunch culture permeates this feminine space and extends across *SoA* and the cable drama mediascape. For this reason, chapter thirteen widens to examine economic-institutional-industrial changes, socio-cultural anxieties, and political stagnations that reflect or are reflected in these altering conditions. Chapter thirteen proposes the *rotten aesthetic*, a new genre convention specific to cable TV dramas that encapsulates the cross-genre uptick in graphic gratuity as a polyvalent aesthetic technique.

Chapter fourteen concludes and connects how genre conventions and innovations suggested in preceding chapters expands understanding of contemporary genre theory, media studies, and critical studies through introducing and extending language such as global temporialism, oppositional engines, and the rotten aesthetic. These extensions help reinforce the pivotal role Television Studies should play within the Communication discipline while also lending interdisciplinary dexterity to alternate disciplines including cultural studies, media studies, women and gender studies, film studies, mythology studies, sociology and media ecology studies, and other emerging sub-disciplines. In the following chapter, I outline a method for close reading televisual texts. In this outline I present two distinct processes that help centralize specific ways for Communication scholars to engage televisual content critically. This template is vital in the development of multiple critical points of analysis that are then previewed for future chapters.

Chapter Three

“Method” or How (I) Close Watch TV

Along with many successful rhetorical and critical scholars, TV scholars frequently draw upon personal experience with TV in contexts where these examples and anecdotes relate personal use and communicate how everyday life experience contributes to theorizations of television. Robert Allen attempts to "define" television in The Television Studies Reader (Allen & Hill, 2004) and his take is as humorous as it is informative. Allen lists a series of functions TV provides both broadly and personally. Soon his list diverges into bullet point descriptions of the many uses and gratifications he finds with television. The list ranges from physical and numerical iterations of the spatial locations and technological volumes in his house and office to colorful asides of distinct TV-watching memories. Re-reading his introduction I laugh at how similarly I organize my thoughts and the inescapability of engaging the personal even when one seeks to identify the generalizable. Interpretation lies at the heart of subjectivity, and while I theoretically aim for objective neutrality, subjective anecdotes closely resemble autoethnography. Passing value judgment is not the focus of this study, but every subjective theorization is informed by internal biases in knowledge and experience. Anecdotal inclusions are not presented to refine the ideas of this project to limited and limiting frameworks but rather support the general through lines denoting the role(s) genre plays within television dramas and the overlapping generic conventions and ideological messages (such as "family") that stir the melting pot constituting the contemporary cable TV drama.

The chapters in this project explore television from diverse angles and theoretical perspectives. Chapters four through seven consider the roles genre conventions play as produced and reproduced within contemporary cable dramas.

Chapters eight through ten examine how audiences and institutions produce and consume texts through paratextual discourse, self-reflecting identification, and brand alignment. In a bit of overlap, chapters ten through twelve consider how these texts embed contentious content to offer innovating representations of the role gender and politics and gender politics negotiate meaning in the American subconscious. Each of these sections and chapters evaluate televisual texts from a variety of theoretical perspectives. Chapter thirteen brings together themes of genre analysis with polyvalent critical thematics to conceive how these areas inform one another. I broadly assess these ranging themes in conclusion in chapter fourteen. Yet the method for surveying such a broad range of themes—from the contextual and interpretive to the intertextual and paratextual—offers a similar pattern film and television scholars might find familiar just as communication scholars find useful.

There are a vast numbers of ways scholars can approach studying television. In this section, I highlight processes that enabled many of my close readings. First, there always exists the text. For contemporary audiences texts can be consumed in a variety of contexts and situations. Film is an interesting medium in that it has a primary historical viewing situation in the public movie theater. Yet the movie theater ambiance is architecturally designed as a private, intimate, voyeuristic experience. The lights go down, the audience gazes upon and into the lives and situations of others. Contrasting in some ways, television is a historically private medium. The TV resides within the home, the private residency, as a traditional viewpoint. Lynn Spigel (1992) details the cultural tradition and role TV played in *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*. TV can be enjoyed collectively by the family or socially between

friends. Yet like film, TV constitutes an independently consumptive experience. Intimacy has to do with how an audience consumes a text, the fact that the internal process of interpretation/decoding is taken on individually even if the act of viewing is shared or communal. For these reasons, viewing practices ought be considered relevant to any method of televisual consumption.

Technological progression now allows traditional mediums like film and TV to be consumed in nontraditional formats. Film offers the longer history of transition as movies became publicly available through advents like TV, beta-max, VCR's, DVD's, OnDemand, and Internet streaming. Television series were less popular in distribution methods like VHS but emerged as a competitive force during the height of DVD production designs emphasizing "box sets" as a premiere method for collectors and media consumers. *Owning* material opens the possibility of rewatchability whereas traditional television production practices and procedures formerly dictated what content airs when, how frequently, and in what capacity. Gray and Lotz would call owning one of many possible contexts in which audiences receive televisual media. As a teenager I could watch episodes of *The Simpsons* every evening on syndication for an hour or so, but I had no control over which episodes aired and became typically frustrated when the same few seasons seemed to repeat frequently (and frequently out of order). Thus *ownership of* TV denotes a key area where the proliferation of TV content emerged as a desirable method for consuming TV content. For rhetorical purposes, I might call this *consumptive agency*.

I have always been a collector of commodities just as I collect ideas and knowledge as an academic. Toys were replaced by comics and comics replaced by

experiences, friendships, and so on. Dramatic upticks in "quality TV," a subjective term to say the least, trickled in throughout the 1990s but broke into newer realms of possibility in the wake of David Chase's *The Sopranos* success for HBO (Martin, 2013, O'Sullivan, 2013, Leverett, Ott, & Buckley, 2008, Lotz, 2007, & Newcomb, 2007). Communication and TV scholars from Horace Newcomb (1974, 2007) to his protégé Amanda Lotz (2013, 2012, 2007) acknowledge the cultural and economic impact *Sopranos* had on the television medium. The storytelling increased complexity, production design, and character development in ways that innovated what can be done with serialized programming. Compelling TV has always existed in many genres and programming avenues. From *Twilight Zone* to *All in the Family*, from *Gunsmoke* to *Hill Street Blues*, the infamous final episode of *Newhart* to finales of *The Fugitive* and *M.A.S.H.* that captured America's collective attention. Yet these were primarily live events, single airings that generated unique milestones in TV history. *The Sopranos* as a cable product impacted television because it's consistency to surprise and compel viewers and critics stretched over years. Its popularity coincided with the DVD boom, and indeed I consumed every episode of *the Sopranos* on DVD without watching a single episode on HBO (point of fact, my family never had HBO, and my dorm room in college certainly did not provide it either).

Thus, the process of consumption in some ways could be read as a sacred ritual. The high gloss packaging slowly unwrapped, the ribbon within popping out the inner container of DVDs. The DVD menu cues whet viewer appetites through montage shots accompanied by musical beats from the catchy opening credits song. This was TV experienced in a new way, an innovation in transmedia fetishism. Innovating methods

of consumption continue with new technologies and newer audience preferences. Strangers put in earphones to watch *Game of Thrones* via HBOGO transmitted on a cellphone in a subway. Airline travelers do not have to cross their fingers for a relatively whimsical episode of *Frasier* to air while traveling from Boston to Seattle. Instead, they can open their laptop or tablet to pre-stored video media and binge watch the latest season of NBC's *Hannibal* downloaded from their iTunes account (assuming there aren't any passengers eating within eyeshot). Everyone has a method, and the methods of TV scholars likely reflect the numerous methods of media content. Scholars are, after all, TV viewers at heart and likely developed their passions out of preferred cultural rituals.

A key scene from *Mad Men*'s penultimate season finale features Don Draper—always the king of cool—finally breaking down emotionally mid-presentation when he inverts one of his classic sales pitches to the Hershey Company. Don's psychological crisis spills into his ad pitch when he reveals for the first time his childhood raised in a whorehouse. Don's personal account recalls the "great ritual" with which he ceremoniously consumed Hershey bars in private. While I do not share the same transgressed origin, I have often consumed TV with highly ritualized preference. I consume television for many reasons: entertainment, distraction, reward, habit, passion, addiction, and scholarly attention. There was something special about waking up on Saturday mornings to watch cartoons as a child. I have fond memories of the would be campy yet idyllic TV dads that taught me "family morals" each Friday evening on ABC's T.G.I.F. slate while my parents (or later my mother) worked late evening shifts. I remember receiving my first television for my bedroom, and how the gift ushered in

my adolescence as I privately snuck episodes of *Melrose Place* and *Baywatch* but also intense "mature" dramas like *The X-Files* and *NYPD Blue*. As Ron Lembo (2000) observes, "turning to television…becomes a ritual part of people's lives" (p. 100).

TV was the warm glow that hailed me ideologically, culturally.[1] In college TV brought great relief in pockets of time, frequently late on Thursday evenings after a stressful week of classes and organizational voluntarism. Our friends met together for *Survivor* and after everyone left I poured over the remaining shows I preferred to watch distraction free. I traveled overseas during summers and always returned to shows "taped" for me by my dad while away. The advent of Amazon and the consumer freedom of my first credit card allowed me access to extinct texts I had missed (previous spatial, economic, and temporal barriers collapsing under the consumer "freedom" ushered by the Internet); fantasy-horror hybrids like Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* or spy-thriler/family-drama hybrids like Fox's *24* and ABC's *Alias*. Like Don, I consumed TV with "great ritual" in an era where television production progressed in innovative narrative and production technique.

I also developed a close eye for how texts communicated their messages. Like any profession, development relies on two key areas, the experiences over time and repetition. If I am a scholar of television, then I am also a student of television, just as I am a fan of television, just as I have been both a casual or passive viewer as well as an impassioned fan or active viewer. I have served time in each of these capacities, and at times these distinct methods of viewing inform one another to surface relevant themes for scholarly discourse. It is also significant to note the shows I view do not represent my primary selective method for which texts to investigate. Rather, I outline this partial

history to encourage my position as an authority on television content and to communicate the breadth of televisual viewership I have logged in active and passive modes, across all potential television genres, over decades that vary in perspective and interpretive ability.

I can recall the major events of the past twenty-five years in their visual representation across the family television screen. From watching the first Gulf War LIVE on CNN as a first grader to OJ Simpson's flee from police to the Oklahoma City bombing. David Koresh's Waco cult compound engulfed in flames contrasted by Rob Schneider and Phil Hartman's mock sketches on *Saturday Night Live* the week before. The proliferation of newsmagazines like *Dateline* to exploitation talk shows like *The Jerry Springer Show*. I remember going to bed no knowing who the President would be in 2000, and witnessing mobs of hundreds of thousands chanting with exuberance at President Elect Obama's November 2007 acceptance speech. I've seen the best and worst of MTV's fluid transition from music videos to "reality TV" like *The Real World* or staged events by an endless gaggle of attention-getting celebrities. I watched the first season of *Survivor* and communally celebrated many subsequent seasons. I've sampled the bizarre pantheon of "reality TV," from reality-competition to celebrity brand-making to how *The Learning Channel* (or *TLC*), *The History Channel*'s (*History*), and all of *A&E*'s cable networks transformed their mission statements into a cultural carnival that often communicates (or *produces*) Middle America as a grotesque funhouse mirror.

I remember the horror of watching Columbine footage B-roll over and over while in high school. As a college freshman I recall how absorbed I became by the

media's endless coverage of 9/11, both the live coverage of the smoldering buildings and the weeks and years of aftermath. I remember naively questioning why Fox News cared more about providing me live footage of America's tanks rolling across the desert. I remember the invasion of Iraq while CNN started to vary in its programming output. I recall the queasy unease I felt when American soldiers pulled down Saddam Hussein's statue, or rather first erected an American flag despite claims of "liberation." Television has positioned itself a premiere lens that depicts the world. TV has raw and live capabilities but is also *always already produced*.[2] TV thus engages in persuasive work and must then be monitored by those able and willing to read television with a critical and interpretive eye. Comedy Central's satirical programming including *South Park*, *The Daily Show*, and *The Colbert Report*[3] continue to provide cultural criticisms, holding a mirror up to political hypocrisies and public hysteria. Scholars frequently embrace these potent texts for their intertextual dexterity. After all, satire as genre functions as a trickster conduit for the masses.

Such texts, while complex and highly intertextual, communicate relatively straightforward Platonic catharsis for millions of viewers held captive by the contemporary American corporate/political climate. The catharsis argument posits a familiar theoretical trope in the history of rhetoric and literary criticism. It is natural then such value judgments remain potent among contemporary media texts. The goal of this project is to extend beyond the catharsis observation to examine numerous ways texts communicate cultural meanings. I am less interested in the catharsis argument, if only because it limits the merits of extending a television studies model for communication. Indeed such texts provide not only catharsis for the average viewer,

perhaps seeking escapism or narrative justice to the injustices mediated daily, but also these texts present stimulating content with the potential for provoking reflective discourse.

The combined passive and active mode of televisual consumption, along with experimental watching in numerous contexts and situations, informs the method of this study. The texts under investigation interest the author. But I hope to have communicated by this point that elements among all television genres appeal for various reasons at various points in time. For every text discussed there are dozens more sampled but perhaps not relevant in strategic focus. Already I have positioned a preferential rationale for certain texts within the cable TV drama bracket of genre programming. I will continue to stress contextual significance within individual chapters along the way. In the meantime, this chapter remains interested in method so that scholars and readers can understand the motivation and process of analysis and potentially replicate similar modes of close reading.

The primary method used for selective consideration of texts is both deceptively simple yet painstakingly complex. As a television scholar, I follow online discourse trails along various informed Internet news sites and paratextual media. Monitoring numerous sites for informed discourse can be a time consuming chore. It helps if the writing is strong and the opinions are stronger. Locating research with rich insight and near-scholarly discourse helps refine the opinions of casual bloggers and overzealous fans. These opinions scatter across the Internet but are easily recognizable due to unprofessional website layouts, low-standard font selection, and color templates that often counteract legitimacy claims bloggers offer. Meanwhile, TV blogging has come to

represent a new industry standard (Martin, 2013). Bloggers author *recaps* of popular shows that publish online. Recaps discuss the major themes of television episodes but may diverge between personalized insights into production practices, speculate opinions toward a show's effectiveness in conveying its message, and react critically if a text diverges from popular shared meaning or narrative incongruity. Many prominent news sites offer regular recaps of popular shows, including the *Wall Street Journal*'s blog *Speakeasy*, *New York Magazine*'s online site *Vulture*, *The Onion's* review sites *The A.V. Club* and *TV Club*, the *Washington Post*'s online presence *Slate*, website versions of *The Atlantic* and *The Independent*, and *Rolling Stone*, as well as web-based sites like *Huffington Post*, *Salon*, and *TVOverMind.com*.

Recapping culture has largely overtaken the roles traditional TV critics provided. Interestingly, instead of TV critics' reviews published in advance to stimulate potential viewership, recaps produce online discourse that generates cultural currency over time due to a blog's permanence online and its spatial and economic accessibility. Due to the financial interest of the news sites that publish recaps, I will from this point refer to TV bloggers that specialize in recapping as *recappers*. Recappers occupy a liminal position in that many of them are paid for their services all the while retaining an agency of approval/disapproval in response to a given TV text.

Recapper sway holds the potential to legitimize or delegitimize a show when the text fails to meet its potential. Thus while recappers in no way control whether a text gets renewed or canceled, recapper culture plays an important role in shaping the paratextual discourse and cultural currency of a given text. This kind of *discursive potency* can help enable a show's resonance along tertiary channels like streaming

services, which are quickly becoming primary channels for younger audience demographics. In turn, a text that re-gains popularity on a tertiary site like Netflix or Amazon Prime or YahooScreen has shown the potential for *second life*, as is the case with Netflix's resurrection of Fox's *Arrested Development* and AMC's twice canceled *The Killing* and NBC's thrice canceled bubble-show redefinition *Community*. For these reasons, recapper culture exudes persuasive appeal and thus may benefit scholars looking to identify TV texts rich in cultural currency. In addition, considering the proliferation of recap culture online suggests new ways to consider audiences in how audiences interact with texts, producers, and other audiences, where a text's cultural currency can be quantified by the number of "likes," "shares" and "retweets" for a given article or topic.

Seeking out informed discourses that communicate cultural currency among TV texts represents one form of *active consumption* used as a research gathering method. Another method of active consumption occurs through *informed watching*. It is worth reiterating there is a difference between passive and active TV consumption. Both represent unique forms of viewing. I may watch the news hoping to gain insight on the day or week's weather. I do not need to take notes or distinguish and dissect structural patterns. I know what the weather forecast looks like due to visual cues and temporal placement within the newscast. Weather forecasts are also brief and occur at multiple points in a typical newscast, particularly in the mornings and amidst severe weather. On the other hand, TV genres like dramas hold certain conventions, but more and more there is a breaking of conventional norms in an effort to innovate audience anticipation, to stimulate viewers but also to tell unique and dynamic stories. These kinds of texts

require increased attention to detail, consideration and contemplation afterward, and potential second or third viewings for clarification, insight, and missed cues.

It is important to note repetition of viewing can quickly become a time-consuming process. For this reason, it is ideal for TV scholars to sample texts with regularity. Sampling can help broaden familiarity with TV content in general but also allow subtle cross-comparison between what kinds of content is being produced by what types of networks, writers, and producers. Patterns of comparison may emerge during this process or perhaps some texts may reveal themselves as holding either overt or covert resonance. Once a researcher feels confident navigating content, they should be able to recognize the emergence of key themes that studies may focus on. There are a number of contemporary televisual texts that produce thematic commentaries on the real world. Syfy's *Battlestar Galactica* received copious praise and coveted cult status for using its science fiction genre setting to explore mid-2000's allegorical reflections of America's war on terror and general post-9/11 anxieties. AMC's *The Walking Dead* performs similar work under the guise of horror genre tropes taking place in a post-apocalyptic zombie landscape. Whereas *BG* takes on soulful metaphor in some instances, *TWD* frequently deploys key phrases in dialogue that cue audiences. For example, throughout season three the antagonist known as "The Governor" runs a militant compound where he brainwashes his loyalists via fear-mongering, often referencing factions outside their borders as "terrorists." *24* evokes (or provokes?) relatively straightforward social imaginaries involving government conspiracy, paranoia of intercultural Others, and the serialization (narrative and ideological) of war on terror.

These three texts shift between overt and covert messages with regularity due in large part to the metaphorical nature of genre storytelling. Arguably the TV drama thrives in large part due to the fantasy settings, which allow writers and producers to tell stories that function as overt escapism but also covert commentaries concerning social fears, injustices, and societal ailments. Some cable drama genres play closer to "reality" if that is even possible. FX's *Justified* borrows from the western genre as well as the hard-boiled detective and crime noir sub-genres. The series redresses rural Kentucky as a Southern Gothic noir where familial conflicts ignite under severe impoverished conditions. For Kendall Phillips (2005), Gothic fiction "weaves tales in which something from the past returns. Out of those things we believed we had left behind comes some thing to haunt our present and remind us that our confidence in our knowledge of the world is unfounded. Out of the past comes the chaos and savagery that we believed ourselves beyond" (p. 32). It is easy for viewers to *go along for the ride* with *Justified*'s Raylan Givens, a Deputy U. S. Marshal with a trigger finger and daddy issues. But it is almost easier to sympathize with criminals over seasons as some of these back-wooded lowlifes are revealed to be the oppressed among drastic economic and cultural shifts in the American/post-global landscape. The criminals become reframed as victims cum opportunists, thus placing audiences in question with regard to who viewers should root for. Despite the crime noir trappings courtesy of Elmore Leonard's inspirational source material, a cable drama like *Justified* surfaces cultural themes in its storytelling in ways that can potentially provoke and thus stimulate critical reflection if not discourse among viewers. For this reason, repetitious viewing becomes a key tool for TV scholars.

There is a significant line between the role recappers embody and the work TV scholars can achieve. Thus there is no redundancy to call for increased attention from scholars at a time when recaps propagate Internet sites as potential click bait. Indeed the institutional rise in recapping reinforces the economic position televisual storytelling occupies and the TV drama is arguably chief among texts of interest produced and discussed among audiences. Thus amidst exploding popularity it is crucial to recognize the need for scholars to investigate multiple ways of reading or *watching* the text, interpreting meanings and meaning making processes, modes and practices of consumption and audience participation, and institutions and cultural contexts that inform and influence television both intertextually and paratextually.

Disciplinary Reach or an Impact Factor to Consider. Over the course of seven years in grad school, I observe academics and grad students gush in favor of preferred televisual texts. I am surprised by some of their softer choices perhaps due to neutral or hardened self-projections social scientists emit. At conferences and in classrooms and offices, scholars go to great lengths discussing their "love" of a favorite show without ever seeming to evaluate or even identify *why* a text works for them or *how* it generates interest. In short, I hear a lot of talk and see very little action at least among many in Communication. This is a conversation Communication scholars should be cued up to engage on at a number of potential fronts. Yet I see students and faculty sometimes stunted in disconnection between the proper channels with which to use pet theories. Thus a methodological goal with this project is to demonstrate and extend ways Communication scholars can reconsider the kinds of data they pursue. While nearly all of my theoretical and methodological analyses embrace critical perspectives, my

research processes and overall method is grounded in extensive qualitative data mining and centered on texts that communicate messages to audiences of millions rather than readerships of decidedly fewer numbers.

Sampling. Choosing between television genres is a lot like cluster sampling, or perhaps cluster sampling can be useful in understanding genre division. TV genres are broken into groupings based upon production design method (news, sitcom, reality TV, etc.). From this grouping, the TV drama has been selected based on its high probability to elicit layered interpretations greater than genres like news even sitcoms. News is a relatively straightforward format, although recent years have yielded a polarizing effect by which newsmakers on channels like Fox News and MSNBC have found ways to embed subjectivist-interpretative components such as Bill O'Reilly's "Pinheads and Patriots" segment (nevermind O'Reilly's own autoethnographic warstory embellishments) or Rachel Maddow's explosive neoliberal rants. Yet for the most part news is presented in a relatively straightforward style, sans increasing info scrolls across the sides, margins, and header/footers of a given screen. Traditional sitcoms arguably present even simpler functionality in their formulaic stories, archetypal characters, and over the top generalizations of comedic affect. Even when sitcoms innovate—such as the method adopted by NBC's *The Office* and *Arrested Development* before that—techniques like shaky camera zoom-ins mixed with high definition cinematography already show signs of conventionality on fare like ABC's *Modern Family*. To be clear, there are dynamic features in these and other TV genres, yet perhaps no other genre innovates cinematically and interpretively to the degree of contemporary cable TV dramas.

Already I've noted a lifetime constituting both random and purposive sampling that informs familiarity across television genres. Due to broad insights into TV programming across mediums, selections among cable TV dramas can be viewed as purposive and strategic samples. I have and continue to draw from a wide variety of cable, paycable, and network TV programming, yet in keeping with a manageable scope for this project I pay particular attention to the TV drama genre. Within the sub-genre of cable TV drama, the texts under closest examination represent strategic samplings that communicate rich polyvalent interpretive ability while also retaining popularity with audiences and critics. More than general audience identification, each of the programs I highlight best represent the sharpening focus on niche or fringe subject matter, controversial in tone and content, high in *fan* appreciation, but also capable of growing audience bases year-to-year instead of shrinking them.

It is becoming clear this winning formula represents an innovative programming template that a majority of networks now attempt to emulate. Ultimately, these strategic samplings, taken from larger purposive samplings and selected from random samplings before that, comprise valuable units for theorizing a television studies model for Communication scholars that relies solely on critical methodologies. Now that I've thoroughly previewed the selection process in accordance with the justification and general questions I provided in chapter one and the theoretical emphasis discussed in chapter two, the next section outlines the strategic method used for examining TV texts. In the rhetorical tradition of *close reading* (Brummett, 2010) and the television studies tradition of Thompson and Mittell's (2013) *How To Watch TV*, I conjoin these terms for what I call *Close Watching*.

A Method for Close Watching TV.

In this section, I outline a method for close watching that serves the double duty of extending a sub-genre of recapping that I identify as the *rhetorical recap*. Both models work together and present a method for scholars interested in applying critical methods to televisual content. Yet simply "applying" any method to any text or situation or communication act is misleading if not altogether unwise. Instead, scholars should locate strategic texts with strategic interest and focused theoretical emphasis. Hopefully these techniques of close watching and rhetorical recapping can offer ways in which scholars can better apply their areas of expertise, extend conversations and interpretations of televisual texts, and thus innovate critical perspectives on the rhetorical power and interpretive agency TV texts present. A sub-goal then becomes locating, highlighting, and theorizing critical narratives embedded within texts and surfacing those conversation in ways that make the text work for the critic instead of the critic working for the text. Contra- or oppositional readings can be useful tools in developing forms of discursive resistance, a key area of interest for many critical and rhetorical scholars.

In this section I draw upon Brummett's recent summarization of method and *close reading* as a critical process of interest. Rather than elongate a lineage of interpretations, I limit discussion partly due to the modification I make to Brummett's broad definition of close reading. There are many useful scholars throughout canons of mass media studies, rhetoric, film theory, and so on that I could use, yet I rely heavily upon Brummet's insights for two strategic reasons. First, Brummett is a contemporary scholar that extends his work to readers-scholars from multiple disciplines and multiple

places in and in addition to the academic hierarchy.[4] In essence Brummett writes accessibly without watering down his theoretical rigor. Second, Brummett not only advocates critical scholarship, but he also leads out of Communication, serves as Department Chair at one of the most endowed institutes in the University of Texas, and thus commands a chief position of authority and reverence regardless of the feathers he may occasionally ruffle. Brummett can thus be viewed as a continual example advocating use of mixed critical tools toward analyses of popular culture within the disciplinary boundaries of Communication while also elastic to outside interdisciplinary areas.

In *Techniques of Close Reading*, Brummett (2010) advises scholars to, "Think of techniques of close reading as habits, tricks, and knacks you use "on the ground" once inside a text," and view method as "the vehicle you use to get around a text" (p. 29). By comparison, "a method is the systematic way to act to change the world, to perform more effectively in life, or to gain more knowledge about it," or in short, a method is a "system of techniques…the plan for thinking and action, and the techniques are the embodied actions or ways of thinking that achieve the plan" (p. 37). Methods represent "ways of applying theories" (p. 39) and through the following sections I outline a method that presents a technique for what I call *close watching*.

Research. The research gathered to perform a television studies model for communication comprises a number of overlapping procedures. For the explicit study of *programs*, ideal scholar-viewers would want to have a strong background in the general narrative and storytelling procedures of television and a basic understanding of the diverse conventions and formulas between television genres. In order to understand

contexts, scholar-viewers need not only a working familiarity with a program's genre, but also its potential paratextual awareness including if the show carries the potential for embedded intertextuality or cultural currency. Along with contextual information such as genre conventions, intertextual knowledge can provide keys to unlocking why audiences prefer certain contemporary texts above others. Indeed with texts like *Lost* or *Dexter*, the average audience member does not recognize or cannot communicate *why* a text resonates with them the way it does. Inability to articulate such powerful cultural resonance provides double incentive for scholars to fill in these interpretive gaps. According to Gray and Lotz's television studies model, gaining insight into audience preferences and institutional practices will help explain a text's popular resonance or cultural currency. Cultural currency may make a difference in whether a scholar-viewer chooses a popular text rather than a cult classic. Either of these options can yield rich academic potential, but only if they are guided by sturdy academic inquiry. For this reason, the scholar-viewers should actively look for ways to incorporate, extend, and develop theoretical connections between TV texts and disciplinary interests. Thus, one of the key steps in developing a method in *close watching* comes through the intentional transformation from passive audience to active audience.

Practice Active Audience Behaviors. Active audiences membership can take on a number of engaging roles. For scholar-viewers, active audience engagement might mean viewing TV with a notepad and pen while scribbling initial observations. Some contemporary consumers prefer the convenience of a second or third screen such as a nearby laptop, tablet, or cell phone. Indeed, these technologies can enhance viewing experience by allowing instant access to production information via Internet searches on

IMDB or other industry sites. Smart phones and/or wireless Internet devices also present opportunities to engage in fan activities such as live-tweeting during a first-run broadcast. This creates opportunities to read how others are responding to and creating community out of a televisual experience.

Yet at the same time, there is something active about a less-is-more approach to TV consumption. Second screens, third screens, and simultaneous interactions create a bevy of potential distractions. The best procedure when applying a *close watching* method is to zero in on a text with compete focus. If note taking becomes necessary (writers know all too well the price paid when ideas are not immediately recorded), then take breaks or pause viewings until ideas can be charted and/or updated. However, be careful in that pausing too frequently can in some ways disrupt the overall viewing experience, distort textual intepretation, or interrupt the narrative flow that often sparks interest in a text to begin with.

Enjoy the Act of Watching. For these reasons, and especially if the text holds personal interest, scholar-viewers should consider watching a text the first time through *as enjoyment*. In *Reading the Popular*, Fiske (1987) places pleasure in conversation with criticism:

> The meanings and pleasures of popular culture are multiple, transient, and located infally in the diversity of social relations that constitute subordination, and that are experienced always in some form of resisting relationship to the forces of domination. They exist in the moments of reading, rather than in the structure of the text, and are thus less readily

> available for analysis. Textual analysis can identify those spaces or gaps where popular readings can be made (p. 109).

TV can communicate deeply emotional messages and those messages may not resonate as clearly amidst waves of distractions. Scholar-viewers should be disciplined in active viewing as a process of enjoyment in the trust that attention to visual and narrative details throughout a first viewing will open potential insights to record and react to upon a second time through. Along with many disciplines, repetition thus becomes a critical component to getting the most out of a televisual text. Time sensitivity is an issue for all scholars, and hopefully this method will outline ways to maximize that time. If mining a text becomes a taxing experience like visiting a dentist, the text may not be an appropriate or fruitful data set for the scholar-viewer. This is especially true given that a close watching method calls for repeat viewing. Repeat viewing is also essential, as Eco (1979) notes how "narrative texts—especially fictional ones—are more complicated than are many others and make the task of the semiotician harder. But they also make it more rewarding" (p. 13). If a text lacks depth or a scholar-viewer lacks interest, the process can become burdensome if not altogether unproductive. So take pleasure in the aesthetic experiences combined by critical thinking and active viewing.

Learn to Recap and Practice by Doing. The third recommended step in communicating a television studies model for critical scholars is to practice the paratextual mode of *recapping*. Already I have previewed the proliferation of the television recap as a contemporary way in which online discourse extends the cultural currency of a TV text. If scholars are not familiar with the subjective template of recapping, then visit Internet sites like *The AV Club*, *Salon*, or *Vanity Fair* to sample

various ways TV critics and bloggers recap their own preferred texts. Recapping is not only a strong way to get into the mindset of the contemporary TV critic process, but it is also an excellent tool for making sure scholar-viewers comprehend the narrative complexity of a text. Televisual texts like *Game of Thrones* or *Mad Men* or *American Horror Story* have sprawling casts, multiple settings, and sometimes multiple time periods to keep up with. These texts perform great narrative feats but keeping these continuities clear—especially for scholar-viewers following multiple shows—requires active consumptive procedures. Comprehension is crucial to developing interpretive abilities. As incentive, scholar-viewers can also appreciate the function of recapping as an advanced form of note taking. For education addicts—Alan McKee (2007) cleverly identifies this audience as *theory fans*—this kind of active process can help researchers feel at home in their educational mode as lifelong learners. For television scholars, we might nickname this process *rhetorical recapping*.

Rhetorical Recapping. Suggesting a new term in rhetorical recapping offers a great way to advance the next step toward a television studies model for communication researchers. Rhetorical recapping is different from traditional TV blogging or recapping in a couple of important ways. First, professional TV recappers serve an industry purpose in that they are *paid* for their services by news outlets and industry-sponsored websites to generate and promote online discourse concerning populist and/or critic-favored programming. On the other hand, scholar-viewers are most likely not paid, and especially not by industry producers. For the most part, scholar-viewers represent the ethics and quality of higher education and thus seek to extend texts, or rather a text's paratextual discourse, in ways that suggest scholarly ways of seeing and thinking and

communicating. Second, many recappers are English or film school majors if not professional journalists. While there is a strong amount of interdisciplinary overlap in TV criticism, the goal of this study is to propose and demonstrate a method for Communication scholars. Thus, the rhetorical recap brings even more focus into how scholar-viewers can approach close watching their text of choice.

Like the former athletes who comprise an endless assembly of talking heads in suits on cable's hegemonically increasing sports channel tiers, scholar-viewers bring their own brand of professional insights. Rhetorical recappers should embrace epistemological areas of expertise and apply those areas strategically whenever possible. I am not suggesting a critical race scholar binge through season after season of *Survivor* to survey the problematics of race relations nor am I suggesting to apply critical race theory simply because *Survivor* is a critical race theorist's favorite program. What is opportune, especially for those who've developed multi-mixed methods training, is for scholars to develop a deep bench of scholarly tools and hence work toward identifying relevancies for application of these academic languages across tele-situational opportunities. Close watching and rhetorical recapping is not about plugging in random pet theories into open signifiers (should we call them signifiers or *ciphers*?). Like any disciplinary procedure, scholar-viewers should make informed decisions with tactical emphasis. In other words, it is important to *isolate a theoretical lens*.

Theoretical Lenses as Academic Conventions. One handy way to think of theoretical or epistemological lenses is to compare them to genre conventions. Already we have examined the ways in which genre conventions both act as stabilizers and also cultural constructs more salient than stable. In other words, theoretical lenses work

when in conversation with similar modes of thinking and the general language of a given theory or method. Similarly, a theory or method should share some connective tissue with a TV text when isolating a theoretical lens of choice. Recognizing compatibility can occur on a number of fronts. Critical scholars are naturally inclined toward cultural conversations centering broadly within issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, and their relationship to overarching issues of power and dominance. There are numerous sub-categories and emerging directions but these key core themes highlight the traditional routes many theorists pursue. If a scholar-viewer randomly chose an afternoon game show, for example *The Price Is Right*, some oddball theorizations might surface. One could question the tradition of white male hosts or perhaps the gaze-inducing objectification of female assistants holding prizes (who or what is the prop here?) or even manic representations of class vis-à-vis mob mentality and the mediated circus of lottery selection processes that produce contestants? There may be some rich themes embedded, but then again, like being a contestant on the show, the odds are risky and not in the researcher's favor. This is why random and strategic sampling function as important frontrunner methods for scanning televisual texts. This is also why privileging modes of active audience viewing habits enhances research probability for identifying textual potency.

When close watching in combination with rhetorical recapping, practice connecting the narrative tissue or visual storytelling to pre-selected theoretical themes. Look for ways these themes run across a single episode or perhaps even seasonal story arcs. Detail these observations in the rhetorical recap. If scholar-viewers follow multiple threads of interest, such as gender negotiations or conversations of power or privilege,

bookmark these differences creating **bold** font headers or perhaps distinguish themes by in a two-step process. First highlight rhetorical recap segments or paragraphs using the highlighter function available to most Word, Keynote, or related writing software. Second, create a color-coded scheme that organizes your themes by color. This will help scholar-viewers relocate textual themes easier, especially given the volume of recaps that can develop over time. Thinking ahead will help organize thoughts and provide continuity between rhetorical recaps. In time, qualitatively rich samples might develop and lead to enough data for transforming rhetorical recaps into competitive papers, journal essays, or even book chapters.

As appropriate in research, identifying a purpose statement, formulating a research question or hypothesis, and rigorous active brainstorming is encouraged throughout any television studies method for communication scholars. Researchers should be looking for academic conventions or scholarly ways of seeing and reading a text (e.g. close watching). Due to the interpretive nature of critical methods, answering the "So What?" question can occur at different points throughout a process. Unlike social scientific inquiries, there is flexibility and fluidity in how scholars can adapt questions and theorizations based upon what the content/context/producer/institution reveals along varying levels of research and interpretation. Research also plays an important role throughout the process. Scholars may want to simultaneously read up on relevant theoretical content as they explore potential avenues for rhetorical recapping and eventually translating rhetorical recaps into fully formed academic essays for conference or publication submission. Ultimately, scholar-viewers should seek to *restructure a text's general narrative to tell a critical story*. Insights that comprise a

critical story extend the text's interpretive legitimacy and reveal potent new uses texts can serve in ongoing negotiations of cultural currency, dialogic resonance, and future inquiry.

Indeed, the close watching method I have previewed shares similarities with inductive reasoning whereby focused observations can inductively lead to empirical generalization, which then suggest potential theories that direct researchers to potential hypotheses and research questions. Thus, repeating the cycle helps refine the process or perhaps unveil new areas of analysis with each close watching. In addition to inductive approaches, this method may remind some readers of Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), but given the contextual depth it takes to close watch TV, drawing too close a comparison between GT and close watching posits a hasty generalization. To recap, the television studies method for communication scholars offers a template that recommends researchers 1) sample and familiarize with TV, 2) emphasize active patterns of viewing, 3) practice recapping, and utilize academic strengths to become a 4) rhetorical recapper, interested in 5) isolating theoretical lenses and terminology, in order to 6) restructure the general narrative of a chosen text to tell a critical story. For the most part, this structural template—or method for television studies among communication scholars—aligns with practices and procedures undertaken for early drafts relating to this mode of inquiry. Depending on the theoretical lens or language of a theory and/or text may depend on the number of viewings necessary to grasp a text's potency.

I cannot claim to have identified all the themes, values, or interpretive decodings communicated in a single episode or season or series of *Sons of Anarchy* or *Game of*

Thrones or even *Hell on Wheels*. But all texts analyzed depend on thorough and repetitious viewings of texts, rigorous note-taking of narrative structures, key themes, genre conventions, and data relevant to extending critical-cultural conversation. Notably, a similar method of *close watching* will be applied to all texts under analysis.[5] In the remaining section I outline chapters that will complete this project and fulfill the four tenets of Gray and Lotz's television studies model under the new extended guidelines I present through mixed critical methodologies. I preview diverse theoretical lenses and critical perspectives, which extend discourses communicating polyvalent themes relating communication theories to televisual texts and vice versa. With genre theory at the heart of this project, it would work best to consider additional theories in later chapters as theoretical lenses functioning like generic conventions that comprise the fluid academic genre of Critical Theory. As with any genre text, all of the conventions that comprise Critical Theory are not in play. The size and scope of such a project would take many more years of focused (and funded) time to collect and redistribute. Instead, this project opens a conversation that can be extended to include additional theoretical lenses and language connecting alternate texts, scholars, and scholarship.

Chapter Previews

Just as contemporary cable TV drama blend genres like period, fantasy, western, and other pulp materials, Critical Theory frequently extends mixtures of critical-cultural studies, gender studies, rhetoric, performance studies and other relating perspectives of criticism. Next I preview chapters and display critical analyses developed by using the television studies-inspired communication models of close watching and rhetorical

recapping. The close watching and rhetorical recapping methods will be used to develop, organize, and theorize how contemporary televisual texts communicate polyvalent messages.

To review, Gray and Lotz's (2012) television studies model calls for multiple points of emphasis in the strategic areas of Programs→Audiences→Institutions→Contexts. All chapters except one engage programs to differing degrees, but chapter four places specific emphasis on how televisual programs communicate and negotiate uses of time. The relationship between TV and time echoes the historical and contemporary significance between these two human-made constructs. This chapter analyses the use of time as an industrial framework for TV as well as the role time plays as a narrative function within TV. First, this chapter examines the etymological history behind the key words of time and TV. Next, emphasis on processes of adaptation and temporal elasticity demonstrate the fluid ontology time possesses. Then, close readings reveal how time functions as a narrative tool for writers and showrunners. This segment specifies uses in the post-Network era and highlights dramas that distort time in ways that suggest post-9/11 themes within American and postmodern culture. Ultimately, analysis extends discussion to consider new terms that speak to this transmedia phenomenon in temporal urgency and global temporialism.

Chapter five moves away from broader focus on generic uses of time and instead examines the post-*Sopranos* cable TV drama using a traditional film theory/genre analysis. This analysis thus involves contexts to the extent that same-genre programs undergo alterations in order to translate from film to television, as does the

biker-themed *Sons of Anarchy* (2008-2014) or *SoA*. In this chapter, I perform a mixed methods *rhetorical close-reading* of the cable TV drama *SoA* that demonstrates how contemporary media texts perform multi-layered tasks that transcend traditional television production just as television as a medium metamorphosizes into transmedia formats. Along this hybrid highway, I make a pit stop to fill up on the ways *SoA* privileges classical conventions of the biker film genre. These classic conventions, I argue, add an aesthetic richness and historical authenticity to the genre's exploitation formulas. I claim the drama eclipses the aesthetic value of those programs to meet contemporary audience expectations in a competitive and expanding transmedia culture. In particular, I acknowledge *SoA*'s higher production value, aided through a presentational style of quality film sound that includes the re-emergence of the *acousmetre*. I demonstrate how *SoA* performs and sustains the acousmetre through its repetitious voiceovers from John Teller, the dead father of the show's antihero protagonist, thus signaling a high-culture mark of *auteur theory*. Ultimately, I argue *SoA* audiences ultimately benefit from what genre theorist John G. Cawelti calls the balance between "convention" and "innovation," a pattern that all successful genre texts must communicate in order to maintain legitimacy and thus rhetorical power over time.

Chapter six continues the genre analysis theme but instead switches genres in an attempt to communicate the potential polyvalence televisual texts can simultaneously project for audience interpretation. In *Sixguns & Society*, Will Wright (1975) performs a seminar rhetorical work on the Western film genre that combines Vladimir Propp's (1968) syntagmatic structural analysis of Russian folklore with Kenneth Burke's (1969) literary demonstration that popular culture posits a significant site of investigation for

understanding symbolic action as a cultural construct. This chapter embraces the *spirit* of Wright's foundational work as I examine the FX cable channel biker drama *SoA*. I read the show as a revision of the American Western film genre, updated for postmodern consumption but ripe with common tropes and ideological context that ranges from mythic conceptions of landscape to the mise en scene of the Native American plight. Employing the genre functions typical of Westerns unearths connections between *SoA*'s fictitious town setting and how televisual drama inverts traditional archetypes of "civilization versus wilderness" and reinserts the outlaw narrative along the new antihero status quo topical among post-millennial cable dramas. I inspect the role of borders in how their ideological constructs on *SoA* invert the Western tradition. Ideological inversion includes open-ended Westward expansion among Westerns now updated as close-ended political constraints indicative of post-globalist anxieties of American decline in the narrative world of SAMCRO. A bevy of film theory and visual rhetoric scholars join the conversation and co-create space where I reposition their critiques of Western cinema against *SoA*'s backdrop, the fictitious Charming, CA. I argue the revision and update of outlaw culture, gunslinger violence, and the show's subsequent popularity perspires a post-9/11 trauma that plays out the perceived decline of White male privilege and the American Dream as television tragedy. Whereas "authentic" histories of biker movements follow WWII, with the advent of a biker film genre juxtaposed primarily against Vietnam, *SoA* embodies western form in a way that posits distinctness amidst familiarity. Thus through evoking the Western genre, *SoA* updates these ideological criticisms for *war on terror* media consumers in ways that synchronize such historical (and historicized) thematic anarchy.

Chapter seven stays within the western genre to a certain degree but shifts texts to examine another non-western text, *Game of Thrones (GoT)*. The adaptation of George R. R. Martin's literary series *A Song of Ice and Fire* (or *ASoFaI*) into HBO's televisual experience *GoT* posits a cultural epoch in the past-present-future transformation of literary properties into transmedia storytelling properties for multinational audiences/consumers. While the TV series may directly influence *GoT* fans to consider or return to Martin's literary inspiration, the richly imagined female character Arya Stark evokes multiple literary, TV, and film archetypes in ways that suggest these literary traditions while innovating their outcomes through genre hybridity. I argue that Arya's transformational journey evokes female literary archetypes that borrow from Jewett and Lawrence's (2002) theorization of a "Heidi redeemer" myth as well as Western film scholar Richard Slotkin's (1998) understanding of the "revenger" plot convention in Western cinema. These mixed messages and meanings from literary, film, and TV history collectively demonstrate how transmedia storytelling stylistics and genre hybridity help connect audiences (and eras) from one medium to another. To structure Arya's sizable journey through *GoT*'s first four seasons, I draw upon "the mythic perspective," as conceived by rhetorical scholars' Janette Rushing and Thomas Frentz (2005). The mythic perspective emphasizes the mythological templates of a character or rhetorical situation in terms of its distinct phases of *departure*, *initiation* and *return*. I emphasize *GoT* over *ASoFaI* due to the former's larger audience impact and growing multicultural resonance. I also note how deviations in the TV series ultimately strengthen Arya's *anti-heroine journey* from redeemer to revenger over the course of the show. In effect, this exercise extends

interdisciplinary utility between literary and rhetorical criticism, television studies, and mythology, with implications that communicate broad applicability for scholars of gender, genre, industry and audience studies.

The next unit of three chapters shift focus from programs and contexts to contexts of audiences. Chapter eight stays in conversation with *GoT* but pulls back to examine the extratextual or paratextual dimensions of fandom that help generate show's global popularity. Chapter eight embraces the approach of *reception studies as critical fandom*. Premiering in the Spring 2010 television season, HBO's *GoT* fashioned a name for itself through layered narrative hybridity that asks viewers to follow not only multiple characters that expand across a fictitious would-be medieval fantasy realm but also to successfully navigate a nontraditional storytelling style that de-stabilizes central protagonists while repositioning antiheroes and villains alike as sympathetic signifiers for audience identification. As familiarity with the cultural construct gains popularity beyond niche readers and initial inquisitors to the HBO series, networks of fan sites stimulate an aggressively expansive form of cultural capital. These critical forums both legitimate and interrogate the cultural capital now required in order for popular entertainments to expand and retain audience attention, much less the staying power necessary to finalize (if not exceedingly exploit) their full narrative-consumer potential. Internet enthusiasts come together at *WinterIsComing.net*, a sub-site created in 2008, which functions as a kind of catch-all for *GoT*-related news, rumors, reactions, and speculations. The focus of this chapter examines the contrasting nature between these two concurrent styles of sourcing for Internet fandom relating to Martin's HBO adaptation.

Chapter nine approaches the audience/reception mode of consumerism but carefully weighs the communicative rhetorical power memorabilia communicates. This chapter thus views *audiences as consumers* and *institutions as producers* but maintains concentration not on methods of production and consumption but instead the communicative power of the object. In order to achieve this, I apply a combination of material culture-Prownian analysis, performative writing, and rhetorical-mythical Analysis. I employ Prownian analysis for a base material examination and investigation of modern kitsch memorabilia connected to the cult TV hit *SoA*. Specifically for this case, I perform a colorful close reading the text-both performative in presentation and rhetorical in analytics-of a black *SoA* table lamp with a Grim Reaper shade and an M-16 stem. The ramifications of these two arguably violent images invite a criticism of the text's prominent narrative themes and their darker archetypal origins. Prown, Professor Emeritus in Art History at Yale University develops a multi-disciplinary method that connects humanist subjectivism from art history to its more modern use in American studies and Communication. In the primetime television biker drama *SoA*, FX offers a subversive revision of grunge glamour aesthetics in small town, U.S.A. Likewise the niche commercialization of *SoA* products promotes similar markers of culture, history, and advertising symbolism. With this entry, I slice the rugged landscape of kitsch advertising with attention to an official *SoA* table lamp.

I execute a Prownian analysis of this luminescent artifact utilizing Prown's method of description, deduction, speculation, research, and interpretive analysis. Utilizing Prownian analysis, I deduce artificial surface values found in modern commercial products and thus bypass close associations with the TV drama of the same

name. The deduction phase includes playful prose for the purpose of exploring the artifact's most prominent features. This description also helps the reader/author uncover which features represent key significance for later research and analysis. In order to adhere to Prown's method, I abstain from linking the lamp directly to its commodity predecessor *SoA*. Through avoiding the source material TV show that would undoubtedly compromise interpretations toward the product's overt brand association, the Prownian method instead posits a theoretical realm for more open and thus polyvalent readings of postmodern materialism. Through this critical lens, the text ultimately communicates an ironic meaning in that the "anarchy" it purports must always exists within the commodified confines of consumer culture. This irony de-mythologizes the text for would-be consumers of both the lamp and its larger cultural parent, the TV drama. Instead of creating "authenticity" for consumers, the lamp burns yet one more brand extension to signify fandom allegiance. In rhetorical terms, I argue this allegiance is less about ideological identification tied to biker gangs, for example, and more in tune with kitsch culture associated with agency-strained victims of minimum-wage stagnation. Read rhetorically, the throwaway artifact gains a second and more significant value when gauging the post-Obama economic climate in America.

Chapter ten concludes the audiences unit by proposing an critical extension of audience and reception studies through autoethnography. Autoethnography holds deep resonance for many critical scholars, even those that do not exclusively refer to the process as such. Roland Barthes (1981) implements personal reflection into active theorizing throughout celebrated works like *Mythologies* and the lesser-discussed *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Claude Levi-Strauss (1975/1955) relies

exclusively on his own autoethnography when fusing colonialist-style reflection with performative writing his acclaimed *Tristes Tropiques*. In *Trickster in Tweed*, active contemporary rhetorical scholar Thomas Frentz (2008) uses autoethnography to make sense of his cancer, the loss of his work partner/co-author/spouse Janet Rushing, all the while coming to grips with his pedagogical legacy. Employing autoethnography as critical lens joins a return to the western genre as dual lenses for Self-interpreting space and place and experiences of the past with cultural problems of the present. It is the real versus the reel. Chapter ten views audiences as institutions of understanding and institutions as comprised of audience interpretations. In this case, emphasis comes from *an audience of one*, or *the Self as informed interpreter* and *interpellator.* In this chapter, I analyze how cable channel AMC's antihero Western drama *Hell on Wheels* centralizes its narrative around life at the "edge of civilization." I juxtapose my analysis against the community experiences I observed and experienced growing up in a small "Western" town. Through authoethnography and close watching, I inspect how the show's (im)moral elements that emphasize western themes of community, religion, and justice may not be melodramatic so much as sobering reality and a reflection of everyday life survival for small towns and those that struggle within them.

Chapter ten's emphasis on the politics of everyday life juxtaposes with the final section of chapters that stress the political polyvalence in televisual texts and the cultural contexts with which these texts reflect. In chapter eleven I again examine *SoA* utilizing theoretical combinations of public sphere theory as it rides shotgun to Barry Brummett's (2009) theoretical exploration of rhetorical style in *A Rhetoric of Style*. Employing Brummett's theoretical strategy, I decipher the stylistic codes comprising

SoA in an attempt to reveal how the show's narrative mediates performances of public and counterpublic. I argue that while the fictional counterculture motorcycle club posits itself as a kind of counterpublic, its practices and procedures reify aspects of a democratic public. Specifically, I smuggle in examples where democratic arguments between club members; examples that oscillate between Second Sophistic ethos and what Jurgen Habermas contends to be a critical-rational style of argumentation. Debating how these arguments succeed or fail within the context of the show, I stress the significance of *SoA* as a mediated text that circulates important discourses surrounding the democratic process. Thus, I theorize that early seasons of the show, through its circulation on TV and alternative mediating formats for mass audiences, constitutes an aesthetic form that also promotes considerations toward a more politically active public.

Chapter twelve functions as an oppositional reading of chapter eleven's masculine emphasis. Chapter twelve explores polyvalent negotiations of gender representation in *SoA*. Surveying Betty Friedan, Jean Bethke Elshtain, and Donna Haraway, and others I examine the interactions between the key female characters on *SoA*, highlight patterns of hegemonic patriarchy, and argue for potential areas of resistance, as I theorize how female characters in TV can create spaces for mainstream gender critique. Ultimately, my goal is to emphasize whether there exists potential for a liberal feminist discourse amidst the dominant masculine norms representative of this cable TV show and its male-driven cable network culture. The nature of *raunch resistance* displayed and indicative of *SoA*'s rhetorical style speaks to a larger cultural phenomenon undergoing transformation along the cable TV drama spectrum.

Implications lead to the theorization of a new cross-genre convention to be explored in the final theoretical chapter.

Chapter thirteen returns to broader emphasis on programs but maintains the socio-cultural specifics of chapters eleven and twelve along while expanding upon the usefulness of Levy's raunch culture as a way to interpret innovating genre conventions in the post-*Sopranos* cable drama. Network TV, in terms of creative innovation and artistic execution, resides like a post-apocalyptic landscape, a wasteland figuratively in danger of being overwhelmed by zombies. In this essay I explore the rise of what I define as a *rotten aesthetic*, a theoretical and contemporary TV genre convention that functions in response to the disappearance of the R-rated features in cinema, the dramatic genealogy of the post-*Sopranos* televisual mediascape, and as a manufactured reactionary visual to Levy's post-feminist theory of *raunch culture*. I examine the [mostly cable] televisual landscape of corporeal abjection that seems only to grow with each successive TV season. While the cable drama mediascape seems most prominent in secreting this rotten aesthetic, networks now race closely behind. Thus, in this essay I qualify incidents, describe and critique these rotten manifestations in theoretical terms, and thus theorize how rampant visual gratuity begets larger sociopolitical concerns and rising globalist cultural myths. At the gratuitous epicenter, I argue these narrative themes and this emerging genre convention can best be navigated through interpretations that combine areas of mass communication and critical theory that include genre studies, television studies, mass media theory, post-feminist theory, and broader commentaries from intermediary TV critics and bloggers. Thus, the ~~undead~~ rise of a *rotten aesthetic* genre convention theory might alleviate audiences, critics, and

scholars amidst these dramatic shifts in cultural taste. Finally, chapter fourteen summarizes concluding thoughts on the global impact of American mediations of cultural erosion in the contemporary televisual mediascape and impact genre theory can play in the scholarly negotations of these polyvalent meanings.

Chapter Four

Global Temporialism: Television, Time, and the Temporal Urgency of the post-9/11 TV Drama

Neil Postman famously observed that, "*Television* has made entertainment itself the natural format for the representation of all experience" (Postman, 1985, p. 87). Film and TV have always worked well at visualizing modern concerns and cultural values through discretely digestible formats in the movie and TV series respectively. The two mediums have different rules concerning length, and indeed TV production is irreversibly and inevitably connected to time. Kramer, Callahan, and Zuckerman (2012) concur:

> It is true that in places where the power of the mechanical clock, the first great technological mass medium broadcast by bells in towers, dominates, [and] we have the formation of mass society and mass production/consumption, meaning that masses of people become employed in giant enterprises and synchronized" (p. 260).

Readers and audiences need look no further than the highly mechanized, greatly industrial, and powerfully persuasive advent of television as *the* dynamic broadcast medium of the twentieth century. Concurrently numerous film critics see the twilight of significant cultural thought towards film just as TV critics hail a new "Golden Age of Television" that began around the twilight of the 20th century.

The changing interests from film to TV could be understood in theoretical terms as a *paradigm shift*. Paradigm shifts note dramatic changes that effect cultures, technologies, and societies. This technological paradigm shift in the intellectual storytelling landscape signifies an additional epoch mediated by the events of September 11, 2001 (Mirzoeff, 2009). And while this event fades into public memory with each passing year, the sociopolitical and economic narratives that emerge in its

wake resonate potently. 9/11, as an event, represents what I call a *temporal signpost*. The event is a marker of time in ways that look very different socially and politically beforehand versus afterward. Clearly the world has changed, as any 24-hour news channel will communicate every 15 minutes or so. The TV drama landscape or *televisual mediascape* has also shifted notably, and with this shift, increased collective emphasis on temporal urgency emerges. In an effort to unpack how this increased emphasis on time is mediated, it is important to consider the root concepts of television and time before examining the heavy-handed role time plays in the contemporary literary text, the TV drama. Arguably, increased temporal emphasis elides a culture at ends with the ever-increasing machinations of Western global capitalism. These might sound like complicated terms, and they are, but examining these cultural issues through the narratives of TV might simplify understanding if not create new ways of seeing. However, rather than suggest thin arguments more appropriate among conspiracy theorists,[1] this chapter emphasizes the narrative maturation of time on TV and how this Western advent enjoys the liminal[2] position of maintaining presence while also seeming out of sight.

The Visual Culture of Television and Time

Tele originates of the Greek "far off, afar, at or to a distance" (n. a., 2013). The term relates to the similar *teleos* or *telos* meaning "end, goal, result, consummation, perfection" or perhaps the "completion of a cycle". These definitions seem both intra-related and appropriate given the epistemology of *tele*-vision as a portal that shortens the distance of the "far off" and often "at a distant" worlds of stories, characters, people, places, and events. Distance takes many forms, real and fictional. On one hand,

television might transport viewers to an alien planet where fictional writers recreate the human condition through allegory and metaphor. On the other hand, television might alienate viewers through the horrors of live events like Boston Marathon bombings, civil unrest in Syria, or nuclear meltdowns in Japan. Television perfects these transmissions through its cinematic capabilities and aesthetic suggestions. The ability of a news program to figuratively *cut* from a studio anchor to a street side reporter employs a technological razor that slices through the traditional fabric of time. Viewers can instantly transport to the scene and endure a tumultuous teleportation. Indeed if one scene or reporter does not constitute the desired "reality" of a scene, the viewer may enact their remote control *consumer agency* and thus exchange perspectives via the changing of channels.

In addition, the *ontology* or nature of television functions in a cyclic manner, where programming is structured into blocks of time; segments between production and promotion. The history of television takes place within *modernity* or contemporary Western industrial history, and as such the practices and procedures of television are those that follow closely the rules of capitalism. Nicholas Mirzoeff notes, "Television has morphed from national broadcasting on three or four channels to global narrowcasting on hundreds" (Mirzoeff, 2009, p. 2). Large companies own studios that host, house, and produce content. Traditionally, these corporately owned studios generate sustained revenue through commercial advertising. These advertisements evolve in form and application but for the purpose of simplicity, viewers might best relate to this concept through segmentation. Programs, whether news reports or football games, operate in *segments*.[3] Just as sporting events break at the end of each quarter,

period, or half, the television program halts for breaks as well. Except in television these breaks are never casual. Instead breaks represent a strategic, purposive, and successful function to service advertisers by persuading audiences toward the "agency" of market consumerism. However, without veering into production methodology too far, it is first necessary to review the second half of the root word in conversation, *vision*.

Vision comprises the second half of the word television. Mirzoeff (2009) contends, "(V)ision is never singular but involves all the sense and modes of psychology" (p. 3). The noun vision originates in the 13th century as "something seen in the imagination or in the supernatural" (n. a., 2013). This concept of having *a* vision certainly converses with the numerous visions viewers experience on television. Within the construct of television–the production program, not the physical flat-screen, computer, phone or tablet—numerous visions vie for the attention (or in-ten(s)ion) of viewers. These visions might include imaginative constructs of a mystical island full of plane crash victims or the upper/lower class divisions in post-Victorian England. Some visions are succinct and grounding such as David Simon's incrementally constructed depiction of Baltimore's racially impoverished urban decay on *The Wire* or Matt Weiner's conflicted nostalgia through the white male privilege of 1960s America in *Mad Men*. Others visions trade distinctness for pacification like CBS's continued strategies to flood the traditional airwaves with carbon copy replicas of aesthetically stylish but un-ambitious and repetitious Chuck Lorre sitcoms like *Two and a Half Men* and crime procedural franchises such as *CSI* and *NCIS*.

But visions on TV are not limited to comedies or dramas. Theorist Kenneth Burke (1969) might argue all storytelling communiqué operate within a *dramatistic pentad*. The dramatistic pentad proposes five areas for analyzing a rhetorical situation: *act*, *scene*, *agent*, *agency*, and *purpose*. Together these five areas thus provide insight into the choices and motives being used. News programs often rely on the drama of real life circumstances to convert audiences into sustained viewership. The "human interest" in human interest stories lead to the advent of 24-hour news channels that specialize in cyclic depictions of troubled stories like the trials of killer moms moving through the judicial system or the exploits of the rich and famous in increasing surveillance culture and cultural debauchery. Increased technological surveillance and emphasis on "real" people and "real" drama, particularly amidst inflation costs for TV producers, becomes visualized in the ever-increasing genre of "reality TV". Steve F. Anderson (2011) corresponds that, "Cinema, television, and digital media do not merely serve as vehicles for historical discourse; they also shape our basic relations to time, history, and memory" (p. 4). Arguably the most ironic among TV genre titles, reality TV promises un-staged spontaneity yet increasingly becomes more scripted in efforts to one-up what constitutes "real", "authentic", or even "human" For example, read about (please don't watch) the staged lowbrow sleaze among debutant trophy wives on Bravo's *Real Housewives* series as exhibits A-G. These portrayals of supposed "reality" betray human decency in favor of shock antics, a dramatistic update on the *Jerry Springer Show* formula which used a similar formula to amuse audiences under the disguise of talk show.

TV turns time into a visual vessel. Marshall McLuhan (1967) attests, "Visual space is uniform, and connected. The rational man in our Western culture is a visual man. The fact that most conscious experience has little "visuality" in it is lost to him" (p. 45). Encouraging the structure of television is the process of *visualization*, a device innately connected to both television's revolutionary proliferation and the existential quality of human sensory. Mirzoeff (2009) argues, "Visuality is that which renders the processes of History visible to power" (p. 5), whereas "paradoxically, therefore, visual culture, which wants to be democratic rather than autocratic, is against visuality" (p. 6). The intersection between visualization and visuality within visual culture enables artistic significance within TV productions, where texts confirm and contradict as symbolic actions in aesthetic spaces. TV might then constitute what Richard Schechner notes Victor Turner's concept of the *liminoid*. Schechner (2006) specifies, "Turner's coinage [of liminoid] describe(s) symbolic actions or leisure activities in modern or postmodern societies that serve a function similar to rituals in pre-modern or traditional societies. Generally speaking, liminoid activities are voluntary… Recreational activities and the arts are liminoid" (p. 67). The key link here between modern or postmodern TV and the pre-modern is the medium of storytelling. Older cultures relied on respected teachers or village elders to pass down or share important knowledge through direct storytelling. Today storytelling exists in a number of different ways, from books and movies to social media and television. This chapter examines the TV drama, and for the sake and scale of this project, the TV drama best functions as a liminoid mode of ritualized storytelling.

To clarify, the argument here is not meant to persuade or legitimize TV's existence or reaffirm its persuasive power or aesthetic socio-cultural artistic flexibility (though these arguments are demonstrated critically and qualitatively). Instead, the goal is to highlight the increasing emphasis on time as a fixture on TV and a fixation amongst writers and their narrative constructs. Time has always played a role with and on TV. TV could not exist without time, and the rules of time have always lorded over the structural functionalism of TV. TV requires time. Even virtual New Age techies could agree time would not be the same without TV and other types of televisual media. The relationship between time and TV is significant—not unlike the time frame of one's favorite TV program—and the purpose of this project investigates the narrative functions time plays in the post-Network era landscape, or *mediascape*.

Amanda Lotz discusses the *post-Network television* era at length. Lotz (2007) explains, "Post-network era practices have led the television audience not only to fracture among different channels and devices, but also to splinter temporally" (p. 35). Within this advancing system, "Niche-focused media long have played an important role in society by communicating cultural beliefs, albeit to narrower groups than mass media" (p. 36). In some ways, niche-focused media like genre-heavy dramas attract increased audience and critical attention. Indeed this project is interested and invested in the narrative and thematic values these niche/genre texts communicate and how each presents and plays with time specifically. The next section surveys several temporal landscapes fixated within TV. Analysis demonstrates how dramas employ time and also how time employs a show's narrative style and persuasive appeal. This discussion

offers implications for TV scholars, scholars of time, and the Western philosophy that drives both camps amidst the ticking clock of what I identify as *global temporialism*.

There are numerous temporal methods that time plays as a conductor of produced television. The chapter quantum leaps through several notorious genres and draw some general conclusions about the role that time plays in narrative assembly. Special emphasis on the TV drama communicates its potency as simultaneously the most classical and progressive among TV's storytelling genres. Several contemporary dramas emphasize diverse methodological impressions of time. How is time presented? Is it passive or aggressive, subverting or inverting? In what ways might time create and condense, problematize and pervert? It is vital to highlight the importance of time in its relationship with television and expand a conversation of how audiences and critics might appreciate the aesthetics of time in the same manner scholars and professionals appreciate traditional audio and visual stimuli in the televisual mediascape.

Unfortunately, there exists neither the time nor space to adequately sum up television history. Thus this chapter fast-forwards through TV's history in to meet the crux of analysis in a timely fashion. The history of television as a medium, as an industrial advent, and as a cultural conductor is a long and fascinating account rich with implications, embedded cultural changes, regulations and reforms, and a tendency toward secular progression despite certain traditional ideologies that remain over time. It is critical not to dismiss the relevance of television's early history and instead sideline or table longer detailed discussion for extended conversations among media historians. Given this project's parameters, already a large scope, this conversation picks up at the post-9/11 paradigm shift.

The *post-9/11 paradigm shift* represents an epoch in televisual programming where content and representations of time shift to re-present growing trends, fears, and social norms communicating time (and *the times*) in twenty-first century America and the larger world. The next section emphasizes the term temporal elasticity as a way to preview a few strategic genres of TV programming and how they temporally engage contemporary social, technological, and televisual conditions. This is followed by a focus on the TV drama as a quintessential reflector of transmodern shifts and global temporialism.

Temporal Elasticity in Storytelling Mediums and post-Network TV Trends

Temporal Elasticity. One growing temporal trend is the expansion of cinematic properties for TV consumption. This trend experiences a strong uptick during the post-network era but traces its heritage back several mediums. Many early radio broadcasts produced serials translating literary texts or at least literary storytelling formats. While numerous literary authors practiced serialized storytelling – it is, after all ingrained in the episode nature of book chapters – Charles Dickens is perhaps most notorious for publishing some of his greatest works one chapter at a time. This publishing strategy took advantage of rising interest in literacy and literary consumption as a social method and cultural mode of industrial capitalism. One could easily see the Dickensian model as a precursor to the success of the comic book medium, where titles issues typically publish monthly installments. Serialized storytelling thus elicits a Dickensian quality less about content than form.

When radio broadcasters recognized a public eager to invest time listening to their airwaves, advertising sponsors soon followed. Companies supplied industrialized products where successful commercial investment sustained broadcast regularity. Radio serials emerged as a programming block fulfilling both the business practice of time segmentation and the aesthetic human interest following the literary tradition. The literary storytelling format acknowledges certain industrial privileges predated by oral cultural practices. Oral cultures ritualized methodical repetition of stories, and indeed the memorization process works efficiently when information is synthesized into segmented chucks, often converted to prose or hymn, for efficient long-term memory storage, retention, and re-iteration. These age-old practices demonstrate temporal compartmentalization, or secure information storage that successfully passes from communicator to audience time and again.

For most of the twentieth century, the film medium resonated elitism above radio and TV. Film's "legitimacy" epitomizes a commanding medium with penetrating visual permanence and aesthetic allure. Due to film's initial public accessibility, audience manipulation, and cultural captivation, art critics stirred restlessly theorizing film's highbrow potential. This is in contrast to radio and TV, where programming stretched into temporal business models and not artistic vessels. In some ways TV and film practices dramatically reverse in contemporary settings. For example, the *post-9/11 superhero zeitgeist* (Treat, 2009) ushered in a filmic wave of seriaized superhero spectacles as proto-cultural cash cows. This trend denotes a Hollywood commercial paradigm shift for the twenty-first century, one still growing and not diminishing. In theory, the superhero movie communicates a fantasy narrative that acts as a soma for

modern Western and Westernizing cultures during the War on Terror era (Castleberry, 2010). When evil no long presumes malleable and identifiable monikers like the Nazi uniform or colonialism's intercultural Other, superhero semiotics erect a secular super savior for multicultural/multinational audiences. Yet perhaps the true disguise is a traditional sleight of hand in the commercial presence behind such popular icons. One significant disadvantage beget by the post-9/11 superhero film is the genre's economic impact on Hollywood. In an age of bottom lines amidst rises in Internet use and consumption of media, film pirating, and the proliferation of alternative entertainment means and venues, a definitive paradigm shift occurs in the film industry where hyper-spectacle blockbusters now marginalize midrange adult movies and the adult character drama specifically.

However, innovative storytellers have found a silver lining through a digital Diaspora from the film industry to the television industry. With television, and on cable TV specifically, artists have regained continuity in some respects and found a communicative medium that denotes greater elasticity over film's temporal constraints. Since the blockbuster success of AMC's *The Walking Dead* in 2010, television producers continue developing projects from all of the encompassing mediums I've previewed, including film, radio, comic book and literary works. For example, consider author Thomas Harris's most celebrated literary and cinematic villain Hannibal Lector, now translated with Harris's other characters on NBC's glossy, ultraviolent, yet immersive and poetic *Hannibal*. *Hannibal* (2013-present) demonstrates the post-Network era perfectly as but the latest horror show imported onto TV from outside sources. AMC's *The Walking Dead* draws from its source material as a comic book,

while A&E's *Bates Motel* (2013-present) offers a revisionary prequel to Alfred Hitchcock's (1960) iconic *Psycho*. Horror is not the only genre in digital Diaspora translating film properties to TV.

Science fiction represents one of the most liminal and elastic among storytelling genres. Consider H. G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*, a literary classic revised into Orson Welles's infamous October 30, 1938 radio broadcast. Welles's unique talent helped "sell" the story as a real-life alien invasion to numerous radio listeners. *WOTW* later translated to film in an effective 1950s Cold War allegory and later functioned as a post-9/11 allegory for director Steven Spielberg. Spielberg would again translate his affection for science fiction invasion narrative as post-apocalyptic war allegory in the TNT drama *Falling Skies* (2011-present). Like *WOTW*, *Star Trek* denotes continued successful transmedia liminal shifts from TV to movies, back to TV, and now back as glossed over cinematic spectacle.

Roland Emmerich (1994) and Dean Devlin's *Stargate* time-jumped from an almost hit in theaters to a ten-year TV show run on Showtime and Sci-Fi (now SyFy) Channel. Like *Trek*, *Stargate: SG-1* temporally expanded its brand potential through multiple spinoffs. Even "sacred" film properties like James Cameron's (1984/1991) *The Terminator/Terminator 2* series time traveled to TV after Jonathan Mostow's (2003) threequel *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* demonstrated no favored film franchise is safe from commercial exploitation. *WOTW* screenwriter Josh Freidman was creatively successful in salvaging the *Terminator* franchises narrative potency and allegorical rigor for Fox's post-9/11 pre-apocalyptic *Terminator: The Sarah Conner Chronicles* (2008-2009). While rich in character and true to the original's bleak tone, the show suffered

from the 2008 writer's strike halting its season one momentum as well as the network tampering with its broadcast schedule. Ironically, this time travel tale may have benefitted more from future tech trends like *time-shifting*, which is a DVR and/or Online viewing practice that networks are just beginning to factor into their Nielson ratings system.

Other literary and filmic translations include paycable underdog Starz's most buzz-worthy series, *Spartacus*. *Spartacus* comprises the elasticity of history, fabled myth, pulpy dime novels, exploitation TV, and the same-name film Stanley Kubrick cantankerously half-directed for Warner Brothers and star Kirk Douglas. Translation can take on other forms as well. Some shows borrow a familiar premise and expand the story's temporal elasticity. Two such elastic examples include AMC's "How did Mr. Chips become *Scarface*?" *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) and FX's "Hamlet on Motorcycles" *Sons of Anarchy* (2008-2014). Reverence to source materials can also be valuable, especially when creators lend their own voice to their TV translations. Elmore Leonard, arguably the most popular contemporary crime novelist, extended his underbelly brand name and characters to FX's *Justified* (2010-2015). Compare this to fantasy novelist and TV writing veteran George R. R. Martin, who assists HBO's translation of his massive-volume literary fantasy *A Song of Fire and Ice* series into what has become [as of spring 2013] HBO's top-rated and heralded series, *Game of Thrones* (2011-present). Given *GoT*'s growing success, the show has reverse-engineered Martin's credibility and thus demonstrates a trans-medium elasticity where highly valued entertainment properties extend beyond traditional formatting and economic constraints by further expanding temporal elasticity and storytelling

continuity. The following section *time jumps* juxtapositions between the generic functions of time science fiction versus period dramas. Analysis then resumes a close reading of the post-millennial TV drama as a vehicle for meditations on temporal urgency in the age of 9/11 allegories.

Temporal Dualism between Science Fiction and the Period Drama

Time is expressed as the central problem in Twentieth Century philosophy, physics, history, art, management, literature, communications, computations, transportation, generational "gaps", and all spheres of life. –Eric Mark Kramer, 2001, p. 49.

The two seemingly dichotomous genres of science fiction and period drama both function as reminders of the literary power of metaphor. I risk committing sacrilege by combining myth, folklore, and fiction in an effort to stress an implication they each share with one another. Period fiction has always served as a historical reminder of societal morality. For example, the Hebrew *Old Testament*, *Grimm*'s fairy tales, or the Celtic folklore of the trickster hare each communicate messages about shared social norms, standards for living, and exchanges of past historical values passed along for present and future consideration of how one might navigate life. While many myths, folklores, and fairy tales passed away with their respective civilizations, those that survived did so by successfully crossing the threshold from oral to written cultures. Indeed, I highlight the merit of such transition as I argue these same myths, fairy tales, and folklores passed another threshold in the twentieth century through the advent of technological mass mediation. This is not to say that books do not serve the same technological function of that the spoken word also conjures, but rather that technological innovations like radio, film, TV, and now the Internet provide advances in

how audiences see, hear, and retain the collective knowledge of myth, folklore, and fairy tale. Specifically, I allege TV now offers one of the strongest cultural pallets for recreation of these moral communiqué.

In particular, I contend science fiction and period dramas constitute two of the strongest examples where TV mediates condenses morality through imaginative metaphor but also temporal metaphor. Marshall McLuhan (1967) admits, "Science-fiction writing presents situations that enable us to perceive the potential of new technologies" (p. 125), and we can look no further for examples than in the 1960s series *Star Trek*. Here is a text that now emits a global signal with devoted followers that eclipse most religions outside of the "big three" (Christianity, Muslim, and Hindu). The original series was limited in popularity upon initial run but since its cancellation has spawned four syndicated primetime television series, an animated series, two long-running spinoff film franchises, and now a highly successful rebooted film franchise. This is in addition to the countless forms of merchandizing, books, comics, clothing artifacts, and millions of idol its supporters worship through capitalist consumerism. Despite such media mania, I stress the significance of such cult devotion partially succeeds *because of* the original series' use of metaphor and specifically *the metaphor of time*. I examine the metaphor of time by beaming down three quick examples.

First, *Trek* has long been communicated as a "space Western". This is due to the show's colonialist template where a crew of militaristic and mostly White English-speaking men expands the [Western] horizon (and civilization) through their spaceship. Along the way, they encounter "strange civilizations" that on more than one occasion protrude a certain Native American alienation in addition to the soundstage desert

terrain where the crew explores the wild unknown. Second, the show takes place in the far future, which visualizes the quintessential human interest in prognosticating where time will progress human kind. This allows the show's writers the spatial terrain to "invent" ideological visions of utopia and dystopia and essentially personify the galaxy that escapes human agency. Even the starship can travel at "warp speed" and in effect bypass time and the literal eternity it would take to cult-ivate the far reaches of space. Third, *Trek* demonstrates one of the strongest uses of the fantasy of time travel in television history. In the episode "City on the Edge of Forever", Captain Kirk and co. incidentally travel back in time during the height of World War II. *iO9* contributor Charlie Jane Anders (2011) summarizes the temporal conflict of "City on the Edge":

> Kirk falls in love with a woman who has to die for history to be set right. It's a gutsy move making Kirk's love interest a pacifist on the verge of World War II — a war that was still fresh in people's minds at the time. But if Edith Keeler survives to lead the opposition to the war, then the relative paradise of the Federation will never come to exist in the future.

Thus, *Trek* demonstrates the powerful metaphor that *time travel* has to demonstrate hypothetical necessary evils in human history, the rhetorical power of visual-literary metaphor, and the cultural impact time-centric storytelling can play on collective consciousness. Anderson (2011) agrees and adds, "*Star Trek* demonstrates a strong cultural desire to grapple with the deficiencies of mainstream historiography, as do many other works in the sci-fi and fantasy genres" (p. 17).

Perhaps partially due to the infamous episode *City on the Edge*, time travel plot devices have become a popular metaphor for many science fiction shows on TV. Time

travel not only reemerges on *Star Trek*'s numerous spinoffs, but also time travel begets a temporal legacy on science fiction television: from millennialist programs like *Sliders* and *Stargate* to post-9/11 allegories like *Terminator: The Sarah Conner Chronicles*, *Battlestar Galactica*, and BBC's updated *Doctor Who* series. Continual interest in the time travel plot device and its own unique kind of storytelling machinations underscores a cultural fascination that blends existential questions of "What if?" with retroactive wish fulfillmenst like "If I could do it all over again…". These temporal questions accentuate human emotions like physical regret and mental fantasy, but allocate a visual space to act out such temporal suggestions.

In particular, *Who* enthusiasts note that the show's central protagonist, known as "The Doctor", exists as an immortal illegal immigrant with deistic levels of technological power. The signifier of the Doctor's alien race is that of a "Time Lord". In other words, the character possesses the superhuman capacity to exist both inside and outside *of time*, travel forward and backward *in time*, and regularly saves humanity and thus for earthlings, *preserves time*. Just as the original *Trek* may feel ancient at this era of TV storytelling (temporally speaking), modern sci-fi and period dramas continue a rich heritage that employs temporal displacement to evoke socio-political commentary of the *here* and *now*. Consider current cultural obsession with BBC/PBS's *Downton Abbey*, an upstairs/downstairs primetime period soap that imagines the hardships and kinships between British aristocracy and serfdom at the dawn of World War I. This drama employs time as a marker of history and as a dagger that pierces issues of what Noam Chomsky (1996) identifies as "class warfare." However, class warfare is not the only issue revised in modern period dramas.

HBO's roaring twenties oil painting gangster drama *Boardwalk Empire* revisits the pay cable network's favorite (or at least most frequent) themes of hegemonic patriarchy, masculine privilege, ultra-violence, female psychosexual subjugation, and America's continued aesthetic glorification of criminality. *Empire* offers collaboration from *The Soprano's* writer Terence Winter and Professor Emeritus of unhinged cinematic gangster violence Martin Scorsese. Lotz notes how, "(S)ubscription services such as HBO and Showtime have cultivated a production culture that prioritizes aesthetic excellence and originality in a manner that distinguishes their shoes from those of conventional television" (p. 74). As a high-budget drama, *Boardwalk* moves as slow as an absinthe drip, but contrasts such slow-developing prose with aggressive amounts of shocking [Schlocking? Schtuping?] onscreen violence and gratuitous sexual objectification. Most of the sexual objectification ~~cums~~ comes via corrupt politicians being wooed by racketeers and bootleggers inside luxurious brothels. The politicians drink whiskey on the rocks as they get their rocks off, yet the repetition of this behavioral type perpetuates with such regularity and grandiosity that the viewer becomes less offended and perhaps more inundated by these titillating events. *Boardwalk* stars Steve Buscemi as Enoch aka "Nucky" Thompson, an Atlantic City racketeer/bootlegger/politician/gangster amalgamation of Prohibition boogey men.

Buscemi, formerly the least attractive supporting actor in any movie he's been in, holds power and sway over nearly everyone he communicates with and incidentally sleeps within an endless array of real-life models turned hapless flappers. The show asks its audience to simultaneously reconsider a bygone era as either a watershed nostalgia of power trips and sexual romps for the average onscreen male—surely the

preferred reading of any over 40 White male that makes $150,000+ per year—or a gut-churning test of patience for anyone outside the narrow circumference White male privilege. Despite the setbacks of repetitious subjugation, dramatic tension leans heavily on time and the modern necessity that business run *on time*. Season three revolves around an aggressive Italian mobster that habitually intersects Nucky's illegal bourbon shipments from Atlantic City to New York. *Boardwalk* underscores the fatal consequences when bootleggers do not receive boos on time. From those thirsty afterhours patrons, to the police officers on the take to the kingpin investors to the legitimacy of Nucky's reputation, everyone suffers. As it turns out the criminal universe runs on a clock much like the Western world. Thus, for the period viewer, time becomes a fantasy fixture, a crystal chandelier that lightens otherwise dim realities. Seen in this light, *the production design of time* now reads as important as lighting, costume, and direction.

Mad Men. Robert Levine remarks, "Asking about the experience of time is a little like the question "What is art?" (XVII). As the most *auteur-obsessive* drama on cable, AMC's *Mad Men* posits another temporal disturbance through its period setting in 1960s Manhattan. The show revolves around a New York City ad agency and thus temporal anxiety emerges as a central thread whereby characters sacrifice social, familial, and moral obligations in order to meet the temporal standards demanded by capitalism and Modernity's definition of "success". *Mad Men*'s antihero protagonist Don Draper battles temporal displacement as he attempts to distance himself through time and energy from his past secrets and dual identities. But working harder and faster, Don believes (or at the very least, lies to himself) he can literally elude his past. Don's

assistant Peggy also faces temporal anxieties through the guise of gender issues. In early episodes Peggy begins working for the ad agency as a low-wage secretary. She eventually works her way up the latter, first as a copywriter, then as a creative director. However, Peggy's journey is slow and her patience thin. During one episode she confronts Don with the frustration of how *slow* her ascension seems, but Don is *quick* to remind her how *long* it took him and how privileged she is (as female) to even be in the position she has (considering the *age* they live in).

These temporal issues haunt the lead characters of *Mad Men* throughout the show's duration. During season six, the agency's accountant Lane Pryce battles an inability to keep the books in shape due to his illegal borrowing and manipulation of corporate finances. When Lane can no longer keep his legalities a secret, time literally catches up with him and he commits suicide rather than face the monetary and legal consequences of his temporal actions. Don's daughter Sally experiences the temporal trials of growing up slowly amidst a rapid-changing world with a often-absent father that works to frequently to spend *time* with her. Sally also communicates anxiety dealing with her parents' eventual divorce and exhibits liminal tensions between having to grow up too fast while Sally's mother Betty cannot emotionally grow up fast enough. These temporal issues also belie issues of modernity that include internal psychology and the advent of youth culture. Sally is a baby boomer and thus faces a cultural shift in the generation of children that grow up with absentee parents and advanced forms of individualism amidst rapid capitalist expansion.

Hell on Wheels. Unlike contemporary post-Industrial period allegories like *Mad Men*, AMC's *Hell on Wheels* displaces modernity for the American West. While a

series set in the past may elude modern temporal anxieties at first glance, *HoW* in fact predicates its largest plot structure on temporal issues and anxieties facing the "rapid" expansion of America's borders in the immediate years following the Civil War. The series centers on the largely temporal race between competing railroad companies as they seek to tether the Eastern and Western seaboards visa vi the Transcontinental Railroad. Consequently, antagonism emerges through the ruthless corporate colonialists that remain vigilantly hell-bent on conquering the U.S. soil no matter the social, psychological, or geographical cost. Anderson (2011) avers, "(F)antastic histories serve as a vehicle for expressing present-day obsessions, social anxieties, and cultural aspirations" (p. 19).

HoW's premise rests on a geographic mode of temporal anxiety, one that visualizes the cost of connectivity between America's borders with high stakes for stockholders, investors, and profiteers each rooting for the democratic benefits a nationwide railroad ensures for modern industrial capitalism. Furthermore, temporal anxiety rests in the urgency to erect and prostrate a sufficient and protected railroad for the proliferation of goods and services for the citizens of Modernity. In addition to the physical geography of the railroad, temporal anxieties emerge amidst cultural shifts in the railroad camps. The end of the Civil War begets a dramatic ideological shift from which White society must quickly adapt to Black civil "freedom". This adjustment is ideological but also temporal as the ramifications illicit monetary, spatial, social, and cultural changes that must be internalized in a relatively short period.

Robert Levine posits, "(I)ndustrialization produces an evolutionary progression from a "time surplus" to a "time affluence" to a "time famine" society" (p. 13). In the

industrializing age of *HoW*, the temporal anxiety of railroad erection clashes against racial politics and the class warfare of wages versus work hours. In addition, cultural clash emerges between the temporal hegemony of American expansion (e.g. Manifest Destiny) through capitalism and the negation of these values by Native American tribes. The divergent values among tribes communicate diverse temporal values along with largely accented cultural differences. Yet *HoW* still maintains a modern sense of temporal anxiety even amidst the show's time shift in setting. The modern parallels are striking when held against technological and political shifts that denote the continuing onset of global capitalism. Understanding the modern ramifications and the power of metaphor wielded by period dramas, it becomes significant to add a temporal layer of cultural currency on top of the previous three examples. While *Boardwalk Empire*, *Mad Men*, and *Hell on Wheels* each function independently as period texts, they join a bevy of postmodern texts that share a singular anxiety with the postmodern condition, namely emphasis on how audience meditate on media pre- and post-9/11.

Pay cable bottom feeder Starz placed its hat in the provocative pulp drama ring with the hypersexual "historical" dramas, including *Spartacus*, *Camelot*, *Da Vinci's Demons*, and the *Treasure Island* prequel *Black Sails*. Each of these shows emits lower production values masked in a lubrication of male and female nudity, sexual entendres, liaisons, and orgies. Cheep green screen effects and critical labels like "pulp" seem to lend a forgiveness to Starz unexceptional pandering to schlock-gratuity interests among niche viewers and an iGeneration reared on late-night amateur porn and Netflix. Perhaps Starz producers note decreasing educational scores in America and hope to re-appropriate historical interest by reframing it as *sexy* and *aesthetic*. Then again, one

might say Starz hustles to "keep up with the times" by placating to basic consumer-viewer fetishes. Even the self-acclaimed "History" channel (e.g. formerly "the Hitler Channel" by those familiar with its breed of WWII documentaries) entered the dramatic TV foray in 2013 with its first scripted drama *Vikings*. *Vikings* (2013-present) recounts a realistic revision of an otherwise grim period in history, now retro-fitted for violence-heavy/gratuitous-stylized aesthetics of the modern cable landscape. If *Vikings* succeeds at communicating the cultural anxieties Norsemen faced upon recognizing the global epoch of the New World's existence, then *Vikings* as a drama denotes a fitting transition between conversations of period conventions and the graphic-latent conventions resonant in the post-9/11 TV drama.

Post-9/11 Time on TV: Tele-Temporal Urgency

I think that what people go to the movies for has changed since 9/11. I still think the country is in some form of PTSD about that event, and that we haven't really healed in any sort of complete way, and that people are, as a result, looking more toward escapist entertainment. – Steven Soderbergh, Academy Award-winning director of Traffic, Erin Brockovich, and Che

September 11, 2001 not only represents one of the most heavily mediated live events in TV history—indeed a Western and American event with complete global coverage and convergent ramifications—but also *9/11* has come to signify a temporal epoch riddled in "pre-" and "post-" signifiers. Zizek concurs the undeniable global shift beset by 9/11 as a cultural event. In *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* Zizek (2009) goes on to theorize 9/11's global paradigm shift ignited a one-two punch that so far seems to have permanently damaged the state of neoliberal thought on the geopolitical scene.

Zizek's assessment is recognizable through numerous warning signs produced in popular culture. Tabling Zizek's particular brand of theoretical skepticism, this chapter reads these televisual warning signs through the TV drama lens as aesthetic roadmaps that allow audiences and critics to raise collective attention through progressive TV content. In this hyper-mediated section, analysis close reads time representations on TV, specifically post-9/11 socio-political arguments negotiated within televisual terrain. Lynn Spigel professes that, "9/11 haunts U.S. commercial television" (Spigel, 2007, p. 645), and while much attention resides around news media coverage, political discourse, and ideological implications that saturate the purported "War on Terror," such trans-American consciousness extends into the fictitious terrain as the TV drama. I connect some implications between the West's changing outlook and the technopoly of temporal urgency that rethreads the aestheticization of time urgency on TV.

24. Eerily, in the months leading up to 9/11, Pico Iyer offers an ominous prognostication in what he observes between time, travel, and social anxiety. "What is changing, surely, is the speed at which the world is turning…the external threats are everywhere" (p. 12). Iyer's quotation could easily function as a tag line for Fox's post-9/11 terrorism/homeland security serial drama *24*. The drama *24* (2001-2010) establishes a "real time" premise whereby government agents must thwart terrorist attacks predicated on the urgency of a clock running out. In addition, the series functions within temporal time constraints (episodes cut time into one hour chapters that must further condense the hour's action into 42-minutes for commercial breaks). Quite often plot devices necessitate fast-moving tempos and revolve around America's status quo's threatened by countdowns to detonations, terrorist strikes, nuclear devices,

assassination attempts, biological warfare exposures, and numerous time-sensitive meetings between corporate, governmental, and terrorist factions. Scenes fracture into various split-screen points of view and/or simultaneous shots of multiple characters enduring constant mobility and labor-intensive action. Johnson (2005) calls this kind of intertwined narrative density *multithreading* and argues such dense structure constitutes mental labor for audiences. "Multithreading is the most celebrated structural feature of the modern television drama, and it certainly deserves some of the honor that has been doled out to it. When we watch TV, we intuitively track narrative-threads-per-episode as a measure of a given show's complexity" (p. 72). The audience becomes engulfed with temporal anxiety through ritualized reminders of the "ticking clock" that bookends beginnings and endings of episode as well as onscreen bumpers that precede and reorient viewers upon each commercial break in action.

Robert Levine defines *time urgency* as "the struggle to achieve as much as possible in the shortest period of time" (p. 19). On *24*, Time dominates thought processes for character motivations and actions. The most notorious use of temporal anxiety occurs at numerous points when advanced interrogation methods transpire due to the necessity of information from terrorist suspects within a gravely thin window of time. Slavoj Zizek (2006) discusses these ramifications in his essay "Jack Bauer and the Ethics of Urgency." Zizek dissects "the series fundamental ideological lie" that perpetuates numerous instances where torture, excuse me, enhanced interrogation techniques, are employed and in fact justified due to the temporal urgency of the moment and the looming threat of greater danger if proper information is not extracted from suspects in time. Zizek stresses, "Consequently, "24" cannot be simply dismissed

as a pop cultural justification for the problematic methods of the United States in its war on terror" (Zizek, 2006). Zizek goes beyond textual analysis and reinforces the real world implications that dramas evoke in and of society. "(W)hat is truly problematic about "24" is not the message it conveys, but the fact that this message is so openly stated. It is a sad indication of the deep change in our ethical and political standards." Time also plays a pivotal role for *24*'s antagonists, since their cabalistic plans revolve around time-sensitive meetings, global alliances, and mass-scale missions that require coordination between large numbers of anti-Western factions. Fox's *24* thus provides the quintessential post-9/11 allegory for the War on Terror but even more so a mythological morality play constructing the sensitivities of time and temporal anxiety in the globalization of Western Modernity.

The Walking Dead. AMC's surging juggernaut hit *The Walking Dead* (2010-present) approaches temporal anxieties with unique perspectives steeped in realistic (or is it *nihilistic*?) fantasy via zombie-horror genre premises. *TWD*'s setting encompasses a group of survivors amidst a post-apocalyptic world in which "walkers" or "biters" (e.g. zombies) infest and threaten the extinction of humanity. Arguably one of *TWD*'s strongest metaphors emerges in the show's reversal of Western civilization. Here characters are thrown back into a Dark Ages of sorts while the roaming Black Plague hunts them down. Characters regularly emote anxieties associated with cultural shock, temporal displacement, and the jetlag-like a/effects of sleep deprivation. Temporal anxiety hides underneath the psychological terror of habitual post-traumatic stress disorder caused by the unending death of family members, friends, morality, and the Westernized Self. Paul Virilio observes, "modernity's addiction to space and anxiety

about time…when combined, manifests a chronic sense of urgency" (Kramer, Callahan, & Zuckerman, 2012, p. 295). Certainly *TWD* extends these concerns of modernity and hyper-extends them to meet post-9/11 fears of the Other, consumerism, and Rightwing Second Amendment paranoia among other social anxieties. The drama then redistributes these adrenalized agitations in the post-apocalyptic fantasy-horror realm.

The protagonist Rick Grimes grapples with his own sanity when he must face genocidal death around him faster than his mind (and soul) grapple with unending loss. Rick also wrestles internally between Western democracy and Darwinian survivalism. As the group's de facto leader, Rick negates their ideological assumptions of democratic reason when he announces their status quo an "oligarchy." Rick evokes temporally motivated decision-making, as this impoverished world requires strategic ways of thinking in order to survivor. Temporal change equals ontological reconfigurement. Rick's situational shiftiness signals what Levine means when he writes, "like the psychological androgyne, the truly multi-temporal person and culture does not simply fall in the average range, but has the ability to move as rapidly or slowly as is needed" (p. 219). Rick reinforces this theory when he tries to slow down and live within traditional pre-Walker conditions, only to have his vision mired by further human tragedy. In addition, Rick's son Carl must mentally and psychologically mature years before he grows physically. Carl faces internal temporal shifts that precede external presence, including season three's graphic encounter in season three where he must shoot his dying mother before she transforms into soulless walker.

The Americans. One of FX's newer critical hits, *The Americans* (2013-present) appoints the Cold War Reagan Era as a backdrop for the temporal anxieties of its

antihero protagonists, a pair of Soviet spy's living a suburban family in early 80s Washington, D.C. The couple, Elizabeth and Phillip must race to complete missions for their Soviet bosses. The dueling ideological threat levels are suffocating. On one hand, failure to complete missions may result in deportation back to Russia, or worse, fear of outright war between Soviet Russia and the United States. On the other hand, Elizabeth and Phillip face the dire consequences of Modernity and Individualistic culture as they parcel time between missions and properly raising their young son and daughter. Time does not posit a luxury for these Americans. The fate of the Free [Market] World versus Communism figuratively hinges on their speedy execution of daily tasks. *The Americans* promotes pastime with the Reagan era looming over its narrative. Thus, the narrative's temporality functions as a tragic omen that foreshadows—at least among politically conscious audiences—the Cold War's end and the Reagan era as epoch to either rise or fall of Western civilization.

Game of Thrones. HBO's *Game of Thrones* (2011-present) plays with time differently, using the lens of *fantasy time*. *GoT*'s fantasy time conjures a medieval setting names Westeros, which sounds ideological enough. Westeros comprises a European-esque continent experiencing an epoch between established kingdoms with traditional patriarchal power structures and generational shifts mired by multiple outside threats. One of the stronger metaphorical implications of time on *GoT* is presented through the show's reference to "seasons". In Westeros, seasons can stretch from months to years. *GoT*'s pilot begins as the longest summer on record, eleven years and counting, denotes times of plentiful. For those in the southern Westeros regions, debauchery and excess translate into imperial neglect and callus military corruption. In

contrast the agrarian working class kingdoms of the North communicate their motto "Winter is Coming," a reminder to work hard, stay diligent, and maintain preparedness for long harsh winters and mythological fears made manifest by seasonal change.

The dueling Summer/Winter seasons suggest historical/mythological and socio-economical ideologies that accompany character motivations and dramatic structure. Forewarning apocalyptic winter communicates social unease and stresses steadfast temporal urgency in contrast to the temporal angst identified by those powerful and political and corrupt. Zizek theorizes, "Fantasy is by definition not 'objective'…however, it is not 'subjective' either. Fantasy, rather, belongs to the 'bizarre category of the objectively subjective – the way things actually, objectively seem to you even if they don't seem that way to you" (p. 155). Indeed, *GoT* uses its out-of-time or fantasy time setting to remind audiences of modern socio-political ailments amidst the paradigm shift from economic boon to global recession. *GoT* trades in suits, skyscrapers, and nuclear arms for armor, castles, and dragons. The book and TV series forge contemporary allegory with nihilistic depictions and global consequence. Understood this way, *fantasy time* may posit the 'timeliest' genre of all.

Sons of Anarchy. FX's biker drama *SoA* updates Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and posits time in communal versus societal scenarios. While the show's motorcycle club [or MC] SAMCRO resides in Obama era northern California, their counterculture grunge style operates often under polychromic direction. Levine stresses, "probably the strongest cultural differences concern what is known as individualism versus collectivism: whether the basic cultural orientation is toward the individual and the nuclear family or to a larger collective" (Levine, 1997, p. 18). The MC holds "church"

meetings where those initiated decide on critical matters both legal and illegal. Instead of punching time clocks SAMCRO's organizational meetings may end in punch-outs. You never hear club President Clay or Jax say "7 o'clock sharp" or "8 am on the dot or your fired." Never. Instead, the MC might linger outside their auto shop smoking cigars, cigarettes, or perhaps "medicinal" weed as they pound beers at picnic tables under an overhang. The show regularly emphasizes members' need for "morning" cups of coffee, but given their long nights and late hours, morning might as well be noon or later for those in power. In effect, the life space for SAMCRO abides by countercultural norms accentuated by whatever is pressing at the moment.

When dire concerns do surface (often and always), time becomes a countdown to whatever endgame the MC faces; whether it be outlaw justice, criminal behavior, outfoxing law enforcement, working out deals with rival gangs, or subverting their own group harmony. *SoA* works a literal *dead*line, where lives will end if "shit" can't be "contained." With overt tragic consequences around every bend, time functions as a trickster figure for SAMCRO as they must shift between M-time and P-time norms for survival. As Levine argues, "the most fruitful approach of all, however, is one that moves flexibly between the worlds of P-time and M-time, event time and clock time, as suits the situation" (p. 97). Acknowledging Levine, time is impartial and offers fatalistic wisdom for those in the group. For example, consequences might result in *serving time* at the nearby "Chino" penitentiary. Time rarely heals all wounds for these outliers, and often it is *only a matter of time* before they settle scores or perhaps before *time catches up with them.* The timeliest moral lesson on *SoA* deals with how difficult life becomes when one attempts to live outside the [temporal] boundaries of Western Global

capitalism in the United States. Levine teases, “the clock is referred to as “the devil’s mill”,” (p. 19) and such figurative language draws close ties to SAMCRO’s club mascot, the Grim Reaper.

American Horror Story. FX entered the TV horror genre in 2011 with a controversial anthology series from *Nip/Tuck* and *Glee* creator/writer Ryan Murphy. Murphy juxtaposes his most contentious themes from *Nip/Tuck* and *Glee*, straight White male hyper-sexuality and flamboyant camp, and conjoins these themes with others into single-season arcs. Season one emphasizes the corrosion in the modern nuclear family, season two the familial dysfunction of an asylum, season three a pop feminist witches coven, and so on. Season one’s family tries staying together amidst psychosexual infidelity and relocates to a period L.A. house haunted by conflicting specters. Gratuitous sexual politics aside (but always in frame), *AHS* challenges viewers by time jumping between eras within the haunted house’s history. Each episode time shifts backward temporarily and establishes one of numerous previous tenants that died horrifically in the house. Yet *AHS* does not move back linearly. Neither do flashbacks proceed forward chronologically. Instead, *AHS* fragments time and throws multi-era flashbacks in like random jigsaw puzzles. One might see the house in 1967 or the 1930s as well as the “present” 2011. *AHS*’s efforts might best be explained by better understanding the term *time-free thinking*. Time-free thinking includes “tasks that require attending to the arrangement of elements in space and seeing how those parts go together to make up the whole” (Levine, 1997, p. 46). For audiences, this jigsaw puzzle again draws together postmodern narrative fragmentation with Johnson’s 2005 assertion that *everything bad is good for you*.

AHS's crafty set designers and cinematographers work tirelessly to re-present the same house through different lenses. However, changes in wardrobe, set pieces, and even camera lens tints and cinematography tricks like "home video"-style camera filters accentuate these temporal trips. *AHS* embraces a narrative style of temporal hyper-displacement again in season two. Season two's setting takes place outside of present time, opting to *possess the past* in a 1960s Massachusetts Asylum run by the abusive patriarchal Catholic Church. Through this historical filter, *AHS* critiques organized religion, female subjugation, the state of mental health in the U.S., and America's repetitious obsession and collective consciousness regarding WWII Nazism. *AHS*'s collective criticism is framed within 60s America, through which the nostalgia of the past becomes shattered by the voices of the present. Through temporal displacement, these horrific social issues of the past become time travelers that frighten viewers in the present, conjuring thematic sameness that remains unresolved today. In effect, *AHS*'s purposive manipulation of time functions as a core horror trope adding perspective to the drama's narrative criticisms. In addition, *AHS*'s emphasis on graphic violence continues popular and timely infatuations with killing and serial killers.

Dexter. Showtime's *Dexter* (2006-2013) tenders another recent literary translation. Fiction author Jeff Lindsay created the characters and premise for *Dexter* in his same name book series. The books and series recount the fictitious world of Dexter Morgan, a blood-spatter analyst for Miami Homicide who moonlights as a serial killer with a moral code. Dexter's moral code prevents him from killing innocents, whereby he instead preys on other serial killers through his natural, honed, and professionally trained instincts. But perhaps these "instincts" also speak to larger anxieties, particularly

those resonating human connections between violence and time. Here posits a drama hinging on how a serial killer manages and/or balances time between mundane status quo rules for society and the animistic primal urges that constitute Dexter's "dark passenger." The protagonist Dexter (note his exceptional *dexterity*) maintains a highly individualistic schedule with P-time practices masked within the M-time subtropical culture of South Miami. Dexter habitually straddles across cross-cultural boundaries between moral/amoral, police/criminal, son/father, loner/family man, postmodern individual alienation and Latin communal inclusivity. Amidst these challenges the critical balance lies between Dexter's serial killer Self – the authentic persona he signifies in his "Dark Passenger" internal monologue voiceovers – and his moral mask marked by social and professional time spent at work, with family, and routine activities that communicate normalcy.

With each progressing season, temporal anxiety grows with increased consequences for those that surround Dexter. Season four concludes with a tragic family loss. Seasons six revolves around a "pair" of apocalyptic murderers racing to ritualize killings that evoke prophesies in the biblical book of *Revelations*. In the season six finale Dexter faces off against a killer who kidnaps his son as a "sacrificial lamb." Dexter and the police must race against the lunar clock to prevent further murders while the killer(s) rush to complete the rituals in time for the lunar epoch. Examining *Dexter* from a macro angle, time functions like an ever-closing net around Dexter's serial killer dual identity. Every illegal kill shrinks the quantitative chance Dexter will get away with murder. Time squeezes Dexter's ability to function as model citizen *and* serial killer just as Dexter squeezes out the remaining moment of every serial killer he hunts.

The pressure to achieve dual identity drives narrative action and increased temporal anxiety for the show's antihero. *Dexter*'s long-term popularity reflects America's social-cultural obsession with violence and serial killers. That *Dexter* asks its audience to identify with and cheer for a serial killer arguably speaks to a post-9/11 kairos where violence is both a symptom of the times and significant of time. In effect, time *is* violent in that it does not cease and absorbs everything in its wake. Given this "revelation" about the ontology of time, it becomes clear why humans obsess (or is it *abscess*?) over temporal issues. Just as the TV drama evolves in aesthetic content and depiction of time, the issue remains an age-old (or age-*less*?) question that increases with media technology instead of decreasing.

Season six performs an interesting twist on the secular series as it asks Dexter to consider larger epistemological and theological questions. As the apocalyptic killer tells Dexter while captured and bound to a deathbed, "You are a shining example of how putrid man has become." Dexter ironically retorts, "I am a father, a son, *a serial killer*." Dexter signifies the existential quality of time when he further responds, "Light cannot exist without darkness. Each has its purpose. And if there's a purpose to my darkness, maybe it's to bring some balance to the world." In essence, *Dexter* might be read as a quintessential parable of America's continued fascination with justice, redemptive violence, and ideologies surrounding violence as a form of American agency where otherwise systemic paralysis too frequently fails to purge societal ailments. Indeed Dexter's brand of self-righteous sadism teases at larger American values that have proliferated throughout media history. Dexter's justification for violent behavior imparts an alarming certainty similar to the 9/11 war machine rhetoric proliferated by

President George W. Bush (or is it Vice President Dick Chaney?). In fact, given his oratory history of guffaws, perhaps Bush couldn't have said it better himself.

Spigel (2007) prognosticates, "I think the post-9/11 performance of nationalism will fail because it really does not fit with the economic and cultural practices of twenty-first century U.S. media society" (p. 640). In fact, post-9/11 politicos fever continues to be the talk of Tinsel Town albeit through divergent aesthetic means. The Showtime drama *Homeland* (2011-present), arguably the most "realistic" examination of the war on terror in its initial season, won both the Golden Globe and Emmy awards for "Best Drama" as well as trophies for "Best Actor" and "Best Actress" in a drama series, respectively. *Homeland* traces the steps of a female intelligence agent who suffers from bouts of bipolar disorder, which evokes trepidations of paranoia that could be interpreted by her superiors as either insight or mental illness. To complicate matters, an Army Ranger missing for nearly a decade is recovered. However once he returns home, his intentions remain murky due to his secretive practices embracing Islam. The series posits two distinct and intertwined tensions between the male/female leads: "is he/isn't he a traitor/terrorist?" and "is she/isn't she mentally stable/instinctually accurate?" Thus, *Homeland*'s narrative plays with what Nicholas Mirzoeff (2010) means when he theorizes that, "visuality visualizes conflict" with emphasis on "three main grounds of conflict" – war, religion, and economy (pp. 6-9). Indeed *Homeland* tele-visualizes its dramatic tension into personifications of fear, the war on terror, and the economic-emotional toll this invisible war takes on those involved.

Homeland arrests time as a ticking social time bomb. Government agencies exploit finances, suspend suspects' rights, and propagate illegal surveillance video and

wiretaps. On *Homeland*, security agents experience severe fatigue from sleepless nights spent on surveillance duty in hopes of catching some hidden word or action in time to suppress any potential terrorist threat. The drama exhausts its characters while exhausting its audience, and thus given its propensity for temporal plot twists, *Homeland* risks burning through its own shelf life with each season's need to "raise the stakes". This risk highlights the tension when dramas signify a kind of "real" or hyper time through the lens of narrative or *TV time*.

Temporal urgency continues to plague and propel dramas on TV. Emmy darling *Breaking Bad* evokes temporal urgency with increased regularity and pro-/antagonist Walter White hustles to create a meth empire underneath the nose of his DEA brother-in-law and the criminal underworld of Albuquerque, NM. Fox's cringe-worthy action-horror hybrid *The Following* (2013-present) maneuvers through copious terrain already deconstructed and turned cliché by *24*. Meanwhile, AMC's *The Killing* does not rush in order to solve its crimes. In fact, the show spent two seasons solving one murder and thus dropped in ratings and received [temporary] cancellation as a result…twice. Thus, temporal urgency perhaps denotes a moral lesson for TV writers and producers. Amanda Lotz (2007) observes, "ideas appearing in multiple shows—particularly different types of shows—might indicate concerns relevant to the broader society rather than distinct subcultures" (p. 37-38). Through the examples pulled from an array of cable dramas airing since 2001, numerous themes reverberate social concerns if not societal obsessions with violence, security, surveillance, cultural climate, temperature climate, temporal climate, chronic urgency, monochronic and polychromic narratives, post-9/11 anxieties about domestic and foreign spaces, and secular versus religious

emphases. Arguably these observable qualities suggest an overall anxiety toward increasing globalism. Earlier mentions alluded to conjoined observations in the transmodern form of *global temporialism*, or *communications of anxieties relating to shifts from national to transnations mediums and medias*. Yet before a prescription of "global temporialism" can emerge, a final look at television's transmodern status may provide the critical link necessary to legitimize this claim.

Concluding Thoughts: Is TV Living on "Borrowed Time"?

Television is transmodern—it spans, transcends and conjoins modern, pre- and postmodern aspects of contemporary life; specifically by using oral, domestic discourses to teach vast, unknowable "lay" audiences modes of "citizenship" and self-knowledge based on culture and identity within a virtualized community of unparalleled size and diversity. –John Hartley, 2007, p. 598.

In recent years, the rise of alternative media sources plague the continuity of TV's future. Just as scholars denote the fragmentation of time through terms like "post-Network era," time now indicates TV might be as fragile as it is powerful. Although it is argued here that current audiences and critics enjoy a plethora of provocatively rich and rigorous dramatic TV programming, the medium is decidedly experiencing a temporal paradigm shift in the way TV gets produced, consumed, bought, sold, and experienced. Long gone is "LIVE" viewing's hegemony. Immobile viewership nears extinction. CBS may have replaced bingo night with unending *CSI/NCIS* crime-porn procedurals, but emerging youth demographics watch TV on their phones, laptops, tablets, and Xbox's. The future is mobile, and TV time functions as anywhere, any time. Content matures, traditional formats devolve, and niche markets swell. New

programming strategies result in the glut-ification of TV consumption, *binge-watching*, an increasing habit already parodied on TV by IFC's cult favorite *Portlandia* (2011-present).

One *Portlandia* sketch in particular features the male/female leads as characters that decide to sample a single episode of post-9/11 allegorical drama *Battlestar Galactica* to see what all of the cultural fuss is about. Following the viewing, the duo decides to watch one more episode, then one more. Soon they have stayed up all night watching an entire season. The pair decide to call in sick in order to watch "just one more [season]." They begin ordering in meals, they quit bathing, and their disorderly absent awareness of time results in several consequences. Eventually the electricity gets cut off, and one of the characters loses their job. Guy Debord recognizes this problematic issue when entertainment merges with what he calls spectacle. "The *spectacle* is a permanent opium war which aims to make people identify goods with commodities and satisfaction with survival that increases according to its own laws. But if consumable survival is something which must always increases, this is because it continues to *contain privation*" (Debord, 1983, p. 44). The *Portlandia* TV addicts' desire to watch "one more episode" denotes the power of the [post]modern, post-Network drama as well as the temporal consequences gluttonous TV binges now welcome with the advents of instant-access media formats like DVD/Bluray box sets, Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime, online pirating, and many more avenues and outlets.

If TV consumption—perhaps soon reorganized and understood as general media consumption—exhibits steady increase, then time becomes further commoditized. Arguably time is already a commoditized and fetishized object of obsession in Western

culture. After all time follows the industrialized model of global capitalism. Postman advises, "our media-metaphors classify the world for us, sequence it, frame it, enlarge it, reduce it, color it, argue a case for what the world is like, " (p. 10) and as I have demonstrated, TV holds a temporal trump card. TV can time travel or be time-shifted. TV is time-centric and time specific. Time with TV can be leisurely or educational, informative or oppressive. TV ontology emits temporal urgency in both realistic and figurative ways, arguably with dualistic consequence for each. Kramer and Ikeda suggest, "What marks the so-called postcolonial world is the imperial hegemony of time" (p. 93). Ultimately, the manner with which TV is wrapped up with time and audience time wrapped up in TV suggests a techno-symbiotic relationship of transmedia evolution (or is it *convolution*?). This transmedia (r)evolution, steeped in capitalist ideology and commodity fetishism, communicates anxieties about technological histories, socio-political changes, and universal reflections of temporal anxiety amidst rapid expansion and dramatic global change. This is the world of global temporialism, and it is only just beginning.

Rhetorical Recap: The Dominant-Hegemonic Role of Temporal Displacement and Global Temporialism.

The broad theoretical terms introduced in chapter four are meant to convey the kinds of mediated cultural imperialism producers are in a space race to produce whereas global audiences find themselves in televisual labyrinths of televisual "choice" that now re-produces at rates exceeding a person's temporal ability to consume. At the same time, increased narrative attentiveness to the ways in which time plays into conflict and social action (e.g. *drama*) shows increased parallels across various genres and networks

since 2000. Temporal plotlines metaphorically can be read as reflecting growing cultural anxieties in a number of ways as I discussed. One such problem is recognizable in the glut of well-crafted TV series produced. This "problem" becomes compounded when one considers that television is originally presented as a *leisure* cultural form. It was not meant (at least overtly) to monopolize time but the moment national audiences became transfixed, institutions recognized with green eyes a product they could not resist either (Thompson & Mittell, 2013, Butler, 2010, Jancovich & Lyons, 2003, Spigel, 1992, Ang, 1991, Newcomb, 1976, Williams, 1974). What I call *experiential power of television* comes close to achieving the *more real than real* of Baudrillard's existential deliberation (Kellner, 2007). So while global temporialism represents an institutionalized proliferation of programs tied markedly to shifts in techno-global audience reach, the term also suggests an *experiential phenomena* and one potentially laced in a consumerist anxiety. In essence, the spreadable *becomes* the sticky.[4]

Introducing concepts like temporal displacement and global temporialism are significant for extending the kinds of scholarly assessments that examine and interrogate how televisual texts like TV dramas function and what extratextual roles these artifacts play in how culture shapes. On an institutional level, modes of capitalism necessitate continual growth, and that includes not only product output and production volume but also audience reach, new audience growth, and longterm investment in the televisual product. While plenty of audiences partake in hundreds of TV programs from reality to sitcoms to game shows to sport to 24-hour news channels, TV dramas have emerged as the defacto programming genre of choice that builds and sustains paratextual interest (which translates cultural capital into economic capital). I analyze a

sampling of these paratextual layers later in chapter eight in the interest of introducing just how potent these texts are in generating cultural capital while transforming lay audiences into impassioned consumer-driven fandoms. But how do these texts generate such rabid interest? What kinds of cultural codes and conventions and genres play into developing long-range audiences divergent across race, class, gender, and political lines? How do these televisual texts extend their messages from polysemic structures to polyvalent persuasions? I unpack this long argument by next examining the diverse ways in which genre-mixing iconicity plays into the encoding and decoding practices of the televisual drama.

Chapter Five

Biker Genre Conventions, Film Sound Imitations, and Innovative Transmedia Convergence in FX's *Sons of Anarchy*

"Rud, rud, rud, rrr…VvvrrOOOOOMMM! Vroom…SchrEEEEEEAACH! BANG! BANG! Pop! Pop! Pop! Ratatatatatat!! Rrrr! Rev! REV! VvrROOOooom…" The distinct sounds and songs of engine noise, convection of gasoline, and the human agency of danger compose sympathy of melodious rhythms to the ears of motorcycle enthusiasts. In addition, the cold steel grip of a gun handle, metallic clicks of catching or releasing clips, ominous chamber clinks, and the expulsion of ammunition offer just a few of the fetishizing gun sounds that serenade firearm afficionados. These two iconic products of industrialization, mechanizations by man of motion, formulate a distinct concerto when combined with the cinematic theatricality of the modern cable TV drama. Specifically, the 2008-2014 FX serial melodrama *Sons of Anarchy* (or *SoA*) induces a hypnotic trance through the aesthetic of its innovative sound effects, sound mixing, and the organized noises that construct its violent vigilante world.

The professional quality and attention to detail in *SoA* posits one major example of how television productions, and specifically the TV drama genre, continue elevating artistic standards with practices traditionally reserved for film. I argue contemporary productions like *SoA* not only meet classical standards of film sound, but also *SoA* exceeds and surpasses the low-brow reputation critics formerly held when comparing TV to film. I suggest *SoA* exceeds these standards through its attention to detail in sound, sound mixing and editing, and soundtrack. Indeed, Corner (2002) argues, "Within the aural profile of television, music plays varying roles and functions" (357), while Butler (2010) also agrees that, "Sound style…is an invaluable stimulus for pulling viewers to the television flow" (14).

In addition to the upswing in film sound/editing, I pit stop to fill up on the ways *SoA* privileges B-movie conventions of the biker film genre and adds aesthetic richness to these exploitation formulas. I draw comparison with the history of biker films by assessing a selection of films, mostly produced by American International Pictures, in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. By demonstrating how *SoA* updates the film form of biker conventions, I claim the drama eclipses the aesthetic value those programs eminate to meet post-Network audience standards in a competitive transmedia culture. In particular, I acknowledge *SoA*'s higher production value, aided by stylized film quality sound that includes the re-emergence of the acousmêtre. Michel Chion recalls the emergence of acousmêtre from the former term *acousmatic*. "Acousmatic…is said of a sound that is heard without its cause or source being seen" (159), whereas "(w)hen the acousmatic presence is a voice, and especially when this voice has not yet been visualized—that is, when we cannot yet connect it to a face—we get a special being, a kind of talking and acting shadow to which we attach the name *acousmêtre*." [original emphasis] (159-160).

Thus I argue *SoA* performs and sustains acousmetre through repetitious voiceovers from John Teller, the dead father to the show's antihero protagonist. Teller dies prior to the show's narrative timeline, yet his "voice" lives on through the pages of his biker manifesto passed down to his heir Jax. Specifically, this technique demonstrates the artistic fervor creators ascribe in what Amanda Lotz (2007) identifies as the *post-network era*. Lotz stresses that in the post-network era, "content must do more than appear "on television" to distinguish itself as having cultural relevance" (p. 37), and with such niche innovations and improved cinematic standards, I attest

contemporary television and *SoA* denote this post-network or perhaps *post-film* transition through film sound quality on TV.

Finally, I cruise into an examination of *SoA*'s success by observing how the drama shifts from niche sub-genre to mainstream "cult" megahit through methods of what Jenkins calls *convergence culture* and comparison of the text's *spreadability* versus *stickiness*. Thus, by establishing the history of biker film genre conventions, through examination of film sound that includes acousmêtre, and by theorizing *SoA*'s shift from cult fare to melodramatic cultural monstrosity, I demonstrate how the boundaries between film and TV continue to erode and I explicate the role convergence culture plays in the growing *in*-distinction between these two mediums.

Joyriding with Television Studies

In this section, I examine a few scholars that help legitimize Television Studies as its own genre of Critical/Cultural Studies. Television studies represents a potent field for interdisciplinary reach, and *SoA* in particulary offers a polyvalent text for theoretical consideration. Newcomb (1972) presents a foundation claim for TV's role as a leading cultural influence and harbinger of modern American art in his book *TV: The Most Popular Art*. In *TV Art*, Newcomb (1972) visits numerous traditional TV genres and theorizes an emerging "television aesthetic" (p. 243). Newcomb's stance offers a foundational resource for television analysis beyond former passive spectatorship constraints. Steven Johnson agrees and updates Newcomb's assertion in *Everything Bad is Good For You*, where Johnson (2005) attests modern TV "complexity has bee lifting programming both at the bottom of the quality spectrum and at the top" (p. 91). Neil Postman (2005), writing in his 1980s mediation on the televisual paradigm shift, warns

that society is literally *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. Postman cynically prognosticates toward the inherent danger television posits as society shifts away from traditional literary mediums. Not too far across the pond, Guy DeBord (1983) theorizes we humans as social creatures are coming into being as a *Society of the Spectacle*. Where as Newcomb's *TV Art* emphasizes an optimistic era when television norms comprised only basic Network channels, Megan Mullen (2008) expands this dynamic to television industrial history. Mullen attends to the economic fragmentation of delivery means, including satellite, cable, and the regulatory systems that divide them. Mullen complements Newcomb by shifting her analysis from cultural critique to a more historical analysis surveying the medium's evolution.

As Mullen highlights the evolution from limited TV networks to a horizon of mediating outlets and avenues, Jeremy G. Butler investigates evolving televisual style. In *Television Style*, Butler (2010) shifts away from mechanical or statistical change, and focuses on methods of aesthetic transformation. Butler's *TV Style* grapples with larger critiques like the power roles that style plays in media influence, but his *Television: Critical Methods and Applications* offer a more textbook take (literally) concerning methods for assessing TV production and distribution. Other critics offer more strategic and specific essays and volumes on the academic practice of TV criticism. Stuart Kaminsky and Jeffrey Mahan (1985) express the significance of genre TV in *American Television Genres*, and the duo reinforce their argument through a bevy of analytic approaches. Marc Leverette, Brian L. Ott, and Cara Louise Buckley (2008) co-edit *It's Not TV: Watching HBO in the Post-Television Era*. In this collected volume, the editors contribute essays dissecting the late-90s, early 00's history of programming on HBO. In

effect, the argument exists that television criticism in academia is as relevant now as film theory was in the 1970s.[1] Given such resonance and topicality, I shift from broader approaches of televisual scholarship to my singular TV text, the cable biker drama *SoA*.

FX's *Sons of Anarchy*

SoA premiered on cable network FX in the fall 2008 season. The drama typically runs an average of 13 episodes per season, on par with most scripted cable and pay cable programming. *SoA* is the brainchild of Kurt Sutter, who serves as creator, showrunner, executive producer, and head writer. Sutter's relationship with male-driven cable channel FX stems from working as a writer on FX's initial foray into scripted dramas, the equally controversial cop saga *The Shield*. However, since *SoA*'s premiere, the show most often receives attention for its grueling depictions of violence, misogyny, and a general aesthetic of crude content (more on this as chapters progress). In other words, Sutter works to achieve as "realistic" a translation of grungy biker culture as possible.

The show, pitched as an updated *Hamlet on motorcycles*, centers around a princely heir Jackson or "Jax," Vice President and second-generation member of the SAMCRO motorcycle club (MC). Jax's father, John Teller, served as President and founding member of SAMCRO (or the Sons of Anarchy Motorcycle Club Redwood Originals) alongside its initial founders, including Jax's stepfather and current emcee, Clay. For Jax, his role in the organization serves as a kind of counter-culture birthright. Furthermore, Clay functions as a type of incestuous father figure, which promotes resonant themes of insulation and family. Jax's mother, Gemma, serves the matriarchal role of "Ole' Lady" to Clay, a den mother to the motley gang. Gemma's pithy and

venomous dialogue elides a metaphorical insight into her Jezebel tendencies within the club (a characteristic I investigate in great detail in chapter twelve). Along with Jax's rekindled romance to his childhood sweetheart Tara, the core cast emits tensions between family and community, traditional themes on television, but muddled within the shadows of underbelly criminal behavior.

While relationships between characters drive the motivating factors and dramatic tensions, the core principles of Jax, Clay, and others communicate complex power relations manipulated within closed-system ideologies and transgressive behaviors. The central theme "anarchy" appears repetitiously and symbolically, both on the vests or patches worn by the members, and in their conflicting anti-establishment motives and actions. The club seeks to operate under their own core values, co-established by Jax's late father John and the other members of the fictional MC. These values dramatically depart from typical American practices of moral behavior and attitudinal quality. Yet again and again, *SoA* repetitiously reinforces what Jane Feuer (1986) posits as traditional TV values that center on familial institutions. If in conflict, SAMCRO does not hesitate to maim, injure, or even kill if the situation conflicts with their club interests.

Amidst these factions and tensions of power, a conversation emerges which bridges concepts of biker culture and dialogues recalling genre conventions and innovations in TV sound. Notably *SoA*, with its biker genre conventions and innovative sound mixing, constitutes a new breed of TV viewing, a paradigm shift that joins a swath of programming aimed at closing the gap between what was once considered the superiority of film and the inferiority of TV. By smuggling in examples of artistic depth

in homage to the B-movie biker genre and the progression of sound technology, *SoA* strattles the genre balance that simultaneously reinforces classical film elements while paving new ground for current and future convergent culture TV trends.

The Biker Film Genre & The Advent of the TV Biker Soap Opera

Genre studies constitutes a peculiar debate between critics, viewers, and even academics. McQuail (2010) finds the need to distinguish variant definitions of genre particular to diverse mass media perspectives. McQuail differentiates between film studies use and mass media or journalistic use, but composes an inclusive series of criteria of which genre might characterize:

- Its collective identity is recognized more or less equally by its producers [the media] and its consumers [media audiences].
- This identity [or definition] relates to purposes [such as information, entertainment or subvariants], form [length, pace, structure, language, etc.] and meaning [reality reference].
- The identity has been established over time and observes familiar conventions; cultural forms are preserved, although these can also change and develop within the framework of the original genre.
- A particular genre will follow an expected structure of narrative or sequence of action, draw on a predictable stock of images and have a repertoire of variants of basic themes. (p. 370)

Clearly, McQuail's research as a statistician lends him arguably less poetics in his broad description of genre, yet the information he presents posits focused and linear observations in how media producers and consumers organize and understand the term.

Scholars Hall (1974/1980) and Radway (1984) attempt articulations that capture genre conventions in the TV Western and afternoon Soap Opera, respectively. Richard Dyer (1977) also attempts to confine the complex matrixes of genres, yet where these scholars seek to define genre by means of containment, other scholars understand genres implications through opposing expressions. Deuze (2007) looks at corporate modes of control and contrasts between "linear and liquid differentiations" of production whereby, "liquid differentiation occurs in the production of groundbreaking, unconventional new media formulas, hybrid genres, and unexpected or otherwise experimental storytelling formats" (p. 51). Jason Mittell (2001) concurs with postmodern approaches to fragmented content in his analysis of how media like *The Simpsons* organize meaning through "genre mixing," "genre parody," and "complex" configurations within "cultural hierarchies" (p. 17-18). I argue *SoA* operates closer to the postmodern variant of genre mixing, with its soap opera cliffhangers, neoWestern archetypes, and biker genre self-reflexivity or "increasing self-consciousness" as Richard Schatz might deem it (Corrigan et al., 2011, p. 462). Next, I break the following sections into segments (not unlike TV), where I examine distinct biker genre conventions that emerge within *SoA*. These conventions help frame the narrative of the show while they also function as intertextual links to biker culture's mass mediated history.

Biker Genre Conventions Updated for Post-Network TV Audiences

Protecting versus Problematizing the Status Quo. In the season one episode *Funhouse*, *SoA* inverts the genre film *Devil's Angels*. In the second act of *Angels*, biker gang "the Skulls" intrude on the small town of Brookville, specifically the "Brookville

Annual Town Picnic." In addition to disrupting the town's harmless fun bikini contest, the Skulls overrun a carnival, pillaging the carnival with unruly public behavior including drinking, cavorting, and potentially stealing prize items and creating a general sense of unrest with the citizens. Ultimately a confrontation emerges as the town accuses the biker club of committing a rape they claim to be false. This concept becomes inverted and reversed like a carnival mirror in the *SoA* episode *Funhouse*.

In *Funhouse*, a carnival visits Charming, the hometown of SAMCRO, and the club must intervene where local law enforcement fails as protectors of the status quo. When the young daughter of a local entrepreneur gets kidnapped and raped in a nearby forest, her father Elliott Oswald turns to Clay and the club for help. But as family man and successful Charming entrepreneur, Elliott makes a Faustian deal with the devil. The club roughs up several carnie folk for answers to the kidnap/sexual assault of Elliott's daughter. SC then learns the carnival clown is the pedophile behind her abuse, and so the club kidnaps, beats, and castrates the carnie before ultimately killing him in cold blood. This inversion of *Devil's Angels* places SC in a more sympathetic light in season one, which alters slightly the genre cliché of the psychopathically maniacal biker gang. This is not to say the club does not embody sociopathic tendencies. Indeed, their repetitive reliance on vigilante justice signifies the outlaw convention of social rebellion prototypical of the biker genre. Thus, *SoA* straddles the bar between conforming biker genre conventions and reforming the genre's problematic clichés for long-term durability in the TV format. Like *The Sopranos* before it, *SoA* must function simultaneously as an expression of "authentic" outlaw or criminal behavior while also

affording audiences relatable characters the audience might identify and root for throughout the show's duration.

The Lone Dissenter. Another convention of the biker genre is the lone figure of dissention within the gang. This role resonates from Marlon Brando's portrayal of Johnny in *The Wild One* (1953) and continues in numerous incarnations that include Peter Fonda's character Heavenly Blues in *The Wild Angels* (1966), Jack Nicholson's Poet in *Hell's Angels on Wheels* (1967), or even perhaps later incarnations like former OU linebacker-turned-actor Brian Bosworth's FBI infiltrator in *Stone Cold* (1991)[2]. On *SoA*, protagonist Jax formulates a composit blend between redemptive prodigal son and Shakespearean tragic prince Hamlet. Over subsequent seasons, Jax gravitates back and forth between moralist loner and vengeful leader. In early seasons, Jax seeks his father's lost vision for a peaceful club with legal business dealings like setting up a legitimate porn business and escort services. Yet through compromise and *ends justify means* ideology, Jax back-peddles to cold-blooded killer, illegal arms trader and drug dealer.

Furthermore, beginning in season four, Jax secretly becomes an FBI co-conspirator. His decision, while private, substantially breaks one of the underworld's most explicit codes. His involvement then escalates in season five, which compounds his secrets from the MC and his dissension into nihilistic betrayals of family, club, and his business partners. Thus Jax functions as a hybrid redeemer and transgressor, sometimes simultaneously. John Cassavetes plays a similar lead as Cody in *Devil's Angels*. Cody leads his unruly pack in search of the mythic land "Hole in the Wall." A pathway of pillaging, destruction, unruly criminality, and attempted rape lead Cody to an existential realization that perhaps his gang's rebellion eschews from his original

intent. Furthermore, when Cody learns Hole in the Wall does not exist in the literal sense of a particular space, he abandons his club and woman, and individually hits the road, future unclear, both for Cody and the audience.

Social Performances of Deviance: Drinking, Drugging, and Cavorting. The phrase "life of the party" carries a deviant connotation when it comes to biker genre conventions. Habitual use and abuse of alcohol functions as commonplace in both the biker film genre and *SoA*. *The Wild One* denotes how lawless the seemingly harmless juvenile bikers become once intoxicated. Actor Lee Marvin plays antagonist Geno and amasses these two qualities as a foil for Brando's Johnny at first, before functioning more as an inebriated red herring. *Devil's Angels* features a progressive series of social drinking, each escalating in severity along with the violent themes of the social situation. Cassavete's Cody first appears at a burnout villa in an unknown urban California location. Later the pack of riders begins drinking and driving as they raid a convenient store for supplies. Finally, the group descends into outright irredeemable lawlessness when they overwhelm the town of Brookville. In *The Glory Stompers*, the woodland hills of California become a hedonistic oasis for drugs, alcohol, and the general sexual pursuit of female companionship with or without permission.

Numerous scenes draw narrative tension through *will they, won't they rape* plot devices. In the case of Roger Corman's *The Wild Angels,* they will and do rape women inside and out of the club. Scenes of bodily desecration also include tormenting the pastor at a fellow member's funeral, trashing his church, and pulling the corpse out of its casket during a drug-fueled party. *SoA* features regular alcohol use, particularly during daytime hours and almost always in some form at night. Degrading club parties

break into orgies every time a member returns from jail. The shift from lighter forms of alcohol like beer, to harder liquors like straight whiskey or tequila, as Clay and club elder Piney often swill with regularity, indicate their darker reliance over the passage of time and crimes committed. *SoA* character Tig suggests an intimate familiarity with necrophilia in several episodes, and club member Opie's Indian Reservation wedding to pornstar Lyla ends with a raunchy reception that includes off-site murders of Russian mob guests.

Postwar Existential Crisis. The history of *SAMCRO* conjoins with the biker genre convention of postwar cultural reaction, initially following WWII but duplicated after Vietnam. Jax's father John, along with stepfather Clay, Piney, and several other deceased members comprised the "Redwood Original" charter founded as a reaction against their involvement in Vietnam. This history remains relatively abbreviated except for the continual references to division within club ideology that tragically led to John's "accidental" death. However, *SoA*'s televisual *timing* should not be mistaken. Initially airing in the Fall 2008, *SoA* coincides with postmodern reflections concentrated toward the ideological zeitgeist of post-9/11 American and the re-insulation resulting from U.S. military involvement in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the myth of declining White privilege following the election of Barrack Obama. Decoded from this perspective, the show updates the genre and historical convention of postwar anxiety and allows these anxieties to reflect multi-generational reactions that coincide with current events while echoing the past.

McDonald-Walker (2000) records the voices of marginalized groups and efforts of actual MCs toward a more coherent political voice. In her research, she calls their

advent in Britain a social movement seeded in the two tenants of "community and political action" (McDonald-Walker, 2000, p. 3). McDonal-Walker's observations and cultural stories qualify how biker groups gained legitimacy through postwar movements. She also emphasizes biker club behavior as necessarily visible in order to maintain power standards rooted in public fear. One might suggest she uncovers the ways in which biker culture works through undiagnosed PTSD. For McDonald-Walker, "lifestyles and cultural codes" take precedence over traditional political citizenship (p. 5), and thus new forms of political expression arise. The author additionally extends conversations of agency with her contention that club membership and participation lead to greater organizational integration and input, ultimately concocting potential avenues of legitimate change. Her work uncovering the dense political ideologies of motorcycle codes reifies my claim that *SoA* posits a legitimate genre text that also functions as a postwar political discourse through its outlaw ideology. Thus, McDonald-Walker's work serves as a liminal conjoiner between cultural studies discourse, motorcycle club history, *SoA*, and the academic merger between these factions.

NeoWestern landscape and the open road. One of *SoA*'s greater cinematic qualities comes through the show's careful recreation of highway riding montages. Whether gun running, chasing enemies, or outmaneuvering the law, scenes depicting open road travel qualify as a staple form of biker genre cinematography and thus function as a genre convention iconography. Benedek's *The Wild One* opens with an auspicious open highway much the way *SoA*'s pilot begins. Haller's *Devil's Angels* feature numerous similar low angle shots—almost taken from the blacktop highway's POV as the bikes zoom overhead—as does one substantially long take from Corman's

The Wild Angels. *SoA* imitates this iconography with a camera angle that also helps magnify the mythic importance of bike and biker. *The Glory Stompers* offers many open road shots where the camera rests directly in front of a roving trope of riders. Similarly, *SoA* employs this perspective for shots specifically designed to focus on Jax's aggressive determinism. The list of examples could continue on as a staple convention of every biker film includes emphasis on movement, riding, and the "freedom" of the open road as a metaphor of escaping societal constraints and governmental strictures.[3]

Intertextuality. Like many postmodern forms, *SoA* follows its predecessors with subtle intertextual homage that only "insiders" would get. I identify an initial example through *lineage*, where Jax's father John, founder of the SAMCRO charter, shares the same name with the genre's archetypal founder Johnny in *The Wild One*. A second example might be understood as *symbolic*. In *SoA*, whenever members get arrested or discuss time spent, they always reference the shorthand name of nearby state penitentiary, "Chino." This prison, and its nickname, reappears throughout each season, with some seasons spending more than one episode with members "doing time" on the inside. However, Chino also signifies Dennis Hopper's character and the vicious biker leader in *The Glory Stompers*. *Angels from Hell* features a psychopath nicknamed "Smiley," whereas a *SoA* member "Happy" sports smiley face tattoos on his side for each of his murder victims. A fourth link might be observed in the way club members strut from their bikes with a wolf pack-esque machismo. *SoA* characters always pivot their posture with hype-masculine contrapposto[4] exhibition, and *The Wild Angel* offers several iterations of this pack mentality, as does *The Wild One* among others.

A fifth and sixth intertextual example occurs between *Angels from Hell* and *SoA*, where both MCs from the respective film/drama series and their authority counterparts frequently prescribe the term "beef." A beef might represent a formal or informal disagree between persons, factions, clubs, etc. In my close watching, I traditionally interpreted law enforcement iterations concerning "beefs" as peculiar writing flaws until I compared it with *Angels from Hell* where officials also speak such coded dialect. As well, the police station in *Angels from Hell* looks suspiciously similar to the layout and color palette of the Charming Sheriff's station on *SoA*. The authorities in that film reuse the same expression interchangeably in or out of the presence of MCs. Thus, a linguistic correlation establishes intertextual links between former films and current TV text. While I could establish intertextual links for the remainder of this essay, a seventh and final intertextuality example occurs when an overweight biker from *Devil's Angels* sports black rimmed glasses, greasy slicked back brown hair, and a jean jacket cut with a black and red checkered flannel shirt underneath. This character, that has no known speaking parts, stands out in retrospect only because a key *SoA* founding member Piney adorns an identical wardrobe.

A Paradigmatic Shift: Film Sound on Television in the Sons of Anarchy Pilot

Barry Brummett (2010) defines a *close reading* as a "mindful, disciplined reading of an object with a view to deeper understanding of its meanings" with an informed expertise that results "in the form of a *criticism* or *critical analysis*" (p. 9). In this section, I perform a close reading of the *SoA* pilot episode. Through the close reading, I investigate various auditory advances *SoA* imports from film, and I theorize

how this drama suggests a text with aural qualities potentially higher than the biker B-movies the text emulates. This demonstration helps update scholarly arguments between what constitutes film versus TV sound production, and thus makes a case for my final observation that the Film>TV dichotomy no longer comprises a hierarchic spectrum of form but instead reinforces postmodern convergence culture and spreadable institutional advances.

Building Space with Sound. The soundtrack of 1950s cinema is minimalist when compared to the modern TV drama, even with smaller cable channel budgets. For example, *The Wild One* sounds like stereo in one dimension while *SoA* produces surround sound for three-dimensional aural consumption. The *SoA* pilot opens with the sound of crows cawing at road kill along a dark open highway. Shortly thereafter a biker rides into view and over the road kill site. The slow emergence of a singular motorcycle engine increases from a low distant hum and grows in volume as the spec in the distance approaches. As John Belton (1985) attests, "The perception of sound is necessarily bound up with perception of the image; the two are apprehended together" (p. 64). As the bike rides up and over the site, the engine noise overwhelms the shot. Loud motor revs are then overtaken by the hard-edged guitar picks of a Southern rock song.

Inside a convenient store, the doorbell dings as Jax enters. His greased back dirty blonde locks drape across his dingy jet-black motorcycle vest. An internal echo emits from the off-camera squeak of his tennis shoe against the store's flooring. The exchange between Jax, a young male buying condoms and children's books, and the

younger female store clerk also indicates their interior setting through low volume voice exchanges and a slight echo indicating the vacant and miniscule store space.

Outside the motorcycle shop Teller-Morrow, Jax shares a cell phone conversation with his mother. Jax's exterior location is reified by the clangs of body shop work, rock music lightly broadcasting across an off-camera radio or speaker, and the masculine noise of hacking and spitting, likely attributed to some club member's smoking habit. Other shop scenes feature occasional shrills of a screwdriver, drill bit tinks, and office phone rings among other miscellaneous noise. The mechanized noises establish setting and mood but may posit what Chion (2009) describes as "naturalism" in a way that they bring to life the blue-collar post-industrial work place (p. 45). Benton (1985) adds, "the editor must…establish synchronization between sound and image" (p. 64). For artists working collectively on a television series, heavy attention to detail enables three-dimensional worldbuilding from a two-dimensional field of depth.

The Emergence of the Televisual Acousmetre. The grand introduction of *SoA*'s acousmatic narrator enters at the 11:45 minute marker. Digging through a storage shed for his newborn son's baby bed, Jax uncovers a manila envelope dated "original 1993" that contains his dead father's long-lost memoirs. The title of the memoir reads, "The Life and Death of Sam Crow. How the Sons of Anarchy Lost Their Way. By John Thomas Teller." The audience must actively read the title, presented as typewriter font that covers a rubber-banded stack of dirty white pages. In the background, a softer and more reflective Southern rock song lullibies the scene. Indeed, if Chion (2009) maintains that, "American film's technical perfectionism in the image, sound, special effects, and editing is all in the service of [the text's *verbal confrontation*]" (89), then

John's voice provides self-reflective synthesis that reverberates the past for both the present and potential future of the narrative.

The crisp papery sounds of tussling envelopes and paper resonate a familiar intimacy as Jax opens the paperwork and begins reading. But instead of hearing Jax's reading voice as an interior monologue, or allowing the audience to read the text silently, *SoA* activates a unique acousmêtre voiceover. Chion (2009) theorizes of an "acousmatic imaginary," where off-screen sound might be heard but not seen, an effect that audiences attribute meaning and context to as it relates to the image/sound onscreen (p. 39). Specifically, the voice belongs to Jax's father John, a founder of the motorcycle club who died in a bike crash under mysterious circumstances. Thus, as a dead figure with no onscreen live presence, the show employs the acousmêtre in John's voice as a guiding figure for Jax's long-term mission for the club.

John's first words read the dedication page of the manuscript, "For my sons. Thomas, who is already at peace. And Jackson [Jax], may he never know this life of chaos." This voiceover works in tandem with the soft Southern folk rock to communicate the melancholia tone that reflects Jax's reaction to early life loss of both his father and brother. The tone of song, the dedicational words, and the composed tone of Thomas's voice signify somber notes of tragedy, both acknowledging Thomas's death, the passage of time since he wrote the words, and Jax's clear and current involvement with the MC. Mary Ann Doane (1985) contends, "The addition of sound to the cinema introduces the possibility of re-presenting a fuller…body, and of confirming the status of speech as an individual property right" (p. 162). Doane articulates how the addition of John's voice in *SoA* gives his otherwise off-screen spectral recurrence an

empathetic humanity and thus provides his manifesto's words *life*. John's voiceovers recur throughout the first two seasons and sporadically until they become replaced by Jax's own internal monologue to his sons in season five. Yet during the occurrences, John's vocal presence overwhelms scene constructs in space and time, whether single shots or montages. In this way, *SoA*'s acousmetre meets Chion's (2011) qualifications that "the acousmêtre is everywhere…[and] all-seeing", it is "primal", and it is "neither inside nor outside" (p. 158-162).

Jax softly flicks through pages as the song ends at the natural scene cut/commercial break. When the pilot resumes, or cuts to the following scene, SC member Bobbi sits in a chair in the clubhouse, strumming an acoustic guitar version of the same chord. This transition is important in that it establishes the thoughtful shift in the televisual medium for two distinct reasons. First, a traditional TV viewer might not recall how a particular scene ends tonally by the time commercials run and the show resumes. Yet the artistic awareness of the emerging popularity of TV on DVD/Bluray or Internet streaming posits an opportunity for the artists to compose a tighter sense of narrative closer to traditional film form. Similar artistic awareness resonates again through the show's use of musical transitions in numerous future episodes.

Second, by mimicking classical film style this transition marks the maturation of television production and innovates narrative standards of film form. Consider an example from Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather II*. Al Pacino's Michael Corleone sits in his chair and meditates on a former family dinner. This signals a flashback of the dinner, which ends with a character placing their left hand to their head. The shot then *form cuts* to Michael holding the same posture. What is interesting about this transition

in *SoA* is the role acoustics plays in place of visual transition. In the first scene, acoustical music, like John Teller, exists only for the viewer. Yet when the shot breaks to the next scene, Bobbi literally plays acoustic guitar onscreen. Thus, we see how music also complements the show's use of acousmetre in affording audiences enhanced experience into this arguably less accessible sub-culture. The transition also facilitates what Chion (2009) calls "the imperceptible bridge between diegetic and nondiegetic music" (p. 77).

The storage unit scene also features several innovative uses of sound for heightened narrative resonance with the audience. As Jax digs through the old boxes, the sounds of cardboard clunks and slits evoke the familiarity of storage and the process of packing and unpacking. Jax picks up a childhood toy car and runs one hand across the bottom wheels. The wheels make a grind-y spinning sound, distinct in familiarity for anyone who has owned or played with toy cars with hard plastic wheels on thin metal spokes. Jax then grabs a childhood BB air rifle, cocks the gun, aims and fires a single pellet. Each of these noises recalls childhood experiences for those of a certain age. The soft pop of air running through the BB gun signals an indistinguishable sound effect. The sound effects that accompany the imagery of this scene complement the scene's ability to conjure emotions associated with childhood experience and nostalgia for the past (perhaps they should be called *sound affects*?). These little nuances also establish a pattern of experience for the audience that inoculates audience identification with Jax and thus arguably negotiates a deeper meaning for when he uncovers John's manifesto.

Echoing Lies in the Clubhouse. Inside the clubhouse, when club members interact, I contend a distinct echo is identifiable. I theorize this slightly present use of echo communicates how hollow the club has become, thus reinforcing the idea that John's worst fears have come true. The slight echo also matches the composition of space, as the club features large barroom open areas typically empty except for special occasions. Also, the echo retains value in the private members-only club meeting room where *SAMCRO* votes on important MC legislature. I posit this echo, however subtle, denotes the hollow truth behind each member's public opinions. This argument is supported by the subsequent deviation through episodes and seasons between what club members protest publicly to the group versus how they conspire in private. Read [or heard] in this light, the echo added in scenes within the clubhouse construct an aural reflection of the show's dualistic themes between secrets and truths. Bela Balazs (1985) suggests, "The sound film will teach us to analyze even chaotic noise with our ear and read the score of life's symphony" and thus, understanding the significance of this synchronicity, the chaotic world of SAMCRO becomes an equally poetic one.

Sound Mixing Trauma. One frantic scene in the pilot features the premature birth of Jax's son Abel. In a jittery scene shot by handheld camera, Jax's ex-wife Wendy stumbles around her kitchen in a panic. She flings a drawer full of silverware and manically picks apart the room looking for a syringe. She finds further paraphernalia hidden in a freezer container of ice cream. The sound mixing performs an admirable job complimenting the scene's evocation of urgency, desperation, and ultimately fragility. Yet Noel Burch (1985) warns, "background noises and dialogue must be recorded separately and their relative levels determined during the sound mix"

(p. 201), so that a film or TV show might meet its peek dramatic potential. Wendy ends up overdosing, and must deliver Abel surgically 10-weeks premature at the hospital. The depravity of the handheld/shaky cam in Wendy's house is juxtaposed against the steady cam setting of the hospital where Jax's other love interest Tara works.

Hearing the Healer and Her Hospital. Tara, a surgeon and Jax's childhood sweetheart, speaks with soft vocal tones that imply trained interpersonal professionalism. Tara alerts the family of Abel's status with empathic but professional low tones. Low tones suggest immediacy without sinking into whisper or mumble. It is unclear whether her hospital voice dialogue is recorded on site or later in post-production. Belton (1985) confirms, "the soundtrack corresponds not…directly to 'objective reality' but rather to a secondary representation of it" (p. 66), and thus, whichever setting produces Tara's audio recordings, the matchup is seamless and transmits an authentic sense of realism demonstrating *SoA*'s cinematic stylistics. Hospital scenes also feature recurrent noises like heart monitor machine beeps, elevator dings, and the rolling wheel sounds of stretchers and/or IV trays. Stock audio helps deepen the mise en scene for maximal immersive quality.

Sound as the Accentuation of Violence. SoA's use of violence commands one of the show's great strengths as a pulpy melodrama with hyper-vigilante overtones and gutsy updates of its tragic Shakespearean/biker culture hybrid roots. When Jax learns of Wendy's overdose, which threatens Abel's life, he immediately rides off to confront the drug dealer responsible (because no one in the family should bare responsibility). Jax and company swing open a barroom door, and jukebox music suddenly floods the soundtrack. The sharp sounds of pool cues striking balls and the glassy clings of beer

bottles and glassware immediately transport audiences into this dingy setting. Without hesitation Jax struts up to the party "responsible" and breaks a pool stick in half across his midsection. Each of the sound effects that conjoin to film this scene require what Burch (1985) defines as *texturing*, or the "integrating of sound effects and music into a single sound texture" (p. 204). Thus, the noise of splintered wood on the meat of a human frame posits the kind of jolting auditory aesthetic in which *SoA* revels.

In one montage evoking vigilant aggression, Jax suits up for his illegal arms bike run. The headless montage starts with a foot resting on a bed as a hand shoves a pistol into an ankle holster. The aesthetic sound of cold steel softly hoofing into black leather contrasts against five consecutive metal guitar strums, which evoke hard-edged masculinity. Next, the POV centers on the mid-section of a shirtless male body in black jeans. A boot knife slides into a sheath with a quickened wisp, and two jewel-incrusted hands then clamp the button that attaches the knife sheath to the jeans' belt. This shot occurs with another five consecutive metal guitar strums. The third shot cuts back to a mid-range shot. Jax, his head still cut from the frame, velcro's on a bullet proof vest with the unmistakable crunch and stick sound, and pats his midsection to secure the vest in place. Five more guitar strums blast the soundtrack as Jax turns his back ' the camera. As he turns, his face and body now come into view in the background wall mirror. Jax momentarily studies his body as the guitar strums come hard and heavy. The soundtrack intro to some alternative rock song effectively flatters the montage with their conjoined metamorphosis of Jax from man to *mythological biker*.

Back to a headless frame, Jax's picks up a handgun off the bed and readies the chamber with one hand before tucking the gun inside the front left side of his vest. In

the final and most significant shot of the montage, Jax stands with his back to the camera. Now dressed, armed, and most importantly vested, the shot centers on his motorcycle cut with a tattered American flag framing the background. The black leather cut features a large white patch with black letters that banners across the top. The patch reads, "SONS OF ANARCHY." Across the bottom of the cut, a second banner reads, "California." In the middle of the cut, a large patch features a black and white Grim Reaper holding an M-16 assault rifle with a sickle blade across its nozzle in one hand, and a white crystal ball with an inscribe "A" [for anarchy] in the other hand. The composition between the juxtaposed centering of black and white anarchy on top of red, white, and blue democracy reinforces the soundtrack's emphasis on masculinity, aggression, rebellion, and transgression. The contradictions between "loving America's spirit" and "rebelling America's status quo." This musical montage continues with exterior shots that fragment parts of Jax's bike in motion. Only now, the hard-edged rock has transitioned beyond the intro guitar strums and adds auditory layers in Jax's bike motor as it revs and echoes through the urban hillsides of sunny California. Through these kinds of *stylish aesthetics*, *SoA* creator Sutter borrows a Hitchcockian technique whereby "the audience is forced to identify with the evil impulses in relatively attractive and normal people" (Weis, 1985, 301). Thus, through identification, acceptance, and ultimately indulgence in the show's aesthetics, audiences comply with *SoA*'s actions and hence serve as its co-conspirators.

Concluding Thoughts and on the Convergent Culture between Film and TV Drama

As my close reading of *Sons of Anarchy* suggests, technological shifts impact audiences' aesthetic experience. Lotz (2007) avers that, "Theatrical technologies affect how we think about the conditions in which viewers watch television and how and why they view" (p. 74). So far, I have explored how *SoA* invokes the genre conventions of biker cinema and transforms these B-movie tropes into a three-dimensional world through innovative use of film sound qualities that include soundtracks, sound mixing and editing, as well as the return of the acousmêtre for TV audiences. Each of these qualities not only borrow from traditional film form but also they demonstrate how modern TV production no longer imitates film form but instead meets and in some cases exceeds its detailed synchronization. Deuze (2007) agrees that, "technological convergence, and the mutually reinforcing developments of localization and globalization have made working experiences [in] the media industries increasingly similar," (p. 59) while Kiwitt (2012) also concurs that, "for those working professionally on the border between [film and television], there is no need to definitively classify a production as one or the other" (p. 12).

In addition, when considering the rise in mass popularity of niche or genre programming, Jenkins (1992, 2006a) breaks away from traditional mass media TV theorists that view television consumption as a passive form of spectatorship. In contrast, Jenkins argues that genre programming, ranging from *Star Trek* to *Beauty and the Beast*, encourages participatory reaction from its viewers and fans, which thus demonstrates the potential for the co-creation of culture that includes fan fiction,

traveling to TV conventions, internet chat rooms, consumer products, and forms of fan participation. Jenkins (2006b) fulfills his early predictions in his arguably more influential analysis and theorization of media participation in *Convergence Culture – Where Old and New Media Collide*. Butler (2007) consents with these scholars and specifies that, "it is more accurate to view televisuality in terms of a continuum—from the stylistically utilitarian to the stylistically exhibitionistic". I argue Sutter's *SoA* situates closer to the *stylistic exhibitionism* through its aesthetic updates of biker genre conventions, film-quality sound editing and mixing, and through sophisticated narrative devices such as the acousmetre.

As Jenkins (2006b) sees it, "Convergence is both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process" (p. 37), and in some ways these trends emerge with *SoA*'s use of fan-driven surges in ratings each successive season, creator-owns app's that provide extra content like animated story boards of deleted scenes and script specs, and now an endless replication of consumer products that endorse *SoA*. Perhaps the most appropriate irony to conclude this essay is a reflection of how the popularity of a supposed anti-authority, anti-corporate narrative ultimately situates itself as a perfect example of convergence culture wherein the text's popularity resonates twofold from its narrative anarchy and its conservative profitability. If only one could obtain that splintered pool stick or even SAMCRO's Cara Cara "adult movies" on DVD as a commemorative collectors items.

Rhetorical Recap: Triangular Analysis as Transmedia Method?

In this chapter, I analyzed the TV artifact *SoA* through a triangulation of genre analysis, film theory close reading or textual analysis of sound editing, and a cultural

reading of the text's extension into transmedia formatting. This triangulated approach emphasizes how contemporary texts like *SoA* move beyond a singular format (formerly TV). First genre analysis of *SoA* demonstrates how the show effectively borrows from its conventional cinematic history, while expanding its diegetic storytelling to match the serialized television drama format. Second, analysis emphasizes how TV texts imitate iconic sound editing and sound effects mixing, thus extending these artifacts from their former cultural status of "low brow" artistic expression to innovate in ways that draw upon classical film technique and strengthen their diegetic persuasive appeal as a result. Third, I briefly concluded how *SoA* producers make use of transmedia formatting to enhance audience consumption practices for multiple viewings across variant technology platforms.

In terms of global temporialism, appendage formats like DVD extras, mobile app animated storyboards, and kitschy commodity merchandizing further monopolize the time and energy and money audiences put into their preferred televisual texts. Transmedia formats like Netflix or Amazon Prime offer ideal time-shifting capabilities for consumers less likely to pay exhorbitant costs for pricey Bluray collections that function singularly (e.g. requiring TV's and only working with Bluray players). Thus transmedia can either shrink or increase costs, just as time-shifting consumption shrinks view time (sans commercials) while increasing time spent engaging tertiary texts or Binge-watching marathons. Given this either/or—both/and potentiality, *SoA* operates betwixt and between Jenkins et al.'s sticky⇔spreadable continuum. While auteur showrunner Sutter maintains creative control over his property (narrative stickiness),

processes of production/consumption, audience reception including pleasures of text/paratext, and modes of interpretation remain liminal (transmedia spreadability).

Yet just as I identify *SoA*'s narrative stickiness, processes of decoding render diverse points of engagement and interpretation between audiences. In the next chapter, I re-examine *SoA* through genre analysis, this time highlighting the signature conventions of the American Western. Reading *SoA* as a Western shifts its ideological persuasiveness and iconicity in ways that reframe the genre text for divergent audience interests. Indeed as much as the B-movie biker genre speaks to the conditions of postwar rebellion and anti-capitalist anarchistic sentiment, which is coded as "liberal," the ideology encoded in American Westerns speaks to alternative conventions and coded values the traditionally read as "conservative." This demonstration supports the long argument that TV dramas not only work as polysemic texts but also communicate polyvalent messaging.

Chapter Six

Connecting Genre Rituals and Revising the American Western in TV's *Sons of Anarchy*

One of my grandfathers served as both a trucker and blue-collar oil fieldsman while another worked simultaneously in military service, mechanical engineering, and carpentry. In addition, the latter always exuded his motorist enthusiasm. I came to experience the eras of their passions secondhand, which gave me a kind of liminal insight into what I might call secular *salt of the earth* White lower-middle class, middle-American values. These values emphasize(d) *family*, *community*, and *loyalty*, and varying contortions of this form. I recall the endless array of Westerns always playing on my grandfather's brown-paneled television set, the modest reward to a hard day's work, the visual aesthetic complementing simpler pleasures like coffee and cigarettes and uncalculated naps in the recliner.

In hindsight, I can easily identify ritualistic patterns and ideological behaviors exerted between my two grandfathers, one closely aligned with characteristics of simple life found in Westerns while the other emanating a Red-Blooded drive toward mechanics, the open road, and the trouble that comes with it. Although I paid little attention to the narratives of these Westerns growing up, as researcher I now appreciate the sentiments they communicated to working class generations of Americans. As cultural ideology, I recognize the persuasive appeal (or what scholars consider *rhetorical power*) such repetitious imagery conveys. Thus, I find it both reaffirming and timely to witness these postwar thematics resurface in *post-network era*[1] of cable drama supremacy, particularly on *Sons of Anarchy* [or *SoA*].

In this essay, I examine *SoA* and read the show as a revision of the American Western film genre. I examine common tropes and ideological contexts ranging from mythic conceptions of landscape to the mise en scène of the Native American plight. I

tease out connections between the show's fictitious town setting and how the show inverts traditional archetypes of place and reinserts the outlaw narrative as the new status quo. I inspect the role borders play in how they reverse, from opening and expanding in Westerns to closing amidst the post-globalist narrative world of their club, SAMCRO (or SC). I draw on a number of film theory scholars as I reposition their critiques of Western cinema against the updated backdrop of *SoA*'s fictitious Charming, CA. I argue this revision and update of outlaw culture, gunslinger violence, and the show's subsequent popularity communicates a post-9/11 trauma playing out on television.[2] Specifically, like the history of biker movements following WWII and the advent of the biker film genre in and around Vietnam, *SoA* plays with Western form in a way that posits distinctness amidst familiarity (e.g. innovation and imitation). Ergo, through evoking the Western genre, the show updates these ideological criticisms in ways that synchronize such historical (and historicized) themes for modern audiences.

Splitting Time: Discursive Tensions between Network and Cable TV

In 2008, cable channel FX premiered its newest "edgy" drama, *Sons of Anarchy*. *SoA* focuses around a modern biker gang that work as mechanics by day and illegal gunrunners by night. At the show's core, attention to tensions and relationships between characters and the protection of the their club/town/ideological border situates *SoA* as a drama that updates and revises key themes resonant of the American Western. *SoA* embraces many aspects of the Western film genre. As TV drama, it often avoids trappings of choosing between cinematic genre modes due to its prolonged state as a serialized program. In fact, *SoA*'s episodic and shorter season structure allows the show to explore numerous genre terrains associated with but never exclusive to genres of

crime, biker history, and in the case of this analysis, the Western film genre. While the drama evokes numerous incarnations and genres (indeed a growing trend indicative of postmodernity), *SoA* becomes a coup d'état that synthesizes televisual form with Western archetype.

Amidst a postmodern split between network and paycable broadcasting, episodic programming often splinters between differing styles of execution and presentation. Networks still cast the largest net of reach and thus must appease the largest possible audience base. For this reason, the majority of non-reality, scripted television devotes continued focus toward episodic self-contained programming. This program style primarily consists of weekly, standalone formats, in which new plots are both introduced and resolved within the constraints of the half hour or hour allotment. CBS's consistent regularity of procedural dramas comes to mind, as does CBS's reliant, if not predictable, stable of raunchy sitcoms. Compare this against cable channel American Movie Classics (or AMC, where "story matters") for their stream of character-driven genre-bending critical darlings like *Mad Men*, *Breaking Bad*, and *The Walking Dead*. FX's breed of TV dramas more closely resembles the latter, and the gratuitous aesthetic among FX programming no longer appears to appease only the young male demographic (Aurthur, 2013).

In sharp contrast, many but not all cable dramas follow the format established by paycable programmers like HBO, Showtime, or even public broadcasters like PBS. Close attention to character development becomes a central motif. As well, shortened seasons allow for tighter script management that results in stronger arches of character and situational development. While network shows wrap up weekly lessons or

storylines, cable dramas tend to overlap stories utilizing cliffhanger endings and unresolved tensions.[3] In the same way, this narrative approach is similar to Richard Comb's assessment of *High Noon*, where the latter's "starkly compressed and stylized storyline goes with a psychological realism that simultaneously diffuses and complicates the plot" (Combs, 1986, p. 169-170). Instead of the network trend of 22-24 episodes per given season or year, cable networks often produce 10-13 episodes.[4] This shorter structure allows writers to guard their creative property closely and procure the highest *quality* out of their storytelling opportunity. In this case, *SoA* creator and showrunner Sutter guards his passion project while he simultaneously maintains brand management over numerous facets of *SoA*'s operational avenues directly and indirectly related to the show.

SoA's televisual landscape splits between the terrain of featured set pieces and the terrain composing an enormous cast of characters. While the cast of characters expands and contracts from season to season, the show ultimately focuses on family. Initial seasons highlight Jax, the "heir apparent" Vice President, his Old Lady Tara, Jax's stepfather/club President, Clay, and Jax's mother, Clay's wife/club matriarch Gemma.[5] The core members of the club include Treasurer Bobbi, Jax's best friend Opie, Opie's father Piney, Clay's right hand man Tig, Juice, Chibs, Happy, and club Prospect Half Sack. Outside the club, feature players include corrupt police chief Wayne Unser, incorruptible Deputy David Hale, and Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms [ATF] agent June Stahl. As well, numerous additional friends, family, club members, rivals, and rotating cast members construct a dense universe of interactive parties. While this large cast creates a rich scope for entertainment purposes, I concentrate

attention on characters and elements that specifically attend to American Western patterns. With so many characters shifting in action and motivation, *SoA* might best be understood through Christopher Frayling's decription of Sergio Leone's approach to *Once Upon A Time in the West*, where "Each of the main characters in the story 'moves' like a chess piece, the chessboard being…'the mythological system, that is, the cycle of conditioned action'." (Frayling, 2006, p. 194). At the helm, creator/showrunner Sutter controls the pieces, and each season shifts these pieces around the board, extending new power positions to some while reducing power and agency among others.

Among these shifts or "cycles of conditioned action" Sutter demploys various narrative recollections of the American Western. In the following sections, I highlight ways Sutter's *SoA* embraces archetypical genre tropes of the American Western. Acknowledging these tropes, I explore instances where *SoA* pays homage to the Western, and outlaws in particular, while paving stories in a postmodern terrain of moral ambiguity. In this way, *SoA* operates as both a morality play in the history of Shakespearean tragedies like *Hamlet*, while updating stories that resonate with ideological themes of the American West. Ultimately, through this blended, fragmented, and thus postmodern lens, *SoA* revise's history so that a new story might be told in the fictitious present. Embracing the genre of Western cinema history, I analyze how *SoA* tackles genre tropes of landscape, Western style, the small town, the psychological Western, the Native American plight, and outlaw-gunfighter justice. Examining each of these conventional templates, I argue *SoA* embarks on its own transformational journey,

an updated critique of post-9/11 tensions of militarism, recession, and moral class division in America.

Western Landscape in Physical Terrain and Outlaw Biker Style

Edward Buscombe contends, "Landscape in [the Western] tradition is an aesthetic object. Its function is to be gazed at, in an act of reverential contemplation" (Buscombe, 1995, p. 118). As a televisual aesthetic, the architecture of *SoA* intends to be gazed upon by viewers, immersing them in the world of SAMCRO. This landscape stretches from the mountainous hills of their outskirt rides to main street Charming to the stylistic grunge apparent in each character.

The Sons of Anarchy suggest wardrobe archetypes of the Western through distinct biker style. The most important elements of an MC member are his cut and his bike. The "cut" is a black leather vest with white lettering, including patches detailing the member's rank in the organization. The club's dedication to a uniform style recalls the tan dusters sported by Frank's gang in Leone's (1968) *Once Upon A Time in the West*. The back of the vest features a large Grim Reaper carrying an M-16 with a sickle hanging off gun barrel. This symbolism points to the club's motif as "Reapers" and to their gunrunning specialty, the M-16. The remainder of their wardrobe fashions itself in typical combinations of tattered jeans, black leather, optional earrings, and heavy doses of various "ink" or tattoos.

The other critical element, the Harley Davidson, functions as an updated stand-in for the Western horse. The bike serves as an intricate element of frontier spirit for club members. In fact, in several episodes regular automotive vehicles are viewed as "cages," revealing their less-desired status for vehicular travel. With the club operating

a mechanic/repo shop, their tow truck functions as the group's personal stagecoach. In the season two episode *Eureka*, members scramble on to it in a pinch when they use the vehicle to illegally rescue Tig. Tig, held hostage in a motel room by a group of bounty hunters, ducks for cover as the tow truck crashes through the wall. SC members, guns pointed, reenact a makeshift Wild West ambush, which creates enough shock for the club to retrieve Tig without further incident. Like the outlaws they are, the truck drives away without tending to the structural damage of the low-end building.

Other visual markers also heighten the authenticity of biker and Western lore. Members smoke cigarettes with regularity and excess, never stopping to consider modern messages against the now-taboo use of tobacco.[6] Clay is often depicted smoking a large cigar, a phallic signifier that designates both his leadership as club President and the hyper-masculine atmosphere in *SoA*. Most members sport grisly facial hair and long unkempt locks of greasy hair. These rugged appendages recall the wild nature of wilderness trappers, fur traders, and further accelerate a visual separation between SC and civilization.

The MC fortifies its base at the Teller-Morrow automotive shop in Charming, California. During most days, the shop exists as a legal business for mechanics both in and out of SC. The metal sighting, steelwork, and razorwire fencing replace log walls with spiked edges common among Western cavalry settlements. Yet behind the doors of the onsite clubhouse, SC meets in an exclusive room for "patched" members only.[7] Their sacred meetings are called "church," and at these meetings the men-only vote on key decisions that effect club business. Thus, the Teller-Morrow compound forms a fortified border, a modern day fort, protecting SC from threats outside its walls.

As an MC, the club performs illegal gunrunning as its main source of income. Through gunrunning SC functions as a modern outlaw gang situated within the small town Charming. Yet the Sons see themselves as protectors of Charming, keeping unwanted big businesses, urban developments, and increased law enforcement beyond its borders. In other words, SC works diligently to keep the progress of civilization at bay in ways that recall Anthony Mann's (1952) *Bend of the River*. The tension between frontier wilderness and civilization resonate a consistent theme among Westerns. John Ford's (1939) *Stagecoach*, (1956) *The Searchers*, and (1962) *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* display themes of impending civilization at different levels. Jim Jarmusch's (1995) *Dead Man* opens with an extended train ride west across the American frontier. In *Dead Man*, the further west the train travels, the less civilized and more rouge-ish the inhabitants become. This pattern of spatial tension resonates on *SoA*, as the biker gangs compete for both urban and rural territories in the general Pacific West region. Exploring the vagueness of the Pacific West region opens an additional avenue of the Western archetype, depictions of landscape.

The Ideological 'Small Town': Eden versus Affliction

The town Charming has an *ironic* name, similar to other ironic towns in Westerns like Leone's (1968) "Sweetwater" in *Once Upon a Time in the West* or "Machine" in Jarmusch's (1995) *Dead Man*. Charming evokes the names of other Edenic paradises. Visually, Charming could be read as any small town "main street America," with its diner, barber shop, sheriff's station, and small fixture of locally owned stores. Yet ironically Charming appears as Edenic for SC alone, while other townspeople either resist or streamline the club's hegemonic lean on commerce. In

season one Donna, wife of MC member Opie, refuses the club's help, hoping Opie's recent stint in "Chino" (a nearby prison) will lead to an awakening that allows their family to leave SC. Darby, a local white supremacist meth dealer resents SC for refusing him the right to deal meth inside town borders, while privileged property owner Elliot Oswald must remain a loyal servant to the club cause, due to blackmail evidence Clay hangs over his head.[8]

In Season two's *Smite*, the group visits Oswald's horse ranch. Oswald rides up to the group. Tig orders him to, "get off your high horse," before Clay updates him of the latest town proposal to develop Oswald's land. Oswald reveals that the city and county want expansion, a city issue that is beyond his control. Clay notes that, "Charming's problem is the club's problem," a callback to Clay's intent to keep Charming small and safe from expansion. Clay's ideological perspective, although motivated to keep the MC in control, evokes the idealized state of melancholia experienced in the opening scenes of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence* (Ford, 1962), specifically as Hallie Stoddard visits Doniphon's gravesite amidst scenery of the town's expansion. This parallel highlights the Western tensions of expansion and resistance and the motives behind each.

Deputy Sheriff David Hale, the solitary moral compass of Charming, must regularly resist temptation from all sides, with a goal of bringing down SC. In the season two premiere *Albification*, David argues with his brother Jacob in the diner parking lot, after Jacob attempts to align "Davie" with the town's newest inhabitants, the "White Hate" group the "League of Nationalists" [LoN]. As the brothers bicker, Sheriff Hale declares, "I am not going to swap one group of outlaws for another."

Unfortunately, his words become inaudible as the deafening interruption of SC's noisy motorcycles drown out any resolution. Through the lens of these ordinary citizens, the only people that appear to favor the outlaw presence are those that benefit from their existence; namely, Old Ladies and their families, corrupt authority figures and politicians, and those businesses that cater to SC's endless needs for booze, sex, and entertainment vices.

In season two, Ethan Zobelle, a businessman and supposed supporter of "White Power" moves to town to extend his latest branch of "Impeccable Smokes" cigar shops. Like the outsider attempting to settle in the outlaw town, Zobelle experiences a swath of setbacks and challenges. In the opening of *Eureka*, the club revs through town on their way out to assist with a "local blood drive." The bikers drive through Charming's main street as the camera pans up to show Zobel hoisting his new storefront sign. This panning shot of the main street ride through is a staple of *SoA*. Like the tracking shots of cavalries marching through scenic landscape in films like *Stagecoach* (Ford, 1939) and *Little Big Man* (Miller, 1970), the shot communicates the club's stranglehold on the Western town. Numerous shots also feature SC riding through the mountainous and then urban terrain of northern California. Large cyclist hoards recall the cavalry rides opening several Ford Westerns. The ambiguous landscape suggests this terrain to exist "everywhere" and "nowhere." Shots comprising the long drive typically feature accompanying music, often Southern rock in sound, evoking imagery of the American South and its rebellious [if not Confederate] history.

In season two, the character Gemma receives the ultimate cultural shame when a White supremacist group gang-rapes her for revenge against the club. I read this

transgressive act as a direct inversion and reversal of the White fear common in Westerns that women captors faced rape or worse at the hands of "savage Injun" tribes typical of Ford Westerns in particular. Gemma connects the savage attack she receives to employees of the smoke shop when she runs into White supremacist Weston outside. The connection occurs when she notices his "tribal marks" or the peace sign neck tattoo observed during her attack. Gemma confronts Unser with the news, and Unser, as corrupt "Chief" on the club payroll, delivers a message to Zobelle. In his speech, Unser summons the supernatural power of Charming in an effort to cast a thin veil over his intent. Unser warns, "I know who you are, what you do. I'm not talking about what you do with a suit and tie. I'm talking about what you do with rubber masks. Things work themselves around. Your time'll come." Clarifying the situation, Zobelle, reserving complete innocence and ignorance, acknowledges, "That sounds like a threat." Chief Unser assures him, "Charming's a *special town*. Not many folks take to it. I like to think the town chooses its occupants. Right ones stay, wrong ones disappear." If *SoA* were a more traditional revisionist Western, Unser might employ the supernatural as a voodoo scare tactic in the literal sense. But Charming is an aging town fighting modern times, and rationalism via capitalism advances its border. And Zobelle does not heed the warning. While Unser's words are metaphoric in a sense, they also recall and repeat the code of the Western and the town that lies just beyond civilization. In addition, Unser's warning also acknowledge how *SoA* functions similarly to the psychological Western.

The Psychological Western

In the same way that SC maintains control over Charming, most of its residents are left without a sense of agency. The town's dependency on SC, whether to loan

money or keep the peace, keeps citizens indebted to the organization. Thus, reading *SoA* as a psychological Western, several key conventions require recognition. First, I examine the lack of agency among citizens. While noted citizens like Donna, Hale, and Darby push for progress that doesn't involve SC, their lack of hegemonic power and cultural sway subjugates their ability to command change.[9] This lack of agency could be compared to another psychological Western, Anthony Mann's (1953) *The Naked Spur*. In *Spur*, the sole female character Lina, played by Janet Leigh, suffers a habitual lack of agency as she is pulled between the hegemonic tensions of not only James Stewart's Howie and Robert Ryan's Ben, but later the revelation that her motivations recall unresolved "daddy issues." Thus, Lina functions as a pawn between protagonist and antagonist, flip-flopping effortlessly between action set pieces.

Deputy Sheriff Hale can be read as a similar flip-flopper throughout *SoA*'s season two. In season two, Hale begins shifting aid between SC and Zobelle's LoN based on singular pieces of "evidence" leaked to him by each faction. Consider the following exchange between Hale and Clay in the episode *Fa Guan*. As Hale busts a crank and prostitution ring that Zobelle' setup to look like SC, Hale visits Clay after Zobelle gives him "one more chance" to "do your job." Hale delivers two tips on meth labs, noting "I know the bigger devil when I see him."

> Hale: Zobelle's putting down roots. Backing my brother for mayor. And he wants me on his team once I'm chief.
>
> Clay: Why are you telling me this? Are the Hales on board for the "bright new day".

> Hale: I know the greater devil when I see it. Zobelle is flodding this town with Darby's crank and pussy, and he wants me to shut it down to prove to Charming they don't need the Sons. [Handing the tip to Clay] You have til the end of the day to be heroes.
>
> Clay: You had to swallow a lot to hand this over.
>
> Hale: Its not about humility. My biggest priority is going to be shutting you down. But I'm gonna do it the right way.

Here Hale, unable to maintain his season one level of self-righteous superiority, depowers himself through the constant manipulation of his actions by the club and league. Hale, like many of the conflicted characters in *SoA*, resonate themes of Anthony Mann's anti-heroes. As Jim Kitses (2004) notes, "the Mann hero is ever at the mercy of paradox and contradiction" and often "morally ambiguous" (p. 143). Ultimately, flip-flopping siphons Hale of any true agency, and resolution must then come from an outlaw source.

SoA also posits the psychological Western through the source of influence in its premise, William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Creator, showrunner, head writer, producer, and actor Kurt Sutter admits his initial *SoA* pitch to FX envisioned "Hamlet on Bikes." Thus, the show resonates numerous themes that recall and revise perhaps Shakespeare's most notorious tragedy. In the show, the central psychological tensions lie between Jax, his mother Gemma, stepfather Clay, and Jax's love interest/wife Tara. Jax, often referred to as "the Prince," with his golden locks and boyish charm, situates an ideal Hamlet. An ideological wedge forms between club Vice President Jax (the VP position marking his "heir apparent" birthright to the "throne" of club President), and club

President, Clay. Jax's late father John Teller left behind a secret manifesto, the contents of which "haunt" Jax through the voiceover narratives of Teller.[10] This revelation of secret thoughts leads Jax to believe in a new direction for the club. Jax demonstrates a kind of Oedipal relationship with his matriarchal mom Gemma.

Gemma, regularly referred to as the "Queen" to Clay's "King", often reinforces a manipulative Oedipal nature through ambiguous open-mouth kisses with Jax, his ex-wife Wendy, Tara, and other club members. Her protection of Jax creates narrative tensions with Tara, and the slowly unraveling truth about John Teller's death leads to greater tensions between family throughout the show's run.[11] As Slotkin (1998) theorizes, "the psychology of the revenger has its roots in the outlaw Western" (p. 382). As notes, the psychology of revenge in *SoA* shares roots with the tragedy *Hamlet*. But by updating the narrative to a modern outlaw tragedy, the show mines new psychological terrain through the lens of counterculture biker drama. Just as Eastwood's work contested "construction of masculinity" and "what constitutes heroism" (Kitses, 2004, p. 289), *SoA* mines this terrain through the slow-grinding and always complicated transformation of Jax. Through this counterculture revision, other cultural aspects of the Western, specifically the Native American plight, emerge as visibly tragic markers of the present.

The Native American Plight Continues

Just as *SoA* centers on a core group of White male outlaws, this neoWestern revisits the cultural construct of the Native American plight. Similarly, this plight updates a continued problematic via stereotypical representation and subjugation. In the season two episode *Balm*, the club stumbles onto an opportunity as they visit "Indian

Territory" to exercise a repo for Teller-Morrow. Loading an SUV to the tow truck, a "Squaw" begs them not to take the vehicle, as she confesses the truck's full of her "beads" for "weaving." Opie offers her a cold, "I'm sorry" and they repossess the car. Back at T-M, Half Sack opens the supposed box of beads, only to find each box full of "unstamped" homemade ammunition. Thus the beginning of a *treaty* soon transpires between SC and the tribal nation, where the "Waheebah" now become SC's new ammunition manufacturer.

Unfortunately, Native American relations often flow through a stereotypical lens. As SC visits the reservation site [or Rez], Tig discusses the situation with a young man:

> Tig: Tonto speak up.
>
> Ferdinand: My name's Ferdinand.
>
> Clay: Hey, Ferdinand, we make guns. You, make bullets. Now, I could either help you or crush ya'.
>
> Ferdinand: Okay
>
> Clay: Smart boy.

The club relies on historical hegemony with their Native Americans engagements. The club's personal pension for extortion resorts in continual threats and one-sided advantages that favor the [privileged] White male. Scouting the Rez, they visit a school bus, where Ferdinand gives a tour of how the tribe manufactures their ammunition. When the tribe admits they can produce 1000 AK-47 rounds in a matter of "hours," tribal parties demand in return a list of drug dealer contacts for their reservation surplus of "hallucinogenic mushrooms." What is interesting in this interpretation is how the

Native American presence aligns with outlaw ideological practices. Thus the alignment both condemns their behavior but also highlights the continual dominant-hegemonic subversion of Native American cultural practices under current U.S. laws.

Much like the sprawling desertscape wilderness of California, *SoA* plays with other landscape motifs central to the genre-mixing iconicity of its expansive terrain. In particular, the Rez lands just outside Charming play a pivotal role in several episodes. Beginning in season two, the Rez is featured as an off-the-grid site where SC obtains illegal ammunition for their gunrunning trade. Instead of the tribal teepees, the Indians typically work out of low-end trailer homes. This updated division of the modern equivalent to impoverished yet portable living spaces reaches to Western history's visually iconic past while situating furnishings marked in the present. Likewise, the reservation is spatially situated as a post-colonialist marker of defined space and government-distributed territory. Yet the privatization of the space, due to the ramifications of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Native American treatment, isolates the reservation from government interference. Thus, the space becomes a pivotal destination for illegal activities that cannot be tracked nor impeded. In this way the reservation becomes a liminal space of significance for the SC as well as an atmosphere conjoining the past and present in *SoA*.

During a visit to the reservation in season four, two club members happen upon a body buried in dirt, with only the victim's head above ground. Covered in ants and slowly being eaten alive, the still-living hostage serves as a warning to SC that anyone attempting to double-cross "the Tribe" suffers a fate steeped in ancestral torture methods. The barbaric visuals of the scene conjure clichéd stereotypes of Native

American ritual and disturbing myths of brutality. During one encounter, two SC members sit forced to wait in front of a buried White man whose exposed head slowly decays. While their Native counterpart retrieves an item of barter, one club member shows a kind of "outlaw sympathy" by smothering the hostage to death before his captor returns. By coding what constitutes appropriate White man's death, SC communicates a racial bias whereby only biker clubs are afforded the agency of advanced medieval torture.

This scene recalls the Western trope where men see it better to kill women than have them suffer the fate of capture by Indians. Such fears are portrayed and/or referenced in *Stagecoach*, *The Searchers*, and *Little Big Man*. Whereas Ford played this approach with genuine fear in addition to its clear dysfunction as a method of solution, Miller used the trope as biting critique against the Western American mindset. Similarly in *The Outlaw Josey Wales*, Eastwood (1976) problematizes this scenario, where the ruthless rapists comprised a conglomerate of vile men comprising mixed races. Ultimately, *SoA* uses this scene to suggest both a fearsome depiction (such "savage" practices continuing in modern times?!) as an addition to Sutter's usual bag of disparaging scenes that function with wink/wince pitch black humor. With the scene playing out in this fashion, the viewer is reminded of who makes the ultimate decisions concerning "right" and "wrong" in the West, and those decisions never come from native tribes, even on their own land.

In season four's *Out*, reservation land is used as a faux courtyard for Opie's wedding. The wedding itself is not a farce, although lingering problems between marrying bikers and porn stars does lend the situation an heir of tumult. However, this

supposed sacred land also serves as a neutral site to exonerate revenge killings against the Russians for a jailhouse stabbing that occurred between seasons. Just as the land offers no risk of police interference, the land further serves as the makeshift disposal site for unwanted corpses. In this way, counting both the undoubted mess left behind at the wedding reception, coupled with the array of decaying Russian bodies, the narrative evokes "Indian Territory" as a ceremonial dumping ground for waste. This traumatic repetition recalls the history of land desecration and Native American treatment for suiting purposes of White politics. I contend the SC/*SoA* Native American treatment posits a decidedly nihilistic and pessimistic attitude that does not suggest a sympathetic revision let alone legitimacy to the Native American plight. Instead, these ambiguous markers—authentic or degrading or both?—leave the audience in contemplation for resolution. Perhaps these representations best mirror America's continuing psychological obstacles dealing with Western American history and its ideological conflictions with Native America.

Blending Western Aspects of Outlaw and Gunfighter Mythology

No other Western theme emerges more often in *SoA* than comparisons with outlaws. Outlaws and outlaw justice compose much of SC's ideological code of ethics. As Zobelle notifies Jacob Hale in the season two premiere, "We're aware of your town's outlaw problem." Yet as David Hale counters to his brother Jacob, "I am not going to swap one group of outlaws for another." Or perhaps Chief Unser best explains the tangled ideological code in this exchange with Clay in season one's *Hell Followed*, "The deal always was, 'outlaws live in Charming, [but] shit beyond the borders.' You can't change the rules, or it all goes to hell." Unser's comments denote a naïve

understand that Charming's borders provide an imaginary marker to which outlaw justice resides just outside of. Upon closer examination, *SoA* simultaneously portrays numerous identities of what Slotkin (1998) constitutes as "The Cult of the Gunfighter," where *SoA* methods of plot development range from "town-tamer" to "outlaw Western" to "psychological" and "ideological" arguments, often code-switching within the same scene or operating through a conglomerate of approaches (p. 379).

In addition to verbal references to outlaw mythology, SC's deeds and actions clarify the show's portrayal of outlaw justice through gratuitous violence and other lurid content. Whether murderous hits, revenge kills, or self-defense, Charming's landscape becomes littered with as many buried corpses as buried secrets. The club embraces strong-arm tactics in a majority of their encounters, and thus methods of relief compliment their sordid tastes. Elder members Clay and Tig comprise a villainous duo eerily similar to William Holden and Ernest Borgnine's Pike and Dutch in Sam Peckinpah's (1969) *The Wild Bunch*. Yet if the thieving, backstabbing, murderous Clay epitomizes the moral compass of the two, then Tig's heinous behavior recalls the ruthless Vietnam critique of *Wild Bunch*. Tig and Clay often exchange ambiguous looks of empathy, knowing the lifestyle they've chosen, but like Pike and Dutch, neither can nor will give up such practices. In addition to excessive violence and other proclivities like smoking and drinking, SC bides its time with a host of "crow-eaters" and "hangarounds," the lowly females that circulate clubs with endless sexual favors in exchange for booze and protection. But as Clay warns Tig's urgency to join the "patch party" in season one's *Patch Over*: "[the] last time you had free range on pussy, you throat-pumped two brownies, [and] your DNA almost brought us down."[12]

Tig needn't be reminded of his transgressions, as they are a regular installment in his vocabulary. In season one, Tig and Clay break into the morgue to retrieve identifiable markers on two club-related corpses unearthed by Charming's Sheriff's Department.[13] Upon opening the first bag, Tig rolls his eyes in euphoria, and asks Clay if he's ever "ya know…with a *cold one*?" Clay responds with utter disgust, leaving the audience to connect the dots that Tig is seasoned in necrophilia. Another example can be seen when Tig gets kidnapped by bounty hunters in season two's *Eureka*. Tig forces the group to confess the nature of his apprehension by challenging their individual masculinities. One member finally acknowledges Tig is wanted in "Oregon" on counts of "indecent exposure" and "lewd acts" at a "livestock" venue. Here again the vague assumption [left to the viewer] is that Tig engaged in public proclivities, and perhaps worse than that, beastiality.[14]

Ultimately, Deputy Hale perhaps puts it best in his season two exchange with Jax and Clay:

> Hale: You guys cruise around here like heroes, and you and I know the truth
>
> Jax: And what truth is that?
>
> Hale: You're white trash thugs holding on to a dying dream.
>
> Clay: That is so poetic Chief…oh I'm sorry, its just Deputy Chief, right?
>
> Hale: It doesn't matter if I'm chief or not, you can't stop progress. It wont be long before SAMCRO is an ugly memory in the history of Charming. You enjoy the ride, while you still can.

Of course, in Clay's mind Hale is just "a half-bright clerk with a Wyatt Earp complex." Yet Hale's warning promotes a larger theme of *SoA* and later gunfighter Westerns like *The Wild Bunch* and *The Magnificent Seven* (Sturges, 1960), the history of progress cannot be stopped, only briefly postponed. The progressive world has no place for outlaws, and thus, the outlaw code can be viewed as a tragedy, something that cannot or will not end well.

Revising the Western and Biker History for a Post-9/11 Critique

Just as Peckinpah uses the Western to craft aesthetic forms of social commentary (Kitses, 2004), I argue Sutter performs the same function through his revision of Western genre tropes as a modern biker drama. Historically, motorcycle clubs evolved out of a response to veterans returning home from WWII (McDonald-Walker, 2000). In a way, the motorcycle experience beset a kind of cultural coping mechanism for postwar anxieties. Fast forward 60 years, American has been involved in multiple wars, now eclipsing years of wartime involvement in and beyond WWII, the Korean War, and Vietnam. Wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and circulating themes of war on terror and government control following 9/11 permeate U.S. foreign policy and American popular culture. This cultural permeation occurs through the lifeblood of connective tissue, media. 9/11 posits one of the most mediated events in history. The subsequent war on terror and aftermath become the first wars mediated *live* in first-person style. Along with thousands of troops experiencing fatal injuries, America experiences the fatal wounds of wartime financial burden. As an arguably war-induced economic recession began in the mid-2000s, alternative media forms began resonating escapist themes that provide mediated outlets for counterculture lifestyle. Passive

programming like out of time escapism in Matt Weiner's *Mad Men* (2007-2015) mediates [and medicates] the past through the lens of nostalgia, as a way to avoid or perhaps rethink the present. Vince Gilligan's *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) synthesizes border tensions and class warfare with the war on drugs in a post-recession America.

Meanwhile, cable's "rebel" FX focuses on the present and engages the flaws of post-9/11 America through its biker gang (im)morality play *SoA*. I argue that in the same way actual biker gangs evolved out of real veterans in postwar America following WWII, *SoA* mediates biker gangs for a generation steeped in visual culture, media literacy, and America's often-indirect exposure to the perils of war. Thus, in this way, *SoA* revises the histories of biker culture and the story of the American West, and uses such revisions to critique and cope with modern civilization in ways that straightforward debates have failed. In critiquing society through stylistic drama, through Shakespearean tragedy, Sutter might offer a new hope to an otherwise bleak perception of society.[15] Indeed, I believe we can observe how Sutter carefully repeats and revises the Western genre as an ideological and methodological pedagogy more so than proto-American genre toolbox. But audiences and scholars must weigh this dramatic pedagogy cautiously. Just as *SoA* resurfaces themes like the Native American plight, it still subverts this kind of topicality by marginalizing the theme yet again for plot convenience and kitschy pulp exploitation. Sutter and *SoA* heighten conversations about borders and boundaries of family and community but still must be held accountable for how we constitute these physical, ideological, and televisual spaces and histories.

Concluding Thoughts on a Western Ideological Genealogy

Collectively, *SoA* speaks to certain ideological codes steeped in hypermasculinity but contradictory to civil society and "politically correctness." While exaggerated for TV, this convergent problem between former and current masculinity norms arguably belies a telling fate older generations must now endure. I cannot directly experience the conflicts my grandfathers faced in their lifetimes any more than I can speak directly for them. Like the tough cowboys in Westerns or the gruff bikers on *SoA*, men like my grandfathers sometimes struggled to balance the tragic paradox between toughness and cruelty. Often their conflicts internalized, forcing them to find alternative ways to cope with their patriarchal pressures. I can with reservation call some of their methods antiheroic, perhaps on occasion tragic, yet ultimately human. While my grandfathers did not approach each situation atop a horse or bike, adorned in cowboy hat or riding helmet, they did navigate their individual journeys with consistent ideological codes. These codes diverged between small town living and urban setting, John Wayne and John Cassavetes,[16] but aligning emphasis on family and community, coffee and cigarettes, and hard work amidst grief and strife. Those Western values seem almost translucent now, the muddled biker morality as palpable as it is pulpy. *SoA* fell victim to its own conventionality in its final seasons with deeper submergence into darker tragic themes. I suggest that if audiences cannot course correct these ambiguous cultural pedagogies like prior generations absorbed from genre Westerns, American viewers might only be able to cope with its past and present through continuous cycles of repetition and revision.

Rhetorical Recap: Accessing and Assessing the Past Through Transmedia Texts

If chapter five's emphasis on B-movie biker conventions speaks to baby boomer audiences, then hopefully I have underscored how *SoA*'s overt and covert adherence to Western conventions appeals to "the Greatest Generation" of viewers that grew up watching midnight Westerns in the years following World War II. Noting the generational difference in taste and style between biker movies and Westerns speaks to shifting interests in American popular culture, itself reflective of the changing (and challenging) values in America throughout TV's history in the twentieth century. What gives a text like *SoA* contemporary appeal is the transmedia culture in which *all* mediated texts are accessible to a certain degree. I have not ventured into a Saturday matinee to watch a Western double feature, nor have I snuck into a midnight showing where biker movies go hand-in-hand with illegal flasks and reafer flashes between audiences. I belong to Generation X but live like a millennial, binging biker films on Amazon Prime afterhours in my office or when the family goes to bed.

Thus the pleasure of the text becomes one of temporal displacement, imagining what it would be like to be an audience of that caliber, in that social situation, participating in that cultural ritual. I do not have these firsthand experiences, but my dad and my grandfathers do. The pleasure of the text becomes one of familial relations in this way, where I can experience in small, mediated forms some of the conventions and messages that helped inform and shape their diverse ideological values. In the next chapter, I shift texts and theoretical emphasis to examine a single character's arc across four seasons of HBO's *Game of Thrones*. This shift is intentional in order to highlight

how genre-mixing (as we've now seen) is not a unique phenomenon for *SoA* but occurs across the televisual mediascape. Shifting to character arc also allows me to highlight additional ways that genre-mixing iconicity occurs, this time borrowing from literary and mythological archetypes that once again find a way back into the influence of the Western.

Chapter Seven

Innovating Female *Heidi-Redeemer* Archetypes into an Oppositional *Arya-Revenger* Anti-heroine in HBO's *Game of Thrones*.

Beginning in the spring 2011 television season, David Benioff and D.B. Weiss's adaptation of novelist George R. R. Martin's medieval fantasy *A Song of Ice and Fire* books series offered paycable channel HBO's riskiest venture in its 30-plus year history. Now five seasons in, the fantasy drama represents a cultural touchstone that generates audience acclaim and critical applause. The adaptation titled *Game of Thrones*—lifted from Martin's first *Ice and Fire* title—posits an array of melodramatic metaphors and criticisms, themes spanning power and gender to issues of war, family, and hierarchy class systems needed to sustain them. Martin, the author of the still-continuing book series, generates hundreds of characters and fictitious locations in his series; an improbable mission *GoT* showrunners' Benioff and Weiss simplify with success. While *GoT* mirrors Martin's world-building motif, early critics/audiences less familiar with the books communicate divisiveness toward *GoT*'s labyrinthine scope. Increased characters and scope extend areas where scholars might analyze and critique the drama's form in metaphorical, allegorical, and even rhetorical strengths and weaknesses. I argue a monolyth text like *GoT*—with its mythic world of characters and locations—requires precise execution and investigative strategy. Given this project's confines as a single chapter within a larger televisual framework, I emphasize one *GoT* character that exhibits how the text (re)produces an iconic heroine myth reorganized to meet postmodern renderings of trauma, loss, and revenge ideology.

Emphasizing the literary tradition of heroines, I analyze the character arc regarding sympathetic child female Arya Stark. Arya typifies a privileged White female from a prominent and powerful family, but as the grand narrative unfolds, Arya must reject childhood, identity, and privilege in order to survive harsh and uneven cultural

climates. Arya's journey throughout *GoT*'s first three seasons imitates an identifiable and mythic arc that evokes and redefines what authors John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett (2002) identify as a female *Heidi redeemer myth*. Subsequently, season four then innovates Arya into a re-categorization of anti-heroine revenger that draws influence from the innovating Western sub-genre, or "Revenger" plot. I follow Lawrence and Jewett's Heidi redeemer logic as a mythic structural archetype for the young girl/Anglo-European do-gooder. I close watch and rhetorically recap how the Arya Stark character initiates and then disembarks from archetypal norms in ways that invert and reverse the Heidi tradition along various turns. Although both Martin's literary series and HBO's fantasy drama continue in-progress with additional volumes/seasons to come, the show's four aired seasons orchestrate a logical and chronological beginning, middle, and traumatic end to Arya mirroring the Heidi myth. However, whereas Lawrence and Jewett (2002) identify Heidi as a quintessential "redeemer" figure, I reference Slotkin's (1998) Western film genre term "revenger" as the innovating motif in *GoT*. Thus, I re-appropriate Arya a *Heidi revenger*. Demarcating an oppositional shift from redemption to revenge reshuffles *GoT*'s polyvalence as a postmodern and perhaps post-9/11 text that posits female agency amidst rising globalist attacks on *familial* structures both ideological and physiological.

In an effort to simplify my argument, I conjoin details of Lawrence and Jewett's *Heidi redeemer* in phases that coincide [or contradict] Arya's character arcs throughout *GoT*'s first three seasons. Outlining Lawrence and Jewett's conceptual chronology allows these texts to engage a mirror effect with one another in three seasonal acts. I believe this strategy heightens understanding of parallels, contradictions, and

revelations about the nature of mythmaking among young female personas. In addition, I structure my argument according to the first three seasons to demonstrate how Arya's shifting arcs fit the mythic mold of Joseph Campbell's hero's journey while also paying homage to what Janet Rushing and Thomas Frentz (2005) theorize as "the Mythic Perspective" of *departure*, *initiation*, and *return* [or transformation]. A longer project might include a thorough introduction and legitimation of HBO's *Game of Thrones* as a mythmaking text with taut socio-political commentaries and visual-critical persuasions. I leave this task to future scholars and critics (and longer projects I pursue) for brevity and clear focus. Finally, I conclude with critical questions concerning *GoT* as a proto-globalist mythmaking vehicle that, like the newly coined *Heidi revenger*, renders the difference between epic and tragedy anthropomorphically inconceivable and thus elevates the text as a reflection on the human condition in times of great upheaval

The Heidi Myth According to Lawrence and Jewett.

The Heidi myth posits a longstanding place in literary and European popular cultural history. The name comes from the literary children's book *Heidi* written by Johanna Spyri and first published in 1880.[1] *Heidi* is as much an insight into the cultural history of the Swiss Alps as it is a character-driven children's story.[2] In addition, *Heidi* is acknowledged as perhaps the best-selling Swiss novel ever, having "sold over 50 million copies" worldwide.[3] The story centers on a young recently orphaned girl named "Heidi" who must travel to live with her reclusive grandfather on the outskirts of a quaint Swiss Alps village. The tale navigates tensions between isolationism and collectivism, and Heidi personifies a conduit between her *private* grandfather and the *public* or community-focused village. Heidi generally exudes a positive disposition

amidst her ambassador-like liminal role between grandfather and village. One culturally significant and allegorical observation is how Heidi as a character reflects or mirrors Sweeden's historical reputation as a neutral peacekeeping European territory. In this light, Heidi ideologically represents Sweden, an important symbolic trait that I argue Arya symbolizes among contemporary perceptions and postwar belief sets. By novel's end, Heidi successfully reforms grandfather in a way that bridges him back toward community.

Swiss ideological representation aside, *Heidi* functions as myth due to her narrative elasticity. The Heidi trope I identify recapitulates in various alternative forms as Lawrence and Jewett (2002) note in their book *The Myth of the American Superhero*. The authors discuss various incarnations of the Heidi myth that include Americanized versions like the 1913 Elleanor Porter novel *Pollyanna*, its sequels and film adaptations, as well as inspirations adapted into the television series like *Little House on the Prairie*[4] and *Highway to Heaven*. Each of these similarly repetitious narratives collectively constitutes what Joseph Campbell calls mythmaking.[5] Lawrence and Jewett expand mythic credos far beyond the Heidi character, and they argue this character type transcends the Swiss myth entirely. "Like Heidi, [the related myths] contrive to heal the sick and bring happiness to the lonely. A grateful world heaps upon them blessings and honor because their purity and cheerful helpfulness are the catalytic agency for modern miracles" (p. 65-67). Lawrence and Jewett cite *The Wizard of Oz*'s Dorthy, P. L. Travers' *Mary Poppins*, Maria of *The Sound of Music*, all varieties of *Little Orphan Annie*, the aforementioned *Pollyanna*, and even Eva of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as representative literary incarnations.

Indeed, the authors retroactively precede *Heidi* and acknowledge a literary archetype, "the emergence of the sexless heroine" (p. 69), an *orphan* pattern repeated in Charles Dickens' literary canon. These complementary examples establish a mythic literary lineage whereby numerous tropes and factors recur and recede. But this core concept of "redeemer figure" is where the authors' emphasis emerges and my criticism diverges. In part, the Arya-as-Heidi comparison contrasts to such an extent that I argue Arya often inverts and reverses the Heidi myth as much as she reflects it. To achieve this comparison/contrast, I simplify Lawrence and Jewett's Heidi myth interpretation. I utilize their methodological template as a lens to examine Arya's structural and narrative journey in *GoT* seasons 1-3. This analysis will reveal Arya's mythic journey and unveil her controversial role as post-network/post-9/11/postmodern revenge fantasy heroine.

According to Lawrence and Jewett (2002), the Heidi redeemer follows in 1) *the Protestant tradition* that involves 2) *the domestic realm* and 3) *individual transformation*. These qualities center on "the need for both evangelism and loving works" (p. 67). The literary equivalent emerges as 4) "a new redeemer figure, a superheroine—often a mere child—who 5) solves problems by 5) selfless love and 6) virtuous cheefulness" exhibits a 7) *model of purity*, 8) seeks *nothing for herself*, 9) *loves others* but maintains 10) *sexually chastity*.[6] Incidentally, this redeemer can act with almost "otherworldly" superpowers that enable success. I consider these ten factors along with additional combinations from Lawrence and Jewett's observations through a chronological/mythical analysis of Arya's televisual journey.

Act I: Visual Character Introduction and Mythic Departure

Pollyanna polyvalence in the Stark children. Arya first appears in the *GoT* pilot episode, *Winter is Coming*. Arya's introductory scenes successfully tease character development with virtually no dialogue from the gifted child actress. The book series recalls her homely nickname "Arya Horseface" in an effort to segregate Arya's plain if not quaintly butch demeanor when measured against her older princess-in-training sister, Sansa. "Winter is Coming" introduces both sisters inside a stone room where they undergo crochet training from their requisite nun/schoolmaster/nanny, "Nan." Sansa delicately fashions with her knitting tools. But Arya examines the blade-like qualities of her pin and eavesdrops outside where her masculine brothers congregate. These shots initiate Arya's proper feminist upbringing but tease her inward desires toward otherwise masculine traits.

Arya's second scene depicts an exodus or *departure* from *domestic space* when Arya interrupts her younger brother Bran's archery lesson in the courtyard. She lands a bullseye from behind his eyesight with defiant skill. Bran swings around, agitated. Arya greets him with a mock curtsey accompanied by a wry smirk. Her reaction teases Arya's liminal status between traditional feminine roles and her seemingly natural talents toward masculine traits; she even shoots from *behind* a fencepost, signaling gender barriers and indoor/outdoor spatial norms.[7] This outdoor versus indoor juxtaposition in Arya's first two scenes places her at odds with her siblings and society while foreshadowing complications she will later face. The third scene solidifies Arya's temporal fate when King Robert's caravan marches into the Stark family kingdom, Winterfell. The Starks line up in a chronological-patriarchal order to great the royal

party, but Arya is initially absent. Then, she arrives garnishing an infantryman helmet, disrupting her prim disposition within the privileged familial structure. King Robert swoons over Sansa, "My, you are a pretty one," and barely looks down to meekly ask Arya's name.

Later the Starks hold a great feast in Robert's honor and all the family attends in their prominent attire. Arya recalls the Pollyanna heroine/trickster when she flings a spoonful of food onto her prim and proper sister Sansa. Sansa, humiliated, shrieks while brother Robb escorts Arya to bed early. But Arya's character departs from Pollyanna's optimistic outlook on life when her and brother Bran's actions manifest a type of butterfly effect of misery and tragedy upon the Stark lineage. First, Arya's brother Bran replicates a Pollyanna mythic motif when he inadvertently climbs a tower and finds King Robert's wife Cersei partaking incestuous intercourse with her twin brother Jaime. Bran, like Pollyanna, loses use of his legs when Jaime pushes him out of the tower, presumably to his death. This crippling a/effect allows Bran and Pollyanna to each gain new perspective and appreciation for life as a result.

In episode two, *The Kingsroad*, Arya demasculinizes the incestuous prince Geoffrey Baratheon (heir to the throne) after he interrupts her swordfight with the boy son of a lowly cook. Geoffrey tries to attack Arya once she bests him, but her direwolf pup pounces him to the ground, bites and draws blood from his arm, and leaves him squealing painfully. Arya shoos her pup into the wilderness, and thus Sansa's pup is killed in retribution. The act leaves Geoffrey scorned toward the Starks and posits a *hate triangle*[8] between Sansa, Arya, and Geoffrey. This emphasis on hatred inverts and reverses Pollyanna's optimistic "Glad Game." In addition, the consequences of this

chance encounter play out throughout subsequent seasons and serve as benchmark toward future character motivations. In episode three, *Lord Snow*, Arya sits in a kitchen stabbing her cutting knife repeatedly into the table with childlike fury. The visual functions as a behavioral predictor and unconscious ritualization in motion. Nan asks what Arya is doing and Arya vehemently replies, "I'm practicing…for the *prince*. He's a liar and a coward and he killed my friend [the cook's son]." When her father Ned enters, Nan tells him "Arya would rather act like a beast than a lady." This insight leads Ned to make a pedagogic decision to cultivate Arya's aggressive desires with "dancing lessons," or code for fencing classes with a master swordsman named Cirio. Ned's decision evokes both a blessing and a curse as the same ideological mindset that later dooms Ned keeps Arya alive through numerous circumstances.

Season one draws to a somber and tragic conclusion with Ned Stark framed for treason and sentenced to death. In *The Pointy End*, the supposed honor guard decimates Ned Stark's companions in a military coup. A visceral series of onscreen slaughters include the death of multiple Stark loyalists that try and protect Arya and Sansa. When armored guards come for Arya, tutor Cirio fights off the soldiers with only a wooden sword. In defeat Cirio proclaims, "The first sword of Bravos does not run." He reminds Arya, "What do we say when death comes?" to which Arya responds, "Not today." The iteration marks the first of many instances where Arya must both *depart* from a mentor and acknowledge death. By season's end, her father Ned is beheaded and Arya must restart a lifestyle disguised as a boy to evade death. In true Dickensian fashion Arya gains wisdom via a peasant's lifestyle. She embodies the pauper role and inverts/reverses her gender performance to survive.

Act II: Initiations of Happenstance and/or Fate

~~*Heidi*~~ *Arya goes to live with grandfather [Tywin]*. Season two returns Arya to the Heidi tradition with an interesting twist on the myth. Tywin Lannister, an aging patriarch and military general with strong political alliances battles Arya's brother Robb in a continent-spanning war. Neither leader engages in hand-to-hand combat per se, which often relegates them to their respective war rooms. These war rooms take the form of tents, towers, or any available sanctuary. More importantly, these visual spaces predicate the rhetorical war of words between characters. In season two, Tywin acquires the stronghold kingdom of "Harrenhal" for his base of operations. Inside this fortress-in-ruin, Tywin's forces kill, maim, and torture many soldiers of the North. Due to a combination of luck and misfortune [a *Heidi*-esque balance], Arya and her friends end up captives to Tywin's army. Arya specifically winds up a "servant boy" within Tywin's chambers, where the two enact a dueling of wits cast over several episodes.

The Arya/Tywin encounters posit a rare early instance where *GoT* diverges from Martin's *ASoIaF* source material. Mythically these encounters, given Tywin's age and Arya's youth and considering their cross-gender opposition, replay the Heidi/grandfather arc with a wartime allegorical twist.[9] In season two's *The Old Gods and The New*, Arya continues a grooming period as Tywin Lannister's table servant and gains a keen taste for espionage. However, when the questionable councilman Littlefinger arrives to meet with Tywin, tension peeks, as Arya fears Littlefinger will recognize her. In several scenes Tywin opines the beneficiary powers that strong heritage yields. In multiple episodes he interrogates Arya's knowledge of House lineages to determine her background. When Tywin recognizes her highborn education,

he asks Arya to fetch a book his own military captain cannot distinguish. This emphasis on literacy cannot be lost in these scenes. Such emphasis ties back to a central *Heidi* plot point. Here, Heidi benefits from her own literacy and imparts literacy upon less fortunate invalids. *GoT* borrows this subject again in season three when another young princess—imprisoned due to her hideous skin disease—teaches an illiterate sea captain Davos to read while he wastes away in a castle dungeon. True to the mythic spirits of their respective authors, both Spyri and Martin empathize with marginalization and find medicinal power in literacy.

Patriarchal Tywin further investigates Arya's literacy origins in an additional "Old Gods" scene. Arya first tells him her father taught her to read, then that his occupation was stonemason. When Tywin calls her out on inconsistency, Arya responds, "He taught himself" adding that he is now dead. When Tywin questions, "What killed him?" Arya coldly deadpans, "Loyalty." Tywin is bemused once again and thus communicates growing trust. This slight emotional vulnerability, *trust*, allows Arya just enough benefit to steal an important raven letter from Tywin's table communicating strategic war intel. In her escape, the aforementioned illiterate militant catches Arya. She evades him enough to locate an accomplice she freed from death. This indebted assassin makes well on a second of three death wishes he previously granted Arya. His fatal gestures prove violently successful and vindicate Arya's growing survivalist/revenge mentality. However, burning the extra death wish keeps Arya from using it on [grandfather] Tywin, a move that in hindsight would end the war but cut short her transformational journey into Heidi revenger.

For Arya, her journey's second leg with the Bravos assassin ends bittersweet. After he trades three lives taken for three lives saved [*Heidi* again], the mystical killer offers to bring Arya "across the Narrow Sea" for education in the secret arts of his vengeful craft. But fate keeps Arya in Westeros, her journey regional and local, and her destiny clouded by impatient thirst for revenge.[10] Arya's second season arc suggests a *liminal* threshold between innocence and stolen youth, public performances for survival that code-switch gender, and ends in a *killer by proxy* ideology. This killer by proxy acceptance serves a liminal metaphor as Arya shifts from ritual wishes of violence into ritual commands of violence. Each shift marches Arya toward ceremonial transformation into ritual *acts* of violence and the emergent "Heidi revenger" motif teased in season three.

Act III: ~~The~~ No Return – Tragic Transformation

The double-edged sword of captivity-as-experiential learning. Season three finds Arya adrift in the wilderness, besieged by male captors, yet mystically able to maintain *sexual chastity*—on a program that offers very little—questing after a singular purpose and desire for revenge. The first obstacle Arya faces in season three occurs when their party heads north after her brother Jon. Their group is attacked and scattered by "The Brotherhood without Banners," an elite renegade squad that abandoned their duties after season one's royal shakeup. Since then, this group proclaims a defiant "righteous" purpose and religious loyalty toward the "Lord of Light." Their religious fanaticism contrasts Arya's nihilistic mirrored spiritual state, a condition comparable with Heidi.

For example, consider this pivotal conversation during season three's *The Climb*. Arya converses angrily with the Drunken Priest who guides the Brotherhood. In Arya's eyes, The Priest and the one-eyed knight commit ideaological treachery when they hand over Gendry (King Robert's bastard son) to a religious zealot known as "the Red Woman" Melissandre. Melissandre functions as a kind of pagan priestess/harlot for their religious sect and her persuasive power over men displays dominance except to Arya. When the Red Woman, the Drunken Priest, and the one-eyed knight resurface from the Brotherhood's cavernous hideout, two guards seize Gendry for imprisonment. Arya criticizes their actions and calls into question their hypocrisies. The drunken priest's words iterate the hollow political truths of compromise:

> Arya: What are you doing? Let go of him! Tell him to stop! [Gendry] wants to be one of you! He wants to join the Brotherhood, stop them!
>
> Barrick: We serve The Lord of Light. And the Lord of Light needs this boy.
>
> Arya: Did the Lord of Light tell you that or did she?
>
> *A guard carries two large pouches of gold over to Sir Barrick.*
>
> Arya: You're not doing this for your God. You're doing this for *gold*.
>
> The Drunken Priest: We're doing it for *both*, girl. We can't defend the people without weapons and horses and food. And we can't get weapons, and horses, and food without gold.

This interaction displays the socio-political corruption necessary for supposed religious idealists to function. Arya condemns their actions in ways that reinforce Heidi's social values like family and community. A second scene extends the tension and transitions

Arya from a naïve revenge dreamer into existentially indoctrinated vengeance philosophizer:

> Sir Barrick: Come sit by the fire, child.
>
> Drunken Priest: Not talking, eh? That's a first.
>
> Arya: I don't talk to traitors.
>
> Sir Barrick: I didn't like giving up the boy.
>
> Arya: But you *did*. You took the gold and you gave him up.
>
> Sir Barrick: The Red God is the *One True God*. You've seen His power. When He commands, we obey.
>
> Arya: He's not *my* one true god.
>
> Sir Barrick: No? Who's yours?
>
> Arya: *Death*.

This enlightening [or darkening] character moment between Arya and the drunken priest teases out her callus spiritual exigency. Compare Arya's crossroads with what I identify as Heidi's own abyss moment in an excerpt from *Heidi* chapter XI:

> The grandmother called her to come close, and then laying the book aside, said, "Now, child, tell me why you are not happy? Have you still the same trouble at heart?"
>
> Heidi nodded in reply.
>
> "Have you told God about it?"
>
> "Yes."
>
> "And do you pray every day that He will make things right and that you may be happy again?"

"No, I have left off praying."

"Do not tell me that, Heidi! Why have you left off praying?"

"It is of no use, God does not listen," Heidi went on in an agitated voice, "and I can understand that when there are so many, many people in Frankfurt praying to Him every evening that He cannot attend to them all, and He certainly has not heard what I said to Him."

"And why are you so sure of that, Heidi?"

"Because I have prayed for the same thing every day for weeks, and yet God has not done what I asked." (Chapter XI)

This text highlights Heidi's frigid spiritual status and her grandmother's aged religious wisdom. Here we see the similar young female Heidi in a weakened state and at a crossroads of spiritual doubt. Like Arya, Heidi represents the critical reflexivity children must face when growing up. However, inability to deal with the hardships of their respective lives ultimately pushes Heidi and Arya in polar ideological directions. Heidi stays and reforms those around her. But in *GoT*, when the Brotherhood abruptly change their travel plans, Arya runs away into the woods where a runaway knight and sworn enemy nicknamed "the Hound" pulls her [back] into the dark (e.g. the *abyss*).

GoT showrunner David Benioff acknowledges on the HBO OnDemand "Inside the Episode" special that Arya, "has her hitlist that she recites often." One scene Benioff recalls shows Arya sitting by a fire recounting the names of those she prays she can one day kill: "Geoffrey, Cersei, Illyn Pain, Sir Meryn, [pause] the Hound." This oration communicates a transition that "death" is thus of *ritual* concern. Recognizing Arya's narrative shift toward ritual signals a pivotal development in her *revenger*

transformation. Arya's jaded perception further mirrors the middle chapter of Spryi's Heidi chapter XI. Incidentally, *Heidi* chapter XI is titled, "Heidi Gains In One Way And Loses In Another" and mirrors these recurring themes in Arya's young life. Arya often finds traumatic balance as a tragic equalizer in her life journey toward adulthood.

Little Orphan ~~Annie~~ Arya. From youth departure in season one to season two's initiation into mercenary codes, I argue Arya's season three *death philosopher* transition marks a third monumental ideological shift. Indeed her very outlook on life descends into a metaphysical abyss. Her revenge hit list orations perform a ritual function and the verbal communication initiates intent that signifies a decided shift from revenge fantasy, mere *words*, to the actualization of vengeance, transgressive *deeds*. Arya spends several season three scenes deepening her ceremonial and repetitious malcontent. Tragically however, Arya has yet to fully reach the cataclysmic epoch in her heroine journey.[11] I argue that while Arya reaches a significant abyss moment at season one's penultimate episode—virtually viewing her father's beheading—Arya's true moment of spiritual nihilism occurs in the similarly virtual viewing of *the Red Wedding*.[12] The notorious and meticulously foreboding "Red Wedding" ends with Arya's brother Robb and mother Catelyn brutally shot and stabbed to death following an arranged wedding ceremony that Robb dishonorably backed out of when he chose to "marry for love." Robb epitomizes a polarizing figure in Westeros, having started a war to avenge their father's death. Inevitably Robb's own young leadership and naïve hubris as "King of the North" create more disenfranchisement than camaraderie amongst his brothers in arms.

The significance of the Red Wedding on Arya's psyche is immediate and traumatic in that she arrives both *just in time* and *only too late* to intervene in any

meaningful way. Once again happenstance and/or fate enacts the "Heidi curse" upon Arya where she *gains in one hand* but *loses in the other*. The Hound catches Arya before she gets herself killed, but her inability to *return home* alongside her family capsizes the hero's journey. Arya witnesses the execution of Robb's direwolf, the grown equivalent of her own lost pup from *The King's Road* that each Stark sibling received back season one's *Winter is Coming*. The symbolic death sends Arya into shock and visually communicates the gravitational shift occurring. However horrific Robb's death may be, the death of their mother Catelyn denotes Arya's prerequisite transition into another Heidi archetype/Dickensian myth/ideological incarnation, *orphan* status. Amidst death and exhaustion and mental/physical violence emerges the orphan trope of familial isolation. Arya officially joins the Heidi-orphan legacy that spans literary history, from Charles Dickens characters to Ian Flemming's 007 to the often-repeated superhero motif observed in Bruce Wayne/Batman and countless others, Arya finds herself alone and powerless with a singular negative emotion to cling to, *revenge*.

Performing Victimage to Enact Agency—Emergence of a ~~Heidi~~ Arya Revenger.

The season three finale, *Mhysa*, unveils Arya's official transformative act of dissention/ascension. The Hound and Arya flee the site of the Red Wedding and soon stumble upon a small troupe of soldiers drunkenly sitting around a fire bragging of their roles in the Stark deaths. Without hesitation Arya slides off their horse and sneaks up on the militants. She inquires, "Mind if I keep warm?" before one bloke tells her to *eff off*. Arya emphasizes meekly, "But I'm hungry," positing herself as weak and famished in the Dickensian tradition. The troop angrily resists in an even harsher tone. Arya restarts

her approach and gauges another potential weakness, *greed*. “I’ve got money,” she whimpers before revealing the two-sided coin given to her by season two’s assassin-mentor. The closest soldier inspects the coin and Arya assures him “It’s worth a lot.” He reaches to obtain the coin, but it “slips” from Arya’s hand to the ground. “Sorry.” Then as the soldier reaches down, Arya instinctively pulls his helmet downward, reveals a dagger, and starts stabbing him repeatedly in the neck. Blood shoots out in spurts as the other soldiers, half drunk on wine, clamor for their swords.

By the time they reach their feet the Hound dismounts and intersects between Arya and the soldiers. The Hound dispenses with three to four men with genocidal ease while Arya finishes the soldier she stalked. “Where did you get the knife?” the Hound barks as they look down upon their prey. “From you,” Arya responds. The Hound looks down to find his dagger missing, to his astonishment. But instead of flailing her, he assesses the context. “Is that the first man you’ve killed?” Arya concurs that it is. Then the Hound warns her, “Next time you’re going to do something like that, tell me first.” The Hound then sits by their campfire and begins eating the soldiers’ rotisserie meat.

Thus, after three visually epic and painfully tragic seasons, through a combination of happenstance, fate, privilege, and persecution, Arya follows what Rushing and Frentz identify as *the mythic perspective*, a theoretical journey of departure, initiation, and transformation that I argue may not necessarily support a heroic return. Arya returns but doesn’t, her “home” is no more. Her reward is not salvation but instead *survival*. There is no redemption, only revenge. And with *Mhysa*, Arya’s transformation evokes not a redeemer like Heidi but a *revenger* in the bleakest sense of cold-blooded “justice.” Slotkin (1998) theorizes that, “In such a tale, the

redemption of the hero from the darker side of his own nature has little or no meaning for a larger society" (p. 382).

In terms of *mise en scène*, "Revenger Westerns differ from the… in their emphasis on the neurotic element in the hero's makeup and in the highly stylized *film noir* atmosphere with which the action is invested—deep shadows, claustrophobic settings, and grim and hostile landscapes embodying a dim view of human nature and human possibilities" (Slotkin, 1998, 381). Already I have acknowledge great contrast in Arya's spatial experiences—from claustraphobic enclosures of Tywin's Harrenhal tower and the cavernous mercenary cave to the expansive King's Road journey to and from King's Landing. Yet perhaps no scene captures grimness of deep shadows, Western binaries of interiority/exteriority, and the revenger's inward/outward hostility like the season four premiere, *Two Swords*. After the episode-long series of character-establishing scenes, the final sequence begins with a pan down from the tall wood line to Arya sitting sidesaddle on the Hound's horse. The Hound sits behind keeping her under his close watch. The two ride slowly through the gloomy forest meadows. They pass by a family of pale rotting corpses strewn across an open wagon. Later they spy upon a tavern where a familiar group of guards enter. Slotkin observes that, "The revenger always faces a world in which social authority and community support are lacking; he must rely on himself, and perhaps one other person, for the fulfillment of his obsessional quest and/or redemption" (p. 382). Thus the convention enters full swing whence the Hound refuses her desire for confrontation.

Just as the Hound previously failed to register his missing dagger, Arya again slips out of his periphery and into the tavern with singular motivation. The inn sequence

denotes the “Two Swords’s” climax and establishes the revenger tone for Arya throughout season four. In addition, closer examination reveals *GoT* destabilizes traditional audience perspectives toward the fantasy genre not only through dense narrative complexity but also through strategic (if not subversive) cross-genre iconic suggestion. Covertly, the tavern scene closely resembles a frequent Western trope in the saloon showdown. Thus imitating genre iconicity, narrative continuity between Arya and the Hound recalls the graphic tenor of revenger politics and Spaghetti Western antiheroics made iconic by director Sergio Leone and actor/director/producer Clint Eastwood.

Juxtaposing season four’s “Two Swords” and Leone’s (1965) *For a Few Dollars More* draws closest comparison between *GoT* and the spaghetti western sub-genre.[13] While the scenes are not exact replicas, they mirror one another through genre-mixing iconicity. Outside the inn, Arya’s dour wardrobe strongly resembles the iconic poncho saddled upon Eastwood’s *Man with No Name*. Both scenes emphasize cautious entrance into congested (and contested) spaces, evoking the Western binary opposition between interiority/exteriority (Wright, 1975), which also signifies tensions between civilization and wilderness (Cawelti, 1977). Because *GoT* and spaghetti westerns each traverse narrative norms and conventional rules, interior spaces appear foggy and overstuffed, claustrophobic and ultimately dangerous. A POV scan across each respective room underscores the urban rot that "progress" brings paradise.

Both scenes initially conceal the antihero/antiheroine as saloon surveyor, only to reveal his/her intentions through calculated risk. Leone/Eastwood create tension through silence during a forced game of cards, while Benioff/Weiss stage tension via gameful

conversation where each threat signals a bid and raised stakes. The texts thus invert one another through verbal versus nonverbal action. These dueling sequences even pause for final indulgence (smoke/libation) before tension breaks. Once tension peaks, each scene dissolves the myth of interior safety through righteous antihero vengeance and nihilistically styled ultraviolence. Eastwood's revolver puncuates those "Wanted" in the Wild West just as the Hound's longsword punctures those soldiers who want him in Westeros.

Each scene concludes climactic action with optimistic misdirection of supposed victory. Despite surviving their encounters, the respective antiheroes/antiheroine set off on horseback. These cold-blooded killers exit into oblivion. Particularly for Arya/Hound, the landscape signifies not the Western myth of utopia but instead the smoldering ashes of dystopia. Like Leone's iconoclast Western revisionism, Westeros is revealed to be paradise lost. These pessimistic tones imitate and innovate the revenger motif in more ways than one. The revenger plot device and character persona emphasizes moral ambiguity in "the schizophrenic style of the hero, the violent explosions of passion alternating with precarious moments of quiet reflection" (Kitses, 2008, p. 142). Negative transformation haunts the revenger persona. "Driven in an unnatural direction, away from the community, the hero is morally ambiguous, his actions carrying a nihilistic undertone" (p. 143). Of course, what Slotkin describes is not a "hero" in the chivalrous sense so much contemporary renditions of *antihero* qualities. Indeed, the revenger persona functions as a liminal figure "at the mercy of paradox and contradiction" (p. 143). We see this through Arya's nihilistic philosophizing in season three and again in season four as she copes with loss through vengeance.

Arya's transformational change reflects an ideological realignment frequent in modern media, where audiences and artists appear to thirst and bathe upon revenge fantasy as a cultural modus operandi. In an age of black ops, covert kills, wars on terror, and the immanent threat of drone strikes, Arya's Heidi revenger functions as a most potent modern myth established through HBO's visual spectacle *Game of Thrones*. A final question the Arya-revenger journey surfaces is *What kind of heroine does the twenty-first century audience require?* Conventional response seems to reject the hero in favor of an anti-heroine. Or perhaps *how might Arya's ideological aggression/regression—and subsequent audience identification—signify current trends in myth-making public discourse?* If we comfortably align our answer with Arya's choices, we may view this allegory as epic. If we navigate discomfort and remorse reflected in her path, the allegory proves tragic. Cross-cultural scholars might theorize this a perspectival issue, but Heidi may simply think of it as a *moral* one.

Rhetorical Recap: The 'Loner' Archetype as a Normative Western Value

Like chapter six, we see the looming influence Westerns still hold over modern social imaginaries. But larger than that we can acknowledge that just as contemporary texts imitate and innovate from the Western conventions of film and TV history, the Western as an American genre imitates ideas and archetypes that predate it in literature and mythology. Arya's journey fashions together Western concepts of the revenger sub-genre as much as she draws upon Dickensian tropes of orphan identity. Each of these genre suggestions play into the character's personal arc, one that plays with the much older mythological qualities of the hero's journey, namely the allegorical phases of

initiation, departure, and return. But I also close watch yet another televisual example highlighting the loner archetype, a symbolic stand-in for individuality as progress. Individualism versus community represents a staple archetype in the western genre. *GoT*, like *SoA* and other texts, plays with this dualistic tension as an identifiable normative value. In the latter example, reading SAMCRO's internal allegiance to their club as "family" and community becomes a reverberated trope as often as the club's individual and organizational privileging of Self. I explore the political ramifications of competing persuasions later in chapter ten. In the case of *GoT*'s Arya Stark the loner archetype resonates powerfully and denotes a clear cultural currency among fans and critics, reinforcing such narrative emphasis as an ideological norm among contemporary Western values.

I am not an orphan nor was my sister. But I can draw upon themes of loneliness and the inability to control one's situation as a youth, especially growing up in a small town with constricted town values and ideologies of normativity. In my sister I recognize Aryan qualities, particularly the need to look inward for strength in situations of isolation. As when Arya remained behind the stables unable to join her brothers in archery, my sister experienced alienation ranging from when her closest friends developed into more natural athletes, or when her home church she attended from birth favored her ex-boyfriend. Like a sitcom cliché the new worship pastor's son who swooped into town just in time to retrieve scholarships and accolades she had perhaps *earned* from traditional rite or duty. My sister also developed an avid passion for reading and knows the "classics" of Jane Austin and Eleanor Porter, as well as the Nancy Drew series. Reading became an escapism of pleasure but also an inward

journey, molding the strong will and character of the woman she grew into. Like Arya, a girl accustomed to being told what she couldn't do, my sister pursues her interests with the kind of female agency that decides what she *can* do and be for herself and others.

Otherwise my sister would also agree with me that there's a certain grounding that comes with growing up in a small town. And while we cannot control certain factors when we are younger, the pleasures escapism brings can help alter our course. This is especially true in the post-Internet age where *access* denotes a new class of privilege (or at least the perception of one). Access to certain kinds of texts can provide escapism and pleasure but also informs and educates and extends new dimensions of community and culture. With extensions of community and culture in mind, the next three chapters comprise a section on examination of audiences in three unique ways. First, I stay with the *GoT* text in order to examine the many modes and methods of discourse that grow out of this popularized text. As with previous shifts in genre discussions, chapter eight shifts from examining the text to explore many kinds of paratexts that generate and circulate online discourse while extending discussion of spreadable versus sticky texts. By close reading the subtle ways in which circulation occurs, a deeper understanding of the text's polyvalence emerges in addition to the growing understanding of how the pleasure of the text leads to both temporal displacement and a larger cross-cultural phenomenon in global temporialism.

Chapter Eight

Game(s) of Fandom: The Hyperlink Labyrinths that Paratextualize *Game of Thrones* Fandom

Premiering in March 2010, HBO's *Game of Thrones* [or *GoT*] fashioned a reputation for layered narrative hybridity that challenges critics and fans alike. Audiences were mandated to follow not only multiple characters expanding across medieval fantasy realms but also to successfully navigate a nontraditional storytelling style that de-stabilizes central protagonists while repositioning antiheroes and villains as sympathetic signifiers for audience identification. Based upon fiction writer George R. R. Martin's [GRRM] now synonymous *A Song of Ice and Fire* book series [*ASoIaF*],[1] *GoT* grows in viewership at a time where HBO works to expand its brand legitimacy to foreign and thus global markets.[2] As familiarity with the cultural construct gains popularity beyond niche readers and initial inquisitors to the HBO series, networks of fan sites stimulate an aggressively expansive form of cultural capital. At the same time, the girth of online TV critics (often a hybrid between pensive paid-bloggers and reformed academics) and criticism explores the televisual implications that *GoT* depicts. These paratexual critical forums both legitimate and interrogate the cultural capital now required in order for popular entertainments to expand and retain audience attention. Such forums reinforce what some call "the new intertextual commodity."[3] Also in play is the staying power necessary to establish if not exploit franchises and fandom toward exhausting the symbiotic units' extended narrative-consumer potential.

On one hand, paratextual online discourse legitimates a certain formerly highbrow association with what constitutes not only must-see TV but also must-review, discuss, judge, weigh in, binge, and so on. Ongoing discussions constitute a cornerstone process of what critics identify as the *prestige cable drama* or appointment television for those incapable of determining such exclusivity. Yet beneath the corporate team-

cheers and jeers of every *Salon*, *Slate*, or *AV Club* websites, the raw materials gathered by "purist" Internet enthusiasts come together at *WinterIsComing.net* [*WIC*], a sub-site created in 2008 that functions as a kind of catch-all for *GoT*-related news, rumors, reactions, and speculations. *WIC* is not the only *GoT*-focused website—indeed other sites like *Westeros.org* and *WatchersOnTheWall* each function like meta- kingdoms warring for online fan legitimacy and *GoT* cultural currency—but *WIC* does offer a tragic case study, mimetic of *GoT*, wherein too great of legitimacy can ultimately yield conformity. As cultural clout for *GoT* grows dramatically each season, even the independently created cannot stave the off the attentive hegemony of media conglomeration.[4]

This chapter focuses on examining *contrasting fandom ontologies*[5] between these two concurrent fandom online sourcing styles (TV recappers versus *WIC*'s catch-and-release info-scroller) in relation to GRRM and Benioff/Weiss's HBO adaptation. First regarding TV critics that specialize in *recapping*, this chapter looks into how they weigh critiques across a spectrum of reactions that inevitably feeds the show's already existing reputation for layering and depth. Recapping emerges as an institutional method for fan-critics, fan-tagonists and industry-sponsored promoters to extend paratextual discourses and discursive battles over context and content.[6]

Second, examining the monolithic hyperlink gatherer *WinterIsComing.net* as another unique hybrid demonstrates how fans can legitimate appreciation for a given brand or property via organizational accumulation and cooperative online community.[7] Whereas the former attempts objectivism through criticism, the latter adopts objectivity through surveillance-accumulation or the constant gathering of *GoT*-related data.

Together these two modes of Internet fandom mirror the franchise property they reflect through the three concepts of world-building, non-linear storytelling, and strategic ambiguity. These conclusions aid scholars and audiences in understanding how televisual properties navigate both inside and outside the control of their producers while they collect and establish both legitimate and imitative archives throughout developmental, broadcast, and reception phases of cultural production.

GoT as a metaphorical explanation to de-contextualize labyrinthine fan faction discourses

The use of metaphor posits one of the most successful ways in which storytellers distill the complex values and emotions of the human experience into consumable narratives. Lay audiences might call this transformational process "magical" while some scholars may identify it as "spectacle" just as industry producers maintain a host of veritable terms not the least of which would be "marketable." Contemporary post-industrial/post-global capitalism places a premium as well as stringent demands on the value of metaphorical language as a commodity exchange rich not only in cultural value among audience-consumers but also economic value in an increasing transmedia global market. This chapter embraces creative metaphor in ways that synthesize interwoven relationships between texts and paratexts, the narrative world building of GRRM and now Benioff/Weiss with the dialogic worldbuilding among niche fan populations that comprise professional TV recappers. Thus identification and theorization of liminal fandom behaviors are made possible by drawing upon recognizable examples for those familiar with the *GoT* or *ASoIaF* series.

I use the HBO dramas as a primary reference for two reasons. First, the HBO television series captures global fascination arguably more so than GRRM's literary texts. Second, because larger audiences and wider demographics sample the show over the in-production book series, it is logical to draw upon the cultural impact that the TV drama holds over fans as well as paratextual discourse generated through online news venues. This chapter argues that structuring a metaphorical context demonstrates the text's metaphorical potency, as well as the text's reflective value, which thus communicates the rhetorical power and transmedia cultural resonance generated from GRRM's creative vision.

This essay identifies and investigates the *hyperlink labyrinths* that contextualize GoT fandom. The aforementioned recapper culture and *WIC* database comprise two forms of *oppositional engines* for *GoT* paratextual discourse that compliment one another in their distinct designs. The phrase *oppositional engine* proposes a term signifying the dialectic distinction between these two industry brands of fandom. The professional recapping culture in mainstream news sites both reacts and responds to texts like *GoT*. Recappers acknowledge competing and agreeing voices that promote the similar reactionary experiences. In contrast, the *WIC* fan site functions as a "catch-all" data mine or perhaps communal hub for any/all *GoT* information. Both exude similar hyperlinking technologies that posit them as *engines* for information. As blog-like, both function politically to produce powerful discourses that encourage fandom and extend brand awareness.[8] Yet often these engines run in oppositional directions.

The following sections unpack the first of these two oppositional engines previewed as "recapping culture." Recap culture assumes massive popularity online in

an era where industries require "clicks" to justify "costs," hence the advent of *clickbait* as a term to describe how web sites now lure readers.[9] The rhythmic nature of recapping functions like a labyrinthine enabler that clutters together combinations of description and reaction but varies in depth when it comes to interpretation and evaluation.[10] Following the cultural resonance of recappers and reapping, this essay then scales the metaphorical walls of *WIC* and examines the communal and industrial cache that catchall engines offer fan communities. Along these oppositional engine routes, balance between genre theory oppositions of imitation and innovation ground and extend this essay's contribution to fan studies. Theoretical balance includes incorporating and introducing several old and new terms fan studies scholars will recognize. Implicating the theoretical language of fan studies speaks to the discipline's short but growing history as well as interdisciplinary dexterity and utility. Ideally, this essay will introduce terms fan studies and media scholars may find useful for future works. Ultimately, this essay seeks to extend past-present-future conversations through a combination of critical-cultural and original insights.

GoT as Labyrinth Text ⇔ GoT fandom as Labyrinthine Paratext

The world-building mechanics that construct and communicate GRRM's fantasy universe of *ASoFaI* and *GoT* evoke one of the most aggressive creative accomplishments that rival if not exceed similar creations like J. R. R. Tolkein's *Lord of the Rings/The Hobbit* book series/film franchise and George Lucas' expansive and lucrative *Star Wars* universe. Unlike other globally popular (and massively populated) fiction worlds such as the comic book universes of DC and Marvel Comics, respectively, Martin's world constitutes original content drawn together by a single

mind,[11] unlike the hundreds of production staff that scatter a dozen countries across several continents to create HBO's prestige fantasy epic.[12] The scale of GRRM's vision and Benioff/Weiss' HBO adaptation boasts the largest cast in the history of television.[13] Each season before *GoT* returns from hiatus, fan sites flutter with charts detailing volumes of characters, motivations, alliances, and predicaments so that audiences can reacquaint themselves to the show's narrative convolution.[14] The books feature increasingly complex maps that detail the fictional geographies of "Westeros" and "Essos." For the TV series, the HBOGO app features digitally interactive maps that expand territories, kingdoms, etc., as the show grows in intricacy each year. Aside from GRMM's ever-expanding characters and locations, Benioff/Weiss continue to innovate new production approaches and storytelling stylistics that suggests diverse genres beyond epic fantasy.[15]

Themes range the gauntlet of televisual-cinematic emotional expression and visual storytelling, from patriarchal issues to gender troubles, from sidekick comedies to ancient horrors, from war allegories to courtroom trials, from romance novels to torture porn. *GoT* revels in the kinds of narrative density that transcends conventional characters, locations, genres or expectations. That said transcending (and transgressing) audience and fan expectations comes at great cost. But while labyrinthine production design stylistics[16] engage viewers in ways few TV series have, R-rated creative freedom and HBO-encouraged exploitative adultness posits *GoT* in the crossfire of fans and anti-fans alike.[17] Thus emerges a paratextual labyrinth that exceeds *GoT* in size, scope, space, and temporal elasticity.

Jonathan Gray draws upon the work of Gerard Genette for his definition of paratexts. Gray classifies paratexts as "those semi-textual fragments that surround and position the work."[18] Paratexts traditionally encircle a master text without necessarily penetrating its diegetic space. For contemporary TV texts, a series' popularity may dictate heavy or light volumes of paratextual discourse. In the case of *GoT*, paratextual fan factions compete and unite in ways that herald and challenge the course of the series. Discourse may include issues of translation from literary to TV text, the role violence and/or sexual violence plays as contextual versus gratuitous, and the taboo ritual of discussing spoilers in advance of *GoT* airings. Fan fervor amplifies through the progression of digitized devices couples with the onset of multimedia conglomerations, convergence cultures, and transmedia storytelling. Perhpas the text/paratext relational dynamics become so spreadable that the situational confusion becomes sticky. Fan-scholars recognize the intertwined challenges that accompany media texts, fan factions, and paratextual discourses. Gray names negative fan factions "anti-fans" and speaks to their distinction:

> Although the fan is positively charged, what of those who are negatively charged? What of anti-fans? This is the realm not necessarily of those who are against fandom per se, but of those who strongly dislike a given text or genre, considering it inane, stupid, morally bankrupt and/or aesthetic drivel.[19]

In some ways, Gray highlights the utility of viewing fandom as a democratic process wherein disagreeing bodies offer variant perspectives.

Derek Johnson offers a theoretical variation with his advent of the term *fan-tagonism*. Johnson theorizes how fantagonism denotes the "ongoing, competitive struggles between both internal factions and external institutions to discursively codify the fan-text-producer relationship according to their respective interests".[20] For *GoT*, the situation becomes thrice layered between original book author GRRM, showrunners Benioff/Weiss, and each episode's director. While the series receives praise for narrative consistency and artful televisual translation,[21] certain interpretive ambiguities demonstrate how diverting visions complicate already complex production processes and narrative densities. One example of diverting vision can be observed through the aging of the Stark family/children on *GoT*. The book series runs much closer together temporally, whereas because of the behemoth production schedule,[22] casting demands, and narrative complexity, the child actors originally cast experience varying growth spurts that must alter the timeline of the series or risk diegetic disconnection from viewers.[23]

A second hypothetical issue that inverts the child actor-age problem is the sexualization of child actors, or rather, shifting character ages on the show depicted in sexual situations *as* children in the books.[24] This kind of socio-cultural navigation thrust enormous moral-ethical responsibility upon the various collaborators as well as audiences. Thus, for texts like *GoT* and their respective fan factions, Johnson's fan-text-producer relationship could be extended to reflect the author-adaptor-interpreter motif in place of "producer." Furthermore, the literary fan factions posit an additional layer wherein two simultaneous textualities coexist in a temporal race toward the texts' conclusions. Following this extension, perhaps an indefatigable equation that mitigates

dueling textualities may adjust the fan-text-producer equation for the appropriate layers: (Literary fans+/-TV fans+/-Literary/TV fans)→(Literary Text/TV Text)→(Original Author+/-TV Showrunners+/-Director Vision). This almost comical extension of Johnson's original equation helps identify at least one area of contemporary complexity that labyrinthine texts like *GoT* face. But what of labyrinthine fandom?

Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington agree that, "the changing cultural status of fans is probably best illustrated by the efforts of those in the public gaze, such as celebrities and politicians seeking to connect with consumers and voters by publicly emphasizing their fan credentials."[25] The role of celebrity fans (e.g. celebrities *as* fans) and even celebrity meta-fans (e.g. celebrities famous for a text that are also fans of the text) stresses the significant role that social media plays in the proliferation of transmedia texts. President Barack Obama made notorious headlines in his 2012 *People* magazine interview—in which he boasts about Saturday afternoon TV binges of Showtime's *Homeland* and HBO's *Boardwalk Empire*[26]—and with the President's 2014 request to HBO Studio Chief Richard Plepler for advanced copies of *Game of Thrones* and *True Detective* for personal use during an extended holiday weekend.[27] In recent years, the TV serial drama steadily rose in prominence over film and comic book industries at San Diego's Comic Con media-cultural convention.

In 2014, numerous publications pronounced *GoT* the convention's defacto "winner" in terms of fan buzz and producer-actor cooperation.[28] In some ways, the *GoT* fan wagon circles itself as the show's social-media savvy self-aware actors and actresses evoke and perform what we might call meta-fandom moments of intertextual reflexivity. For example, in 2014 *GoT* actress Lena Headey defiantly posted cryptic

spoilers through playfully concocted photos on her Instagram page. Reactions were decidedly mixed among fans and critics but her social media use *as* breaking the fourth wall points to a new hybrid between brand extension and celebrity-fans.[29] This is what Jenkins means when he assesses that, "media companies act differently today because they have been shaped by the increased visibility of participatory culture: they are generating new kinds of content and forming new kinds of relationships with their consumers."[30] In other words, HBO doesn't want to risk sounding like a cultural grandfather when, for instance, *GoT* gains cultural clout as the number one pirated television show four consecutive years on air.[31] Instead, HBO's personnel frequently plays it cool (like TV's "the Fonze" or perhaps "Uncle Jesse") and allows such piracy to *increase* their prestige status and global currency as a sought after brand, especially in the wake of Netflix's rival success.[32]

Meanwhile the ontology of recap culture provides unique spaces to retort and reform production and institutional issues. Recappers legitimize discursive sights/sites that debate ethical and socio-cultural questions. Insolently these discursive entanglements identify topics that underlie HBO's self-aware gratuitous branding.[33] On the other hand, textual shortcomings like instances of *sexposition*[34] throughout the series and season four's "rape versus consent" debate[35] fuel actual discourse that increases the paratextual validity fandom fuels and then demonstrates a recourse impact on perceptions of the text, reflections of how society should engage taboo subject matter, and in effect elevate legitimacy for fan studies. This issue engages what Pam Wilson describes as "narrative activism,"[36] where active fans campaign to eliminate conflicting agents—for example between producers and writers or book authors and TV adaptors—

from causing further harm to the diegetic text and/or the shared interpretive vision beheld by fans.[37]

Recap Culture as Discursive Paratextual World-Building and Real-World Debating

In *Textual Poachers*, Jenkins theorizes how *viewing strategies* "made possible by the technology's potentials, extend the fans' mastery over the narrative and accommodate the community's production of new texts from the series materials."[38] In its context, Jenkins' commentary on viewing strategies emphasizes the technological innovation that "VCRs, Reruns, and Rereading" have on the historical evolution of fan participation and meaning making. While Jenkins original intent works within its historically dated cultural context, his commentary toward the fandom nature of viewing strategies extends contemporary discussion. Certainly VCRs enable the kinds of rereading that affords mass audiences larger accessibility to not only text(s) but also the kinds of functions that temporally displace texts so that fans can absorb, slow down, fast-forward, pause, and generate close readings if not entirely new interpretations and uses of/for content. The onset of Internet proliferation, DVD/Bluray and recording apparatuses like TiVo/DVR/etc., as well as more recent transmedia technologies and culturally popular practices like binge watching and live-tweeting provide a plurality of viewing processes and a multiplicity of interpretive-consumptive avenues.

One avenue of particular interest is the emergent proliferation of *recapping*, or the typed summarization of newly aired TV content, primarily dramas and sitcoms, with an infusion of personal reaction and cultural commentary. Recapping reflects the diverse nature of TV criticism in that it varies in degrees of interpretation, reader

accessibility, informed and/or educated insight, and thus the rhetorical power to persuade readers. Anyone can recap a program, but a unique craft or stylized *rhetorical recap* dominates the arts and entertainment sections of some of the most prominent online American news sources. Among the "elite" staffs of TV bloggers, I argue their respective discourses flavor distinct cultural sway among the interpretational fan communities across televisual genres. In turn a recapper's qualitative and quantitative fervor and/or dismissal acts to enable increased *textual legitimacy* for purported traditional readers, while enabling *fan legitimacy* through mainstream identification with certain preferred readings and texts. On one hand, introducing the word "elite" conjures notions of cultural privilege. On the other hand, professional bloggers wield potent socio-political power regarding degrees of transmedia trafficking and thus exist rhetorically as persuasive pendulums of critical retort and liminal discourse. Recappers straddle lines between traditional lay TV criticism and pseudo-academic mini-lectures, yet such temporal constraint relieves some criticisms of their intellectual heft.[39]

Ultimately, this chapter highlights how *recap culture* functions as a new kind of fandom, an *informed fandom* drawing upon Internet resources and technologies in ways previous generations and iterations of fan communities have not. Indeed, scholars of audience and fan studies mine the roles Internet technology plays and the ways in which fans play with these technologies.[40] This chapter argues the distinct cultural flavor mitigated by professional recapping—and perhaps more importantly the vast replication of secondary freelance or hobbyist recappers that saturate mainstream and independent blogospheres—function to reflect through diegetic mimesis the world-building process that GRRM and Benioff/Weiss extend but struggle to maintain. In effect, such cross-

comparison demonstrates how this distinct "brand" of fan culture vested in *GoT/ASoIaF* posits as difficult a labyrinthine gauntlet as those depicted within GRRM's fantasy fiction world Westeros.

Magic fingers, Recap Screeners, and Paratextual Illusions

Johnson theorizes fan factions exercise powerful political persuasion in the realm of paratextual discourse. Johnson insists audiences "can also challenge corporate producers by constructing interpretive consensuses that delegitimize institutional authority over the hyperdiegetic text."[41] TV recappers, as active audience and active fan, shift the discursive authority of the text into their digital dialogic arenas once a show concludes its initial "live" airing. From this point, industry-mining (and mindful) recappers take to the Web to craft their insta-feed responses to media. A certain recapper segment holds privileged position as these recappers preload their responses due to advanced access to content. "Screeners" posit an industry term comprising (formerly) tapes, DVDs, and/or digital codes that allow credentialed critics media materials ahead of time. Regarding *temporal privilege*, this industry technique ensures a relative saturation quota for textual discourse circulates immediately after an episodic airing. Advanced access thus shrinks the elastic distance between a show airing and post-episode recap publication. In effect, recappers then publish so quickly that bloggers appear magical if not super-human in their typing-processing-publishing capabilities. This technique pads recapper efficiency and thus boosts persuasive appeal. Through this institutional method the screener process arguably adds a layer of mysticism for online readers, which increases the illusionary spectacle that strengthens paratextual discourse.

On the other hand, magic finger recapping inoculates certain kinds of privileged readings that gain online access and thus discursive legitimacy faster than the typical lay fans and audiences. Furthermore, professional recappers catering to TV fans channel messages through *Vulture* or *AV Club* or even slightly more mainstream news outlets like *Slate* and *Salon*. These recappers embed rich discourses and textual meanings into commentaries but their corporate-professional privilege arguably paints recap close readings with shades of industry influence.[42] For example, consider writer Scott Erik Kaufman, a former academic at the University of California, Irvine who offered courses on popular entertainments like *Game of Thrones*. Kaufman often produces unfiltered criticisms with salty R-rated analyses for the political-cultural blog *Lawyers, Guns, & Money*. While Kaufman still contributes to *LG&M,* he now works as Associate Editor for *The Raw Story* and less occasionally for *The Onion*'s sister website *The AV Club*. Yet when comparing the wily outlaw approaches that innovate *LG&M* analyses[43] to corporate pressures adhering softer communicative and critical approaches,[44] the results while subtle should not be understated. This effect might be identified as a *corporate softening* inoculated by industry influence.

One positive aspect of industrial influence comes through the use of professional recaps as a method for generating cultural interest toward a bevy of enriching texts overlooked by non-traditional/post-millennial media consumers. That said one notable mode of give/take negotiation—brought on by advanced screeners and early industry-sponsored recap releases—occurs through *delimitation*. Johnson explains how, "corporate producers' creative choices often delimit the range of interpretation possible within fan meta-texts, authorizing some but denying others."[45] For example, Matt

Weiner frequently clarifies moments of artistic ambiguity on critical fave *Mad Men*[46] and Vince Gilligan also debunked Walter White's "inferred interiority"[47] for the series finale "Felina" during a live Q&A on AMC's torturously forced *Talking Bad* post-mortem show. In many ways, the advent and unappealing onset of numerous post-mortem talk shows diffuse the richness and cultural agency that is both alluring and charming about fan communities. In effect, when post-mortems like *Talking Dead* or *Talking Bad* or *Sons of Anarchy*'s *Anarchy: Afterword* or *Bates Motel: Post-Mortem* create an immediate live feedback loop with series showrunners, episode writer-producers and actors, such programs relieve the text's polysemic and polyvalent potency, the creative currency that fuels fandom.

HBO is slightly guilty but takes a much preferred *less is more* stance with their OnDemand services. For audiences that access programs like *GoT*, *Boardwalk Empire*, or *True Blood* on HBO OnDemand, the conclusion of a given episode's credits typically follows with a pre-produced 2-3 minute "Inside the Episode" short. These shorts cut between select footage of the just-ended episode, accompanied with key insights into the narrative motivations at stake from a writer or producer's perspective. I argue that these media packages hold greater rhetorical value through their process of limited use. Notably, the "Inside the Episode" shorts do not air after live or subsequent cable channel airings nor do they run on HBO's online HBOGO service. The shorts do appear on DVD/Bluray box set releases along with a host of alternative materials that attract fan attention. Arguably the brevity of HBO's "Inside the Episode" helps protect the program's *textual mystique*. The textual mystique affectively describes a cable serial's

je ne sais quoi or intangible qualities. Often the textual mystique forms through a combination of creative and culturally significant inputs, a televisual alchemy of sorts.

Thus, recappers and recapping function as potent "clickables" or Internet eye-catching materials that translate into cultural currency via "likes" and "shares" and eventually transform into advertiser dollars through corporate data-mining processes that quantify views into statistics and statistics into demographic ratios and demographic ratios into concentrated marketing niches. If such clickable data is resold, say to HBO's subsidiary merchandize companies (HBO is owned by TimeWarner no less), then those secondary merchandizing companies can go on to buy the advertizing spaces strategically placed above, below, and to the sides of a given Twitter/Facebook/Instagram/et. al. news feed. Thus, the fans who already click and read *GoT* recaps looking for new perspectives on episodes find doubly rewarding adverts listing *GoT* T-shirts, beer tumblers, lapel pens, and so on. Of course this process identifies contemporary marketing practices among numerous shows and creative properties, particularly those with strong corporate backing. The branding process links product and audience via commoditization and consumption. Tracing this marketing strategy does not denote cynical conspiracy against hidden recapper agendas but instead acknowledges the industrial role(s) performed in the manufacturing of paratextual content. Words like "corporate softening" or "industrial influence" may generate mixed responses in how fans feel about the texts they covet and the paratexts they participate in. Jenkins refers to this phenomenon as "colonial cringe" or shared negative reaction to a cultural-industrial output.[48] Following this logic of corporate sponsorship, the recent

history of *WinterIsComing.net* posits a rich contrast to the spreadable discourses constituting recap culture.

WinterIsComing.net as a "Watcher on the [Paratextual] Wall"

If recap culture constitutes one end of the oppositional engine spectrum among *GoT* fandom's labyrinthine paratext, then *WIC* might best be understood as one of several possible labyrinth sub-stations powered by panoptic vantage points. In *GoT*, "The Wall" separates Westeros from harsh weather and harsher dangers that lie to the North. The Wall posits a strategic vantage point in *GoT* that provides dualistic panoptic surveillance between those protected and those feared. Notably, the Watches who occupy the Wall live by the credo "Winter is Coming," a bleak if not ambiguous philosophy for grim preparedness. Underneath this 1,000 foot structure, those of "the Night's Watch" gain access through strategic corridors that provide privileged access. While the fictitious Wall purports thousands of years in age, according to *WIC*'s "about" page, the website on the other hand was founded in 2008 around the time HBO first commissioned *GoT*'s pilot.[49] This section overviews key features showcasing *WIC*'s versatility as an "ideal" fan site and describes how media conglomeration processes dilute and homogenize the individuality that makes sites like *WIC* function as desirable panoptic engines among fans.

In essence, *WIC* functions as a nexus for *GoT* web content. *WIC*'s web design shows no prejudice in the abundance and directions of both textual and paratextual online content relating strictly to *GoT* and *ASoIaF*. One might question whether a website devoted to a TV series can generate enough content when the TV drama only runs for ten weeks out of the year. Yet *WIC* practices a no-discrimination policy and

finds ways to gain and spread access throughout *GoT*'s pre- and post-production phases. In comparison, consumers purchasing HBO Bluray collector's editions unpack caches of unaired production content designed to expand upon economic limitations the TV series faces. These features range from digitized storyboards to character/world histories voiced by series actors to select episode commentaries. Yet the DVD/Bluray content exhibits a narrow-focused offering. Meanwhile *WIC* encompasses transmedia conglomeration innovated by the Internet, which provides an economically flexible tool temporally elastic in scope and accessibility.

One week *WIC* may embed insider interviews with the design firm behind the popular and immersive *GoT* opening credits sequence. The next day or week *WIC* offers copious reviews, interviews with various personnel, updates on GRRM's personal blog, word of mouth from the production locations, and all the post-millennial buzzworthy pop ideology that proliferates alongside billion-dollar franchises and Hollywood synergy. It is significant to note *WIC*'s initial grassroots-style design and focus. *WIC* was presented without advertising interruptions, noisy margins, or unnecessary spam windows begging users to sign in through social media account. Fans could simply visit at will and gain access to random content that ranges from screen caps of how to make an actress appear 9-months pregnant while unclothed to recurring segments like "Curtain Calls" (whenever a character dies onscreen) or "Dame of Thrones" (highlighting female character intricacies) or "The North Remembers," a genteel breakdown of each month's highlights and hyperlinks.

In so many ways, *WIC* planners extend the site beyond what fans gain from DVD/Bluray extras or *The Los Angeles Times.* For fans, web surfing and/or data mining

for *GoT* answers, conversations, and infotainment functions as personal labor (e.g. *fan-chores*) that may narrow interpretation but also engage individual fulfillment via metaphorical journeys toward fictional⇔real "truth". *WIC* features an active, passionate fan community that uses comments sections as soundboards. But just as the site's ominous meta-mantra forecasts, change is inevitable. Announced in January 2014, the once-intimate fan site reached an industrial epoch that captures a double bind between what gives paratextual spaces a magical je ne sais quoi and how social media conglomeration compounded by consumer demand for creative industries come to homogenize indigenous online culture.

According to the January 2014 announcement, *WIC* was purchased and currently exists wholly redesigned by the un-ironically titled conglomerate network, *Fansided*. *Fansided.com* started as a small-market sports-based Internet fan site that has gained traction and burgeoned into a booming entertainment engine that corrals over three hundred diverse fan-related sites under its corporate umbrella.[50] The justifiable logic behind such strategies is merging multiple sites with separate but highly devoted fan-users creates dynamic potential for crossover appeal. To rework Kenneth Burke's famous phrase, *fan-users become fan-used*. Formerly *WIC* communicated quiet constraint and close adherence to *GoT*-related color palettes in its previous web design. Now the homogenized "sports blue" of *Fansided*'s homepage template saturates *WIC* borders, header and footer space. Instead of the woodsy colors and moody grays that evoke fan fervor and epic fantasy, the long generic scrolling wall could easily be mistaken for someone's [mom's] Facebook feed. While much remains, including the clever titles that encourage sporty role-play, corporate softening and industry influence

dominate *WIC*'s unspoken qualities, its subtext, its paratextual soul. Like the undead White Walkers that roam North of the Wall, *WIC* functions in a way that's culturally lifeless and drolly homogenous. A paratextual labyrinth built into other paratextual labyrinths built into other paratextual labyrinths, *WIC* captures content and now constitutes captured content. The site—while still very useful—is hardly soulful.

Concluding Thoughts on the Oppositional Engines of Industrial Fandom

The previous sections presented two oppositional engines of online paratextual fandom designed to survey the cultural resonance circling GRRM's *ASoIaF* series now translated into *GoT* by HBO's Benioff and Weiss. Engaging fan studies theories and theorists ideally continues their rich merits while extending new possibilities. This evaluation highlights ways in which professional recappers and *WIC* capture and recast texts, create paratextual discourse, and undermine originality in favor of media conglomeration and convergence culture. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to provide critical insight into the motivations that drive these economic and socio-cultural oppositional engines. In the case of recappers and recapping, these industrial-professional fans produce and circulate important critical dialogues and legitimate social issues. In the case of *WIC*, its originators created a savvy product that resonates culturally to such a high degree that it becomes an economically viable investment, arguably fulfilling a key tenant of the American Dream and post-global Western capitalism at large. These two paratexts mimic their *GoT* source material in ways that challenge audiences-readers-fans. First, the paratexts perpetuate labyrinthine discourses that spread throughout hyperlinked corridors, winding down ontological hallways and

into alternating corners of knowledge and perspective. These practices digitize debate and thus capitalize on potential for broader social reflexivity among other critics, bloggers, and fans. Second, the *WIC* fan site highlights values of creativity, ingenuity (or is it *engine*-uity?), and community but also functions as cautionary allegory for extremes relating to convergence culture, corporate homogenization, and even cultural hegemony. Future fan studies would benefit from long-term exploration into these respective oppositional engines, particularly as HBO's *GoT* continues to grow in popularity with each successive year.

Rhetorical Recap: Recognizing Fandom Conundrum in the Inescapable Double Binds within Contemporary Commodity Culture

Chapter eight covers a lot of ground concerning fandom but works efficiently to evaluate and critique the role convergence culture plays in circulating paratextual discourse. The enthusiasm exhibited in chapter eight hopes to mimic the kind of fan fervor that elevates what I consider the textual mystique artifacts like *GoT* come to bare. Yet contemporary fandom must operate with caution (or at least consent) in recognizing the paratextual layers of institutional influence that blanket audiences from recognizing the effects of media conglomeration and corporate hegemony in culture. Perhaps that's easier said than done when your text features strong women warriors, CGI dragons, and philosophizing imps. The previous unit emphasized genre analysis in hopes of outlining ways in which texts might be read in accordance to diverse genre conventions and ultimately what I call genre-mixing iconicity. While emphasis in chapter eight involves audience studies/reception studies/fan studies, I hope it remains clear that a key reason

GoT proliferates alongside its global fandom is due to the innovating fandom ontologies and competing oppositional engines that paratextualize online discourse.

I confess to participating in some of these modes of paratextuality, but always in moderation (at least that's what I tell myself). The closer I study an active fanbase like *GoT*, the more I recognize why Jenkins or Fiske or others go to such great lengths to *involve themselves* with fans in better efforts to gain diversified perspective(s) on this unique commodified brand of community. As Fiske calls for ethnography to play a greater role in audience and reception studies, diversification concerning what constitutes ethnography merits further discussion. In the interest of playing devil's advocate, I go against the grain of traditional audience/reception/fan studies and play with an experimental mode of textual analysis in the following chapter. As a working experiment, I am interested in how a method more suited toward anthropology and art history might work in conversation with contemporary fan studies. For this reason, I shift from the labyrinthine paratexts to a singular paratextual artifact, and pivot away from *GoT* and back to *SoA* in the process. This experiment asks if material cultural analysis in the form of Prownian analysis can function as an innovative form of reception studies.

Chapter Nine

"Material Anarchy" – Western Binaries & the Trickster Archetype Illuminated in a *Sons of Anarchy* Table Lamp

I first happened upon the lamp inside of a suburban media rental and bookstore. The commercial layout of the retail store suggests the lamp might be available through alternative outlets. Like any hardcore researcher, I revved up my Macbook and performed a Google search to see what evidence of the lamp I might unbury. The first two links I clicked belonged to expired blog pages. The third link drove me to a private blog, where an expired online coupon reads, "Sons of Anarchy Gear 20% on NEW Season 4 SOA Gifs at the Official FX Shop #sonsofanarchy #FX". The ad itself was a hyperlink to the official Sons of Anarchy website. Like any road savvy rebel, I backed my hard drive up out of there, spun the (pin)wheels of my mouse, and jetted back to Google. Scanning down to the sixth link, my gut instinct told me I would strike gold. Clicking this link, indescribable disappointment overcame me as I stumbled into a cache of *SoA* loot:

> Tagged with anarchy logo, baby creeper, brushed nickel, fox shop, Get 20% off Sons of Anarchy Gear at the Official Fox Shop, grim reaper, loud bikes, motorcycle club, …Sons of Anarchy Collage T-Shirt [Black], Sons of Anarchy Creeper [Baby Blue], Sons of Anarchy Creeper [Pink], Sons of Anarchy Jax Rides Lamp, Sons of Anarchy Logo Women's T-Shirt, Sons of Anarchy Reaper Print Beanie, Sons of Anarchy Reaper Print Hat, Sons of Anarchy Reaper T-Shirt [Black], Sons of Anarchy Samcro Leather Jacket Print Creeper, Sons of Anarchy Temporary Reaper Tattoo [Set of 2], Sons of Anarchy White Creeper, Sons of Anarchy: Season 3 Blu-ray

...I'd read enough. What had I gotten myself into? I thought this lamp was hardcore! I thought this lamp was something special, something exclusive, something "authentic." I wanted break away from the man's grip around my neck, his factory-laden breath huffing over my shoulder, the stench of free 1-day shipping permeating my browser window. I lit a cigarette in discontent (at least, I imagined that's what I'd do if I were authentically deviant). Seeing this lamp made me think of transformation, yet finding it only reinforced conformity. How did this happen? How did we get to this place? How had I been fooled by materialism once again? It was, of course, a joke, a ruse, a trick. The answer stared back at me all along, tattooed on the face of the Grim Reaper, hovering above the on/off switch of a *Sons of Anarchy* table lamp.

FX premiered *SoA* in 2008 as a hopeful replacement in its long lineup of "edgy" male-driven dramas.[1] Its premise has been described as "*Hamlet* on motorcycles" or a more updated "*The Sopranos* on bikes".[2] Growing its audience in each of its seven seasons, *SoA* posits FX's highest rated program, a testimony to strong storytelling and dedicated viewership, results that in turn harvest the commercialization of the show and its ideas into consumable kitsch products sporting *SoA* logos. Thus, the *SoA* lamp is born (See Figure 1 and Appendix B for all Figures). In this essay, I engage Jules Prown's unique methodology for material cultural analysis, an analytic tool adhering to the chronological sequence of *description*, *deduction*, *speculation*, *research*, and finally *interpretive analysis* of a material object or artifact. For this material culture analysis, I analyze a *SoA* table lamp, inspired by Prown's method, intenting to highlight cultural, rhetorical, political, persuasive, and ultimately communicative values both visible and invisible to consumers of *SoA* memorabilia. Hence, its polyvalence as a institutional text

consumed in a fan-scholar context through an attempt at a negotiated if not oppositional reading. In this way I engage the product while elevating the rhetorical power of its binary-mythological suggestion.

To gaze at the lamp as a light fixture is to miss its intent. Yet to read the lamp within the context of its association to the show of the same name is to fixate on its intended and thus loaded symbolism. But to read the lamp against these qualifiers allows a potential covert intention to emerge; an illusion that looks or even stares one in the face. Thus a trick emerges from the shadow and into the light. I argue that the *SoA* lamp, with its mythic recollection of secrecy and death and its at once physical and metaphorical layering – both black and white, glossy and reflective, concealing and illuminating – ironically taunts users, and especially those familiar with the TV show of the same name, to see themselves flatteringly as "engaged in aspects of anarchistic attitudes and exclusive or private practices" while this false pretense to anarchism simply reinforces public capitalist behaviors through commoditized memorabilia. Yet before I enact an extensive close-reading of the lamp as my object of analysis, I first highlight several additional aspects of the material culture approach known as a Prownian analysis.

Prownian analysis. I as previously noted, Jules Prown, Paul Mellon Professor Emeritus of the History of Art at Yale University, articulates his method for material cultural analysis through the strategic and chronological processes of *description*, *deduction*, *speculation*, *research*, and finally *interpretive analysis* of a given artifact. Kenneth Haltman[3] (2000) stresses that the text or artifact under investigation, "must not be seen as a good illustration of something outside of itself…but rather such contextual

phenomena be introduced into evidence as illuminating some aspect of the object's own intrinsic interest or meaning" (p. 7). I note Haltman's sincerity toward prose (if my introductory attempt at performative writing did not clearly elucidate) in order to emphasize that the object itself, the lamp, remains central to the analysis more so than the text its espouses, namely the FX drama series SoA.[4] Haltman also asserts that the Prownian approach demands that research "give a clear sense of what *in your object* has given rise to interpretation" (p. 7). Thus, I specify that during the research and interpretive phases I de-emphasized studying the TV drama so that the motivation and direction of the analysis stem directed from the messages and meanings intentional and unintentional within the lamp's communicative properties.

The Prownian analysis requires a "fusion of visual analysis and verbal expression" with a keen emphasis on "active verbs and descriptive prose" (Haltman, 2000, p. 4). The Prownian analysis amounts to "intellectual detective work" whereby "careful deduction buys at least the opportunity to consider a fuller range of possibilities" (p. 5). The theoretical stakes celebrate subjectivity and asks the researcher to manifest how "the object make(s) one feel" (p. 6).[5] Particularly, the Prownian analytic process "reliably yields awareness of complexity and polyvalent meaning" (p. 8). This process awards creative theoretical close-readings, and thus I compare the method to semiotics where the author's intent becomes a secondary issue when weighed against the creative and critical polyvalence of the text as interpreted by the researcher. Yet this is where a comparison to, for example semiotics, also ends as Prown's method remains meticulously faithful to a more traditional art history motif. In addition, the chronological order emphasizes that alternative methodologies remain outside of

consideration until after the phases of description, deduction, and speculation have been exhausted. With this brief introduction to Prownian analysis in place, I resume the Prownian reading of the *SoA* lamp and follow Prown's chronological methodology to its exhaustive, and my creative, conclusion.

"What's in a lamp?" – Setting the 'Stage' through Description

The Sons of Anarchy lamp looms dark, the majority of exterior features colored in one shade or another of black. For a small table lamp, the actual weight of the lamp, 7lbs, matches its weighty presence. Though distinguished by signs of seriousness and masculinity at 23 ½ inches fully assembled, the quaint lamp size seems dainty and furthermore communicates a sense of commercialization and mass production, especially given the craftsmanship observable in the intricate details. Labels on and under the lamp suggest it serves as a form of memorabilia.[6]

The one inch thick plastic circular lamp base, perfectly symmetrical, polished black, lies flat, similar in shape to a beverage coaster though three or four times larger with a 7 and 5/8 inch diameter. It reflects light due to its polished finish, glossy to the lamp stand's matte, countering the natural absorption of the color black when seen from a certain angle. Under natural lighting, the base becomes reflective, projecting a mock M-16,[7] which serves as the lamp stand, in the opposite direction (See Figure 2).

The M-16 simulates the actual assault rifle of the same name in appearance only. The nose of the gun composes the upper third component of the mock M-16. Lodged into the barrel of the gun, extending up and out, the blade of a sickle curves outward to the right and downward toward the base, its metallic gray simulating that of a traditional steel blade. The total extension of the sickle cannot be more than five inches from the

mounted position atop the gun barrel. Other than the lampshade and light bulb, not yet described, the elongated side of this blade represents the only attached appendage not fastened by screw or glue (See Figure 3). The plastic faux blade, though light and flimsy, from a distance suggests danger. When the lamp is switched on, the upper half of the sickle reflects light while the lower half remains slightly shaded, a dichotomy of light and dark surface tones.[8]

A black standard two-prong electrical cord snakes out of the base, entirely conventional in size and shape. The cord tends to coil back up into the shape that it was given by the packaging from which it was shipped. We recognize this to be the backside of the lamp for two reasons. First, the awkwardness of the jettisoning cord seems out of keeping with the sleekly modeled lamp design. Also, a chord typically carries a tail-like quality in its physical and visual departure from the base. Second, the front side has been labeled as such by a logo in the center of the base wall consisting of three English words, the only words visible outside of hidden bulb instructions or the stamped plastic coding underneath the base: “Sons of Anarchy” (See Figure 3). Each word in ALL CAPS, printed with a white font, stands out against the black backdrop. The words “Sons” and Anarchy” are larger than the “of,” which features lines running both above and beneath while no markings surround “Sons” or “Anarchy,” though an almost invisible “TM” appears just to the upper right of the final consonant (See Figure 4). The TM establishes the product as trademarked and thus potentially as mass-produced.

"A lamp by any other title would shine as bright,"

or Binary Illuminations of Western Thought

The TM symbol evokes one's thoughts of copyright laws and modern systems of adjudicating material patents. To think of the words *trade* and *mark* recalls medieval practices of artisans. Artisans branded their work with a sign or signature prior to the movement of goods along Euro-Asian minor trade routes. As James Burke (2007) recounts in *Connections*, trade routes evolved along with the systems of control enabling exchange, the early stages of capitalism began in Europe. The lamp, as emerging European technology, summons the history of technology, and specifically the technologization of light as a means of social progress. Early lamps comprised an alchemical composition: oil, wicker, wood, spark. Fire-based lamps reach further back in history, representing technological innovations of the advent of fire. Yet as Greek mythology warns us through the story of Prometheus, fire ignites dualistic binaries of light and dark, the technological consequences of progress, and the inevitability of death.[9]

As Europe progresses, Christianity emerges and the Catholic Church in particular gains footing. As a result, binaries between technology (e.g., science) and religion emerge before splitting centuries later (Cahill, 2006). The Old Testament book of Proverbs, a popularized text during this era, communicates the sovereign binary power between light and dark: "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."[10] The metaphor of light carries heavenly tones of protection, security, and even salvation. Unlike the eternal punishment Prometheus receives for bringing fire (e.g., light) to mankind, Western European Judeo-Christian belief systems offer a binary

belief in light that contrasts the historically Dark [Ages] period.[11] Thus, light also signifies elements of "truth" just as dark suggests disguise or concealment, in tandem to the light/dark binary system. To follow an Aristotelian perspective of logic, if light is to be understood as signifying truth or perhaps life, then its binary opposite, dark, comes clearly connotes deception and death.[12] Judeo-Christian theology arguably secures an alternative oppositional and allegorical understanding of lamp or light, preaching redemptive values and the existential protective qualities light secures.

Light source. Concerning the *SoA* lamp's lighting technology, a small clear 60 watt 120 volt bulb screws into a black metallic female nest, bearing an inscription just beneath the on/off switch: "RUI Cheng Lampholder Listed." Then a circle contains the letters "UT" with another smaller circled r or registered symbol. Just beneath this inscription a single screw sticks slightly out, serving to fasten the bulb nest to the top of the M-16. Another inscription appears printed on a sticker attached on the outer edge of the bulb nest, reading: "CAUTION0RISK OF FIRE, USE ONLY TYPE "A" LAMP, MAX 60 WATTS 120V, 60Hz, AC only, Made in China."

The Soul. A circular lampshade represents a key detachable piece. Its exterior is primarily black, except for a single illustrated or printed image. Its interior's paper white allows for maximal reflectivity of light. The lampshade, 8 inches long and 10 ½ inches wide, overwhelms one's attention with repeated viewings (See Figure 5). The upper and lower rims surrounding the shade bridge together the black exterior and white interior with two strips of black cloth. The cheap material, some sort of felt, serves to cover the coiled metal support frame along the bottom of the lampshade, but shows signs of minute fringing. At three equidistant positions, similar thin metal coiling strips

project inward at a 45-degree angle, conjoining at the center, where a black metallic electrical nest houses the bulb.

Centered on the lampshade a black and white image of the Grim Reaper features Death in the form of a white skeletal figure in a tattered and hooded black cloak. The sketched nature of the Reaper suggests a hand-drawn quality similar to a tattoo. Death stares coldly outward, his eyes hollowed out, blackness filling the void of his absent eyes. The Reaper embraces another smaller M-16 in his right hand. Atop the rifle, a sickle projects outward up and over the back of the Reaper's hood. The position of the Reaper's gun and sickle resembles that of the gun and sword that comprise the lamp stand shaft. A dark substance resembling blood drips from the sickle, reinforcing imagery of violence and death. Death remains a central point of concern in the developmental stages of Western history.[13]

In *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* and again in *The Anthropology of Performance*, Victor Turner (1982, 1988) charts the evolution of Western society in Europe from pre-Industrial work-based culture to the modern, post-Industrial leisure culture. Pre-Industrial societies rarely celebrated leisure, they couldn't afford to. After all, for those living outside "the King's" walls and the care of the Catholic/Protestant Church, there was no leisure. Only death. However, the Enlightenment and Industrial Age promise new hope in the form of social progress. Yet for those working 18-hour days in a factory, the promise of hope withered. Only death could offer true leisure. And when one flicks on the switch of the *SoA* lamp, one prominent feature offers comfort in its glowing gaze, Death.[14]

Centered on the lampshade a black and white image of the Grim Reaper features Death in the form of a white skeletal figure in a tattered and hooded black cloak. The sketched nature of the Reaper suggests a hand-drawn quality similar to a tattoo. Death stares coldly outward, his eyes hollowed out, blackness filling the void of his absent eyes. The Reaper embraces another smaller M-16 in his right hand. Atop the rifle, a sickle projects outward up and over the back of the Reaper's hood. The position of the Reaper's gun and sickle resembles that of the gun and sword that comprise the lamp stand shaft. A dark substance resembling blood drips from the sickle, reinforcing imagery of violence and death.[15] Illuminated, the lamp projects a pinkish hue through the white pores of the Grim Reaper, instilling a kind of life to both the Reaper and lamp. I suggest light projected through the Reaper draws one's attention to engage Death's stare. While in contrast to Death's stare, the binary of light rays emitted by the lamp suggest purity or peace.

Noting the simulacrum of the M-16 and sickle, and thus suggesting a demystification of their emotional danger, the lamp's real danger exists in lighting elements, electrical functions, and its internal simplicity.[16] Thus, this lamp suggests real danger lies in light, denoting again the Promethean myth. Shining light also suggests unveiling of truth, as in the Judeo-Christian theological example before. Thus, the lamp, and Death by extension, warns of dangers, not found in darkness, suggesting false representation ("lies" like the weapons of simulacrum), but in light (or *truth*, as prognosticated by the crystal ball in Death's hand).[17]

In a way, one might contend the lamp both masques the truth or light while holding physical, speculative secrets within its innards, as suggested by both the innards

within the lamp and within Death's crystal ball. As the aforementioned black elements project glossy, reflective qualities, black thus suggests a seductive or inviting color for one's gaze. When the lamp, by contrast, becomes illuminated, the gaze shifts to Death, recalling one's ever-present awareness of death, always looming, waiting for everyone and everything. With the lamp, Death's open mouth, lacking skin to conceal its bones, appears almost smiling, suggesting an element of play, a taunt like that of the archetypal trickster. Death's stare is ambiguous, further suggesting and recalling the ambiguous nature of the trickster.

"The Devil Incarnate" or Death's Trickster Form

Writing in *Alterity & Narrative*, Kathleen Glenister Roberts (2007) claims, "The rhetoric of possibility is paramount in the Trickster" (p. 177). *The* trickster archetype assumes numerous forms over numerous cultures throughout history. As William Doty (2000) avers in *Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals*, "Trickster figures appear in many cultures: Hermes in Greek myth" (p. 360), for example, acted as a conduit between Olympus and the Underworld. This is an early indicator of Death who has access and is often seen transporting the living to the land of the dead and vice versa. Doty notes how trickster figures, "manage to bring cultural benefits (control of fire, music, commerce)" (p. 360), which again stirs up fire as a particularly interesting connection, seeing as the lamp posits a technological stand-in for the former fire-based lamp. Often Trickster appears as "an animal or supernatural being" that is "not quite human" but "typically male in nature" and "unbound by social conventions" (Roberts, p. 173).

In *Four Archetypes*, Carl Jung (1972) notices the trickster in "medieval customs" that "demonstrate the role of the trickster to perfection." Jung, like Doty, views the trickster as transcendent of culture. And these Western personifications resonate strong ties readable in the *SoA* lamp. As Jung attests:

> In picaresque tales, in carnivals and revels, in magic rites of healing, in man's religious fears and exaltations, this phantom of the trickster haunts the mythology of all ages, sometimes in quite unmistakable form, sometimes in strangely modulated guise.[18] He is obviously a "psychologerm," an archetypal psychic structure of extreme antiquity (Jung, 1972, p. 165).

Jung acknowledges *religion*, *magic*, *fear*, and figures of *archetypal* transcendence, each viable markers touched upon so far through this Prownian analysis, whereby *description* of elements, *deduction* of their logical and emotional values, *speculation* as to their origin, *research* which this investigation into the trickster verifies, and the *interpretive analysis* currently unfolding. But alas the trickster continues alluding one with the "double bind" if not investigated thoroughly.

In his essay "The Trickster and the Arts," John Beebe focuses on the trickster's relational affect of sensory dualism, noting **"**Often its trick is to get us into a double bind, by making us think or feel two different things at once, all the while exerting a hypnotic fascination that makes us want to stay within this ambiguous field" (Beebe, 1981, p. 38). Beebe's point surfaces the more human and thus false elements of the trickster method, where "great trickster performers had the ability to project two contradictory emotions at the same time behind a mesmerizing facade. The effect of

their art was both divine and satanic" (p. 38). To acknowledge such spiritual expressions as *divine* or *satanic* is to empower binary thought processes that reside deep within Western philosophy.[20]

According to Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's assessment of Barthes in her reading of Davey Crockett as a preeminent Southern American trickster figure:

> Barthes argues that the object of the author and the audience of a bourgeois myth is similar—that is, to play with language with the object of making what is un-natural (that is, political or contrived) seem natural and inevitable. The joke and the myth are both concerned with illusion and distortion. The one assumes a heroic, the other a comic form (Smith-Rosenberg, 1982, p. 340).

Smith-Rosenberg ultimately offers a fascinating account that Americanizes the trickster figure while situating it between Northern Victorian anxieties and audacious uses of lurid Southwestern American humor. Her close reading of old Crockett myths, printed and distributed among prudent Northeasterners, highlights the double bind illusion at play in a literary sense, where readers consuming lurid tall tales (perhaps satanic?) fail to conceive that they are reading critiques against their own (clearly divine!) cultural values.

Reading Death

Two distinct markers of the Reaper's wardrobe can be logically deduced. First, the hood represents secrecy, and suggests concealment of some truth or value. Second, the crystal ball evokes magical qualities, or perhaps the prognostication of one's future. Taken together, the hood and the crystal ball recall secret or private rituals in which

members wearing hoods, robes, and/or cloaks shared or passed down information through ritual processes. In *Modern Occult Rhetoric,* Joshua Gunn (2005) traces the lineage of medieval occult practices as the secret rituals where those in power shared private knowledge. Gunn charts the unraveling of secret ritual ceremonies, now defunct as the progressive expansion of capitalism distilled the nature and form of secret information.[21] The spread of capitalism evolves the innovation of technology, and with technological innovation, a societal shift into the current Information Age results in a globalized sharing of once privileged or secret knowledge.[22] Gunn suggests public access to once private knowledge resulted in an ontological shift in the understanding of how the occult practices are perceived (Gunn, 2005). In particular, the mass mediation of occult practices depowers its original intent and revises perceptions. Consider this notion in more simplified terms. To hold a secret is to attain a level of power, the power of privileged knowledge. Yet to share that information is to depower it. Furthermore, the sharing of private knowledge denotes the creation of public knowledge.

Thus, a shift from private to public knowledge continues exponentially in the Information Age, as the global market, and access to information via the Internet in particular, heighten public awareness. It is also critical to note that the global expansion of capitalism and the rise in public knowledge parallel one another greatly.[23] Capitalism connotes differentiation and class order, the taxonomy of raw materials transformed into commercial goods and services in processes of commodification and commoditization. Organizations of class order denote hierarchy and hierarchy by nature begets social class and the byproduct of class privilege and thus privileged information.

The concept of privileged information returns us to the Grim Reaper figures, as he clearly holds some secret knowledge in the palm of his hand. The hand extends to reveal a crystal ball with what appears to be an "A" inscribed on its globe. A logical deduction follows that the "A" signifies "Anarchy," yet Death also suggests the trickster figure. Or perhaps recall, "Trickster takes on aspects of evil in order to defeat a greater evil" (Roberts, 2007, p. 180). In this case I might prescribe the former evil as representational of Death's suggestion of anarchy whereas the latter "greater evil" constitutes capitalism. Read in this way, the anarchy's allure promises a lifestyle in the margins and concealed from the status quo. But this covertly embedded ideological suggestions reads false as one must subscribe to capitalist conventions of economic trade to acquire such an anarchistic artifact. Thus I argue his promise of anarchy reads as a ruse. This ruse might be considered by reconsidering the context of the material object. To review, the object designates numerous insignias of mass production, mass assembly, and the auto-ethnographic Google search (atop this chapter) revealed the object's lack of significance as a rare or unique item. Instead, the lamp falls into one of a growing number of random tie-ins, designed to generate money, *capital*, for some large business, corporation, or stock dividend.

To this extent, the object holds no mystical value, and perhaps no ideological value either. The lamp was not carved by some artisan and thus lacks an authenticity to its visceral appearance. As the plastic sickle appendage can only embody danger by the suggestion of its sight, it thus remains one dimensional from a sensory perspective. So too the claim can be made that the promise of secret knowledge, the knowledge of anarchy one must presume, cannot be delivered to the consumer. Instead, the trickster

pulls one over on the consumer, in that by purchasing the lamp, one gives in to the economic laws of capitalism. To participate in capitalism is antithesis to engaging mythological lifestyles of "anarchy." Capitalism by law is a design structure of rules and regulations.[24] Meanwhile, anarchy promotes an epistemology of chaos. In other words, these two ideals remain in contention with one another.[25]

In effect, reading the lamp through this logic supports the claim that the lamp is thus *ironic*. Thus, to purchase the lamp in hopes of attaining some agency of anarchy is to fall prey to the trickster's ruse. Yet in the performative act of purchasing, one final question illuminates, *who is tricking whom?*

"Woe is Me!" or "A Recession on Both my Houses!" – The *Sons of Anarchy* Lamp as a Post-Capitalist "Green Eyed Monster"

The way one must move one's hand underneath the shade, the disappearance of the hand up and under the shade, as if one puts one's hand up into the Reaper, signifies the activation of the lamp, the simulation of the artificiality of the light, the simulation of the life-giving glow to the Reaper, is if one acts as puppeteer to the Reaper/lamp-as-puppet. This action signifies the man-made presence in both the lamp and the fear-induced simulacrum of Death. Both are man-made devices, employed as manipulative tools of the natural state of the universe. The hand of man is the motorizing artifice behind the advent of the Grim Reaper, a signifier of an object of an idea with no traceable original. Thus, the positioning of the power switch underneath and inside the exteriority of the lampshade posits a final "trick." Human agency lies at the heart of myth, the creator of its lore and legend. As Joseph Campbell posits:

> Throughout the inhabited world, in all times and under every circumstance, myths of man have flourished; and they have been the living inspiration of whatever else may have appeared out of the activities of the human body and mind…For the symbols of mythology are not manufactured; they cannot be ordered, invented, or permanently suppressed. They are spontaneous productions of the psyche, and each bears within it, undamaged, the germ power of its source" (p. 1-2).

Human agency, the imaginative mind and the physical body, guide the hand in the creation of myth. Just as the hand reaches into the dark place of the lampshade, the void beyond the boundary of sight, the body physically switches the light on. The mystical technology stolen from the secrets of the heavens, captured by humankind, and stored within the man-made vessel, cycles through culture again as the lamp comes to life. In addition, the magic of the mind, the advent of the Reaper, comes to life, resurrected by the powerful agency instilled not by light projected through a veil, but by humankind's use of myth to explain binary systems of light and dark. As Beebe (1981) reminds us, "When a work of art involves the trickster archetype, I think it is likely both to have a trickster subject in it and to be a trickster itself in the way the total work makes its audience react" (p. 37). Thus, the trickster, a revelation of Death, does not stare out at the observer; instead one looks onto a projection of oneself (See Figure 6).

In other words, the final trick is one the consumer plays on oneself. There is no Grim Reaper, no Trickster proper, at least not from a critical, rational, scientific, and thus logical perspective anyway. As Campbell, Jung, Freud, Doty, and others agree, myths stir up from within. Understanding this principle, a claim might be supported in

that while a material object might contains all the markers and signifiers of some deep-seeded ideological state, the execution of capitalist practice cannot serve as a conduit to providing the consumer with the base human desire; the desire, in this case, for some sense of "anarchy." Consumption only begets more need the Lacan's theory of lack suggests. As myth stirs from within, so too must one face inward for change. Material consumption is a trick one plays on oneself, somewhere between the binary of the conscious and unconscious, the light and the dark. To move beyond this cyclic trick, one must find the "on switch" to illuminate the lamp from within.

Read in this light, the lamp further highlights the symbolism of the trickster, the dualisms of intent, the casting of light and shadow as a distraction, while ulterior readings lie dormant, awaiting explication. As the headpiece of the Prownian ithyphallic, Jules David Prown might contest against Campbell's et al.'s claim that myth manifests similarly "in all times and under every circumstance," and without being "manufactured, ordered, invented, or permanently suppressed" (Campbell, 2008, p. 1-2). On the contrary, Prown (2000) conceives of his material culture method and in the artifacts of material culture as "Patterns of Mind" in which the "Art" in "artifacts" is a "culture-specific concept" (x). Prown's culture specific stance diverges from Campbell universal spontaneity of the mind. I present a compelling compromise that elevates both positions. Instead of digressing the debate of culture-specific versus universal imagination, a more logical understanding of these two epistemologies would be to place them at opposing ends of a mythical spectrum. Thus, instead of reading the Prown-Campbell disagreement as binary oppositions of one another (light versus dark, life versus death, etc.), one might read the contra-arguments as the trickster's double

bind. Thus, the key to understanding the double bind lies in the clear resolution that only comes into focus once one becomes aware of its potential trick. Following these thoughts and as a closing sentiment, I posit both Prown and Campbell's respective positions support logical claims, not as binary opposites, but instead each weighted on a mythic *continuum*. This continuum dispenses with binaries and thus the Western tradition. Like a neutral lamp, free of animation outside the human touch and human mind, the mythic continuum neither fears death nor embraces it. Forget Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, and "To Be or Not To Be," and instead remember what Shakespearean critique and linguistic theorist Kenneth Burke advises when he rejects "either/or" in favor of "both/and." *The End/Beginning*

Rhetorical Recap: Reconsidering the 'Spreadability' of Prownian Analysis within Audience Studies

A chief goal of Prownian analysis is to examine artifacts for their historical values in hopes of uncovering new or unique cultural worth. This becomes complicated by the not only the artifacts of modernity, of industrialization, or mass production, but even more marked by marketing firms and institutional oversight. In essence, just as corporate buyout drains the paratextual soul of *GoT* data engine *WinterIsComing*, so too does the mass-produced and mass-marketed fan object lack identity vis–à–vis individuality in craftsmanship. This is a difficult criticism to make, particularly as it applies to objects adorned in fan cultures. In the comics industry, the goal of the artist is *recognition*, is to have their unique hand drawn and hand-sculped works on display and available to as many impassioned consumer-fans as possible. Thus, the issue over uniqueness becomes a matter of semantics, an eye of the beholder demarcation of what

ought to be studied and what *ought* to be privileged in culture. Prown may not approve of the *SoA* just as Prown's protégé Haltman advised this analysis with reserved caution.

I concede the difficulty in decoding *loaded artifacts* in oppositional ways from their overt encoded messages. However, I add one caveat to my original conclusion. My initial attempt at a closed-method Prownian analysis of the *SoA* table lamp took pilot form in 2012. My close reading, er, Prownian method of description, deduction, speculation, research, and interpretive analysis lead me down a path not necessarily suggested by the text at that time. This path included observations linking the artifact to myth, Western binaries, and archetypes relating to the Trickster. Upon completion of analysis, and returning to the master televisual text, close watching slowly revealed numerous instances in which SoA characters engaged in devious Trickster-esque narrative schemes and plot maneauvers. In addition, rhetorically recapping the artifact for both textual and paratextual data over subsequent seasons has revealed further ties. In addition to several Trickster plot devices typically instigated by protagonist antihero Jax, Sutter increased integration playing with deeply Catholic themes of light and dark, redemption and penance, life and death, most heavily saturated in the series finale that aired in December 2014.

Around this time, Sutter announced plans for his next project, a medieval period drama *The Bastard Executioner*, which promises even closer symbolic mergence between Western binary qualities, European histories (Kolb, 2015) and themes I initially surveyed through Prownian analysis of *SoA* memorabilia. But the Trickster archetype also helps close the gap between binaries. Roberts contends, "Trickster narratives may serve as a script through which insider/outsider relations become

mediated" (p. 189). So while I may not have stayed completely true to the Prownian technique, my attempt at Prownian analysis did prove as an accurate predictor toward key themes of interest for Sutter, both in *SoA* and in future work. In playing with binaries and Trickster archetypes, perhaps Sutter's *SoA* provides more than liminal escapism for viewers. Indeed the text may open spaces for dialogic response between binary opposites of class, gender, and politics, as I will consider heavily in chapters' eleven and twelve.

Thus what the Prownian analysis does offer is an oppositional form of inquiry not in play among current fan studies. In some ways too, the dramatic contrast between chapter eight's large-scale fandom study and chapter nine's intimately isolated artifact study connotes its own dualistic spectrum to innovate audience/reception/fan studies. In chapter eight I introduced the term *oppositional engines* as a way to theorize binary oppositions in fandom as negotiated online and often between fans and institutions. Perhaps oppositional engines could be used to also recognize the large scale/small scale contrast in critical methods employed between these last two chapters. Themes of small-scale intimacy and large-scale texts continue in the next chapter. Chapter ten offers a third innovative direction that audience/reception/fan studies can migrate toward, autoethnography. Like the Prownian analysis, autoethnography utilizes informed moments of self-reflection to assist processes of textual intimacy. In addition, chapter ten reincorporates genre analysis into the autoethnographic process, thus weaving together a triangulated way to approach genre studies (text + genre analysis + autoethnography) using a method popular within performance studies, ethnography and critical/cultural communication divisions. Chapter ten themes notably become shaded

with the personal and thus act as a bridge into the final unit of chapters for this project emphasizing the polyvalent political ramifications televisual texts communicate with and about programs, audiences, institutions, and contexts.

Chapter Ten

Interpreting the "Edge of Civilization": *Nowhere West* and AMC's *Hell on Wheels* as (Im)Moral Allegories for Living

The mythic landscape stretches as far as the eyes can see. If a person didn't know better, they'd think I was describing a Western—invoking a nostalgic image of open terrain and possibility. But I'm not, despite what the farmers and the riggers and the old folks would have you believe. In fact they much prefer living an even grander myth. Utopia. Eden. *The West*. But it's nowhere west. In this essay I combine elements of autoethnography, critically reflecting on community experiences I observed and experienced growing up in a small "Western" town against the Western narrative conventions presented in cable channel American Movie Classics' [or AMC] Western drama *Hell on Wheels* [or *HoW*] (2011-present).[1] The serialized drama re-imagines "progress" as a problematic and tragic inevitability in the founding of the United States, specifically through the narrative lens and technological achievement in the building of the Union Pacific Transcontinental Railroad. Through a series of interspersed sections I explore broad avenues of the contemporary AMC Western and stake claims interconnecting areas of analysis from growing up in a small "Western" town. First, I address the cinematic significance of *the Western narrator* and thus how it serves an ideal autoethnographic-framing device. Then preview *HoW* and juxtapose how the Western drama captures the zeitgeist of small town life in the middle of nowhere. Finally, I plot a theoretical framework through specific genre studies terminology that links parallels found between autoethnographic accounts and the *HoW* series.

I'm a faux Cowboy

Like my father before me, I'm a faux Cowboy. We live in the West but we do not *live like* we live in "the West". We have been conditioned by values resonant in Westerns without necessarily adhering to these principles or subscribing fully to their

ideological implications. To this extent Western ideology and imagery indeed resonate in my family's shared public imaginary. But somewhere along the way we failed to receive the golden ticket to rough-riding glory. I remember the last stash of my father's supposedly vast collection of Western memorabilia. There was a gaudy reproduced portrait of John Wayne in one of the Duke's archetypal tan and melon wardrobes from either a John Ford or Howard Hughes Western. I also recall a hard-to-pinpoint something or other of Clint Eastwood. It sat atop a shelf in the low-sunk den of a former house; the den itself resting in the fringes of our home much like my collectibles find their way further to the corners and attics and garage spaces of my contemporary house, now that I am a father of two and a husband to one with *less* enthusiastic ideas toward showcasing kitschy memorabilia. I draw upon this "outsider" identification in the Western and often identify with similar storytelling characteristics within Western narratives. In particular, I identify with the journalists of the day or *the Western narrator* whose job it was to travel out, interview, and experience the feel of the West.

The Western narrator as both linguistic observer and stock character is a memorable trope that spans the Western genre. Later use of this stock character includes Saul Rubinek's W.W. Beauchamp in Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* (1992). Beauchamp is a writer and opportunist who follows English Bob to record his mythic biography. Yet Beauchamp jumps ship when Sheriff Little Bill Daggett beats and humiliates Bob, thus deflating Bob's mythological character while inflating Daggett's. Gene Hackman, in an Academy-Award winning role, plays Daggett as an ice-cold killer and bully who itches his own hubris when he persuades Beauchamp to dictate his biographical accounts. Another example of this device bookends Arthur Penn's *Little Big Man*

(1970) where an interviewer captures the oral history of Jack Crabb (played by Dustin Hoffman) through an audio tape recorder.

Unlike *Unforgiven*, the entirety of *Little Big Man* takes the form of an autoethnographic narrative flashback. Rendering personal memories *as* narrative framing device accounts for the outlandish if not mythic encounters throughout the film. Crabb's recollections are framed through the memories of an alleged 121 year-old man's perspective. In effect, his autoethnographic biases thus form history based upon *perspectival bias*. I acknowledge *Little Big Man*'s limited perspective and note the role that perspectival bias plays in this methodology. *Unforgiven*'s Beauchamp communicates how traditional field journalism reflects the qualities of autoethnography and personal perspective as chief methodological tools for discerning reality. In the spirit of this Western convention—used again during season three of AMC's antihero Western *HoW*—I revisit the *mise-en-scène* of the small Great Plains-Midwestern-Southwestern town I grew up in. I frame recollections based upon perceptions that I grew up on the edge of civilization, connected only by historic roads and familial roots [and *routes*] but little else.

In situating myself as a Western narrator, I am articulating a complex positionality in participant observation research; as both insider and outsider at the same time with no claim to objectivity—but with a perspectival bias on/in the embodied knowing that informs the stories that I narrate and the vantage point of how I report those stories. As academic and faux cowboy, maybe like Pinocchio, the famed wooden boy who yearns to be real—maybe I also revel in the fascinating in-betweenness of

simulating the real, straddling two worlds of seeing, knowing and the possibility of becoming.

AMC's *Hell on Wheels*

In the 2000s, television struck gold in the form of the antihero cable drama. This narrative subgenre emphasizes strong character development and stronger gratuity, which comprise an antihero formula established by HBO and David Chase's *The Sopranos* (1999-2006) and continued in critically beloved series like HBO's nihilistically gritty *Deadwood* (2002-2005) and FX's initial hyper-masculine triple threat; the rotten cops melodrama *The Shield* (2001-2008), hedonistic sex-romp *Nip/Tuck* (2003-2010), and the melancholia post-9/11 firefighter fair *Rescue Me* (2004-2011). Following these successes, former third tier cable movie channel AMC—that upper-channel notorious for its exhaustive commercial breaks—entered the fold with high praise "prestige dramas" that have blossomed into televisual cultural touchstones exploring 1960s Madison Avenue in *Mad Men* (2008-2015) and the Southwest border politics of meth-making in *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013). AMC's prestige drama slate elevated the network into elite status with swaths of acclaim, buzz, and awards. Audiences then swarmed in droves for horror comic adaptation, *The Walking Dead* (2010-present); a horror first that serializes zombie plague contagion and subsequent post-apocalyptic fallout grounded in survivalist ideology. Given AMC's particular skills producing the antihero narrative across genres (period, crime, dystopia/post-apocalypse), the cable network returned to TV's original late night bread-and-butter, the Western, with hopes to cash in on a traditional cultural staple.

The AMC production of *HoW* is an antiheroic Western amalgamation that constitutes a mixed methods approach to its production ontology. *HoW* unfolds during the heightened post-Civil War period of American technological and ideological progress amidst the Westward expansion race via the connection of the transcontinental railroad. Anson Mount portrays Cullen Bohannan, the centralizing antihero hired by snake oil schemer, investor-capitalist and upper class criminal Thomas 'Doc' Durant. Scottish actor Colm Meaney plays "Doc" Durant. A deliberate stand-in for corrupt aristocracy, Durant's paunchy presence and slight British disposition doubly ostracize audience sympathy toward his thirst for geographic, capitalistic, and historical conquest. In contrast, Cullen conjures both intertextual and extratextual tensions partially due to his origin as a racist son of the South and former Confederate soldier. In this way Cullen posits an antihero figure that audiences may connect or disconnect with and/or both/and. The Confederate typology carries a certain antihero iconicity that recalls darker Western heroes like John Wayne's Ethan Edwards of John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956), Clint Eastwood in his self-directed *The Outlaw Josie Wales* (1976), and both the origins of Western cinema and film history in D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). The oppositional squaring off between these two ideologically different yet similarly aggressive masculine personalities displaces audience association; or at least among audiences that cannot abide intrinsic racial politics tethered to the South or the corrosive extreme individualism that privileges free market capitalism. These two ideological characteristics have long accompanied thematic lines in Westerns.

Yet the audience becomes immediately situated within watching if not rooting between immoral individuals vying for masculine ideologies that comprise greed, pride,

and power. And on occasion AMC claims in advertisements that Cullen seeks "redemption," cued by numerous scenes of stoic alcoholism, un-remedied guilt, and conflicting emotions between the requirements of work/progress/technology and family/tradition/nature. Technically, Cullen works under Durant for a majority of episodes, although the longer the series continues, the genre-blending twists reset these two in diverse arenas for dueling white male supremacy. Under the wake of dueling masculinities and ego(t)isms, *HoW* situates a number of supporting characters that echo stock Western characterizations compounded by contemporary flaws; from the alcoholic preacher to the Christian Cheyenne, from homicidal Irish carpetbagger brothers to tattooed prostitutes and anarchic Norwegians. Ultimately, these supporters symbolize morally gray chess pieces by which the oppositional antihero-villain uses as pawns establishing cross-cultural chaos.

While the *HoW* characters denote Western and literary archetypes, the series borrows its name from actual historical migratory towns of vice, social decay, and lawless criminality that trailed behind the railroad working community (Kreck, 2013, Vollan, 2011, & Ambrose, 2000). Town names contribute to the Western's mythological language. From John Ford's ubiquitous production use of Monument Valley across his film canon to Mel Brooks' lyrically superfluous "Rock Ridge" in *Blazing Saddles*, the names of towns help conjure the respective tones in Westerns. Sometimes using actual town locations can offer credibility that also imposes narrative weight, as implicated by the foreboding use of Tombstone, AZ in George P. Cosmatos' *Tombstone* (1993) or Anthony Mann's allusion to gruffness and real-life Hell on Wheels town Laramie, WY for *The Man from Laramie* (1955). Other times the uses of

fictional names suggests freedom to evoke grand mythical emotions or the Western spirit. Clint Eastwood (1992) uses this concept effectively and reflexively with the town "Big Whiskey" in *Unforgiven*, while Sergio Leone (1968) suggests coy ambiguity through the town name of "Flagstone" in *Once Upon a Time in the West*. There are benefits for using actual and/or fictional town names to support context and narrative. Such an amalgamation is arguably fitting for *Nowhere West*.[2]

"Go [Anywhere but] West, Young Man" – *Nowhere West.*

The phrase "Go West Young Man"—is an iconic trope of western expansionism linked with the notion of Manifest Destiny, open possibility and the indemnification of work ethic as a component of an assumed American idealism. The added warning of "*Go* [Anywhere but] *West*" serves as a warning grounded in experience of having been there. *Nowhere West* [or *Nowhere*] lies almost smack dab in the middle of the United States. *Nowhere* is not quite the Midwest and it's not quite the Southwest and it's not quite the South. *Nowhere* shares a haunting history steeped in Native American tribal relocation; later relocated again to account for America's most celebrated land run of 1889. Along the western border of this historically divisive region rests *Nowhere*, a small town of about 2500-3500 people, give or take accounting for the out-of-state prison population. *Nowhere* doesn't hold much claim to fame beyond John Ford's (1940) use of the downtown courthouse during a traveling montage in his Academy-Award winning Dust Bowl adaptation *The Grapes of Wrath*. This one-stoplight town is a quiet safe haven where simple folks can enjoy simple pleasures like family and faith and watery three-point beer on back red dirt roads down by the river. The township was

established along a railroad, a significant reason for creating townships during the Western era.

Yet while the railroad has faded along with neighboring towns north and south, this settlement stays connected economically for a few strategically significant reasons. First, the aforementioned courthouse brings a steady flow of bureaucratic state-funded traffic into town. Second, the noted prison helps provide a sometimes steady/sometimes wavering job site not unlike the mines and mills of the Appalachian region or the towns along which the transcontinental railroad was constructed. Third, those families who benefitted from the land run generations ago and held onto those property rights have in time accumulated a moderately wealthy land endowment. And in the course of arguably the last fifteen or so years, these once barren and increasingly desert-like farmlands now boom with oil and natural gas caches and the emerging technologies (i.e., hydraulic fracturing) and businesses that follow. Indeed the once left-for-dead area has sprung life and wealth anew. Yet these contemporary bounties recall the plights featured in so many Westerns; namely how only an elite few prosper, reducing long-term regional prosperity while creating class disparity that impacts across lines of race and gender.

Between HoW and Nowhere

It is important to distinguish between Western (im)moralities viewable on genre television and those telling visions I recall from everyday life. Western scholar and genre theorist John G. Cawelti (1976) defines the function[3] of genre *formulas* as "a means of generalizing the characteristics of large groups of individual works from certain combinations of cultural materials and archetypal story patterns," which enables both historical and cultural meaning-making "about the collective fantasies shared by

large groups of people and of identifying differences in these fantasies from one culture or period to another" (p. 7). Formulas help shape a genre but also generate a kind of user-friendly map for lay audiences and critics alike. Similarly, while formulas have the generic flexibility to change alongside culture over time, *conventions* represent "elements which are known to both the creator and [his/her] audience beforehand—they consist of things like favorite plots, stereotyped characters, accepted ideas, commonly known metaphors and other linguistic devices, etc." (Cawelti, 1975, p. 27). Conventions work like genre signifiers that provide audiences with a sense of recognition and identification. Thus, the key to extending versus declining any genre relies on a dichotomous balance between conventions and inventions.

Inventions work as experimentation with expectations among audiences, like repurposing the Western hero in a white hat to an antihero in a black or dark one like Clint Eastwood's man with no name in Leone's (1964) *A Fistful of Dollars* or implementing historical satire through the appointment of a Black sheriff in a White racist town in Brooks' (1974) *Blazing Saddles*. I report key ways in which *HoW* continues the Western tradition through its televisual imitations and innovations of American Western genre formulas. I lean primarily toward iconic conventions on *HoW* and compare how these conventions reflect my own upbringing in a contemporary small "western" town. I describe my hometown as a "Western" in part due to the ideological construct of a kind of unique American experience that may or may not be partially manufactured but indeed is collectively imagined. Likewise I denote a perspective that while several prominent families in my hometown see themselves as living "Western lifestyles," the majority of townspeople are merely surviving everyday life without the

luxury of choosing their socio-cultural signifiers. These "Western" themes involve the (ab)uses of community, the power that accompanies religious privilege, and the transformative process by which political economics convert justice into "justice."

Confused Geographies and Ideologies Between HoW and Nowhere

In tone with the visual-narrative language of cable TV, *HoW* producers mine moral depravity in their quest to "authenticate" depictions of moral and social ambiguity in the American Transcontinental West. Episodes frequently open and conclude with montages depicting struggles among the working class. These rough neck denizens root through grease, soot, and human/animal grime in pursuit of the capitalist visions and ventures beset by aristocratic investors. Editors bathe the drama's visuals in a gray matte finish that implies a worn rendition of a West and communicates collective emotional ache in post-Civil War America. In effect, the *HoW* producers clearly borrow visually from creator David Milch's (2004-2006) HBO Western *Deadwood* by illustrating *the Western town* as a nasty symbol of early urban decay and not the dusty yet romanticism represented in TV Westerns like *Gunsmoke* and *Bonanza*. Close up shots and wide-angle panoramic scans capture the immediate ecological impact created by this habitually transplanting tent-town comprised of uneducated migrant workers living under impoverished conditions. Such cultural extremeness underlies if not "justifies" the various symbiotic methods of vice that follow and haunt residents in Hell on Wheels, the diegetic town of the same name. These vices relieve workers their hard-earned wages often before they're even paid.

Amidst the scummy social anarchy posits the bustling whorehouse, an often-empty evangelical church, and the always-overflowing saloon; a saloon that may or

may not offer historically anachronistic bottles labeled Tennessee Whiskey and/or Kentucky Bourbon. Geographically situated above this buzzed and buzzing camp town, proprietary snake oil salesman and railroad visionaire Thomas "Doc" Durant sips fancy crystal glasses filled with bourbon while plotting nefarious ways to eradicate Native American tribes and undermine government investors through widening (e.g. winding) his railroad beyond fiscal logic to maximize his profitability.[4] His personal railroad cart visualizes class distinction in both its aforementioned physical height above ground level and through its lavish Victorian red leather and dark cedar interior décor. Thus, a dramatic binary opposition emerges between the inside⇔outside mise-en-scène that mythologizes the class politics that drive the *HoW* diegesis but also the everyday life narratives of *Nowhere West*.

Situated in the socioeconomic void between Durant and the townspeople, blue collar/middle class/Southern good ole' boy/long-haired/unshaven former Confederate/hard-working/antihero Cullen Bohannon emerges as arguably the most overstuffed protagonist this side of the Mason-Dixon line. Notably, Cullen remains one of few characters with relative agency and his chameleon-like collage of characteristics allow him liminal passage between the rich White man's world of ambition and prosperity and the lower rungs that comprise the working poor, othered minorities, and the female gender. In short, *HoW* narratively exaggerates the geographic mythical landscapes, ideological class values, and socio-cultural hierarchies that I argue function allegorically to support the rhetorical weight of *the American Dream*. Yet I also contend these dramatizations actually represent reality in ways closer than audiences suspect. I note how contemporary similarities emerge when considering the subtle landscaping

changes in *Nowhere*, now modified in ways that cater to the oil and natural gas industry. Such examples include building apartments instead of neighborhoods, installing trailer park sewage pumps across formerly scenic Western landscapes, and encouraging fast food chains to usurp and dispossess the slower-paced traditional small town diners and eateries.

Already I compared the landscape of *Nowhere* to that of actual Hell on Wheels, which were real-life transitory towns from which AMC's series bores the same name (Kreck, 2013, Vollan, 2011, & Ambrose, 2000). Just as actual hell on wheels towns require a specific economic pipeline for survival, *Nowhere* exists along what some consider the most historically mythologized road in the mythic American landscape, *Route 66*. However, this town rests at least two hours east or west from another major metropolitan area. In some ways, *Nowhere* projects tragedy. Former farmlands slowly decay into future desertscapes amidst drastic U.S. climate changes, yet the town benefits enormously from the second-life oil and gas boom it currently experiences. So while one local economy faces freefall, another skyrockets. That said, the same property-owning class that benefitted from farming subsidies and government-authorized land swipes before that now reap even greater cash crops through *mineral rights*. Oil and natural gas companies mine lands to the long-term benefit of only large landowners—mostly family descendants from that infamously publicized land run—and large oil and gas corporations. It's a rich get richer storyline that just happens to take place in America's Bible Belt Bread Basket. Similar to *HoW*, elite few prosper while hoards of hangers-on live paycheck to paycheck in the shadow of progress.

Nowhere posits a dustbowl settlement that fashions itself a premiere small town safe-haven from the burgeoning avarice of supposed lesser-desired (sub)urban spaces. I note my ontological outsider status as a transplant. I was not born in *Nowhere* but instead migrated into town at age four. My family lacked the historical-traditional-establishment ties that net the kind of prosperity *Nowhere* dichotomously boasts.[5] Yet we stayed in *Nowhere* and clung to its value-laden ideology in order to provide educational stability for me and my sister. Indeed, as my perceptions of the town cultivated alongside my slow-burn adult intellect, I now observe that full-term "acceptance" into *Nowhere* arguably requires a certain historical-racial-social-religious *access* in order to receive the prescribed "quality of life" *Nowhere* so fondly professes.

Communicating the reality of lower class hardship represents one of *HoW*'s continuous narrative virtues. Comparatively, my folks bounced around conventional low-wage jobs throughout my childhood: beginning with lawn care and apartment management in exchange for free rent to food services positions, correctional officer services at the prison, medical supplies delivery, grocery store clerking, under the table cash payouts for cleaning, painting, and wall papering jobs, and lower-earning bank clerk positions. And yet my parents sheltered me in ways that protected me from the quick money vices that negatively persuade against educational pursuit. In our real life melodrama, we scraped by amidst occasionally filing for bankruptcy and infrequently depending upon the benevolence of wealthier church members or relatives to get us through perpetual hard times.[6]

I recall frequent and regulated church attendance throughout my childhood and—as my politically incorrect high school football coach would always advise us on

Thursdays after practice—I always tried to "mind my P's and Q's," though nobody to this day can tell me what that means. In my weaker moments, I wondered why those who seemed un-affected by our church's religious principles—their actions outright defiant in my young and naïve eyes—still received the kind doting fatherly love and attention from the church pastor that he seemingly/deliberately avoided with me?[7] As a result, I received a backward lesson in morality (e.g. *(im)morality*) through these kinds of recurring emotional experiences**.** In retrospect, it is clear that I never quite adorned the *good ole' boy* routine the way my homegrown counterparts so fondly routinized to popular public affect.

Similar to the limited technological vices of *HoW*, there was never much happening in *Nowhere* and generally nothing too good after dark. Whatever the adults were up to (sleeping?), the under-aged underbelly frequently indulged illegal boozing at three generically distinct locations: off a red dirt road somewhere, out at "the tower" or "down by the river." While no brothels exist in *Nowhere*, varying degrees of consent resonate throughout the town. Salacious acts and damaging rumors run rampant through *Nowhere*'s communal banks, general [dollar] stores, and school houses. In some ways, living in *Nowhere* is a bit dichotomous; a would-be self-reflecting utopia in the vein Fordian Westerns by day and a hedonistic dosey doe of Peckinpahian proportions by night. In between the vices and the virtues, the pews and the pukers, such polarization helps explain why I often identified with outsider archetypes that I now recognize in characters like *HoW*'s protagonist Cullen Bohannon. Not necessarily in his roguish outdoor presence[8] or his limitless abilities or his mythic aim with a gun, but rather I identify with Cullen's wounded soul and power of observation and understanding of

how the flawed mechanics of culture enclose upon him. In season two's *The Lord's Day*, Cullen demonstrates an adept ability to code-switch in accordance with the company he keeps. On one hand, some might consider this tactic mere "social graces".[9] On the other hand, I argue code-switching functions as a key survival method in *HoW* as well as in isolated towns like *Nowhere*. To mix metaphors, *if you can't shoot the bull, you're dead in the water.* For this reason, Cullen's western code-switching exhibits acute social ethics as opposed to immoral deception.

Religious Power as Social Enabler Between *HoW* and *Nowhere*

Cullen's introductory scene in *HoW*'s *Pilot* denotes his outlaw status while connoting the religious dichotomy between the sacred and the profane. Inside a gothic cathedral, a white male soldier steps into the confessional to bare his sins. Yet once inside this supposed safe-space for grace, Cullen reveals himself and his six-shooter both situated inside the adjacent priest's chambers. The outlaw blows the soldier away in cold-blooded revenge without hesitation. This is your Western protagonist. *This* is the traditional audience point of identification. This antihero acts more like an antichrist than the violent redeemer archetype Lawrence and Jewett (2002) mythologize in their *The Myth of the American Superhero*. *HoW* repeats similar religious violations in subsequent episodes and seasons, including the recovering-relapsing alcoholic and reformed-reverted homicidal Reverend Cole in season two's *Viva la Mexico* and season one's *Timshel*,[10] and the Swede's manipulation of a Mormon stronghold while masquerading as a Bishop that speaks in tongues and witnesses holy visions.[11]

Cole's road to redemption becomes problematized by his estranged daughter's arrival. Cole's daughter Ruth—sometimes a jezebel and other times a Mother Mary—

exhibits archetypal extremes between the *Madonna ⇔ Whore* binary opposition, including an interracial/ extramarital affair[12] and tempting her father's sobriety with "Korn liquor". Across town or occasionally off the grid, former railroad foreman "the Swede" nihilistically serves as Cullen's moral binary opposite. "The Swede" functions as an agent of chaos. He manipulates union workers, churchgoers, native tribesmen, and even Reverend Cole with apocalyptic rhetoric.[13] Effectively, Reverend Cole's downward spiral ends in public tragedy when he hijacks a train and kills several innocent hostages before meeting his own violent end. The Swede, however, goes on to imitate and innovates Cole's evangelical schema in order to maneuver outsider factions like warring native tribes in season two and separatist Mormons in seasons three and four.

The Swede's various religious manipulations reflect *HoW*'s narrative affliction concerning the role religion plays in Western communities. Thus between these supporting characters**,** just/unjust cycles of transgression-forgiveness-neglect resonate closer to episodic TV conventions over character motive. Or do these bleak transgressions actually shine light upon the fatal flaws found in the isolated small "Western" town?

A shocking memory still, I recall the blasphemous Sunday I visited home from college. Attending the Sunday service with my hard-working mom, the pious youth ~~pastor~~ predator suddenly interrupted the sanctuary during a morning worship service in-progress. In an act of egotistic self-defense and elite narcissism that for me conjures the Swede's religious misdirection, this young "minister" marched up to the pulpit and proclaimed his complete innocence following his recent removal under numerous

accusations of sexual advance toward multiple parties outside and within his own youth group. He initiated a diatribe that included the kind of scripted details that further problematize his accounts as opposed to absolving them. The public spectacle was shocking and abrasive and stunned the audience into immovable silence. His words rang with calculated dishonesty, like the dozens of TV interviews I've watched with professional athletes that deny using performance-enhancing drugs. Yet when you live in the West—and *Nowhere* in particular—the town square intersects with the church steeple, and the pulpit posits a powerful place of persuasion.[14] Tragically, this story is not the worst case of serial statutory rape by a respected White male protected by the community's powerful elite. But such occurrences stress the (im)moral threats capable of emerging when communities over-privilege leaders in religious authority with unchecked power. Arguably *HoW*'s recurring theme of religious manipulation and corrupt leadership realigns audience allegiance in Cullen's favor. The Swede's actions appropriate Cullen's antihero status and suggest his ultimate redemption demands ultraviolent judgment upon the Swede and others for their perpetual transgressions against the innocent and lesser privileged.

The (Im)morality Clause Between *HoW* and *Nowhere*

Perhaps I consider *HoW* an exceptional series because it deconstructs myths of American exceptionalism. Durant's amoral compass results in increased schemes to generate progress and profitability at great social, economic and ecological cost. Cullen's White male privilege and cross-cultural liminality elevates him above situational threats and impossible challenges. The town and railroad continue westward because history "always already" occurs in the past (Ricoeur, 1990, p. 57). *HoW* is

destined to achieve its goal. The spirit of American exceptionalism wills this community toward completing the Union Pacific Transcontinental Railroad. The *HoW* formula distills American exceptionalism and the myth of the West into serialized Westward expansion. Distilled to its essence the series tells of exceptional people performing exceptional duties toward exceptional ends. Morality, alongside native cultures, open plains, the Rocky Mountains, etc., translate to physical, cultural, and ideological barriers homogenized into the properties that construct progress. Read as a distillation toward progress, ethics or (im)morality function as ideological semantics, and the belief in justice thus transforms into the practice of "justice". Justice is a measuring of rights, a balancing of scales. "Justice" constitutes a legal formality to preserve the status quo and protect and extend those already in power. Justice is not "justice". Instead "justice" functions rhetorically as a signifier that points toward what critical scholars might consider *injustice*, just as I have ironically if not rhetorically redressed morality as (im)morality. Although Cullen, Durant, Elam, and even radicals like the Swede experience trials and loss by the ten-gallon drums, these powerful male figures typically engage tactics of "justice" that allow them diverse outlets for rebirth and renewal. These renewals often reward newfound riches that reflect the ideological status between characters.[15]

Likewise, progress in *Nowhere* embraces similar jingoism regarding the county's resurgent oil and natural gas boom. In Westerns like *HoW*, justice is often depicted as a kind of lawlessness that benefits those with the most power. This is one reason the Western genre so frequently returns to the motif of the reformed outlaw who brandishes the sheriff's star in a self-contradictory gesture toward retirement or

redemption. But Westerns like Peckinpah's (1973) *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* or Eastwood's (1992) *Unforgiven* denote internal selfishness that typically motivates self-appointment. Gone are the self-righteous allegories of Zinnemann's (1952) *High Noon*, instead replaced by motives that always point toward capital gain and economic privilege at all cost.

Such is the case in *Nowhere* where the town and neighboring communities inflate the housing market beyond realistic expectation. With the oil and gas economic influx, monetary cash flow gushes upward and outward for a migratory sect of postmodern rough necks. Yet unlike the foolish workers lured into Hell on Wheels-type vices, the postmodern rough necks do not writhe in poverty. The postmodern rough neck drives a $40,000 truck and dwells in enclaves of McMansions. The postmodern rough neck poaches local beauty queens off social media so that trophy wife brides keep the homes dressed, the fridge full of beer, and the bed sheets warm. This is a young man's game, and aside from aforementioned traditional wealthy landowners, new economic inflations further segregate an already in-decline cultural segment, the middle class.

Like Doc Durant in his endless bureaucratic schemes that pad money in his pocket and sidestep legal recoil, the proprietary families of *Nowhere* will authorize lucrative home loans with confidant reassurance one day and then foreclose and repossess those property rights the next, once homeowners cannot meet the mounting inflation and interest. My parents sold the house I spent most of my childhood in—during low interest boom years prior to "the Great Recession" of 2008—and upgraded the family living space thanks in large part to overzealous home loan financing on the

part of local bankers. Within a short time later they made the difficult decision to take out a second mortgage (the second such effort in under ten years if I recall correctly) and soon drowned in debt. To be clear, multiple parties share blame in the ordeal. Yet the combination of accrued debt, economic recession, and income stagnation-decline became too great a burden and my parents lost their house and equity at a time where I was so overwhelmed with grad school pressures and geographic relocation that I felt unable to assist them in the first of two transitory moves. Thus my parents relocated to one of the newer apartment complexes in *Nowhere*.

I wouldn't necessarily compare my parents' living conditions to *HoW*'s tent towns, but most of their belongings moved into three or four separate storage units, as the apartment size could not accommodate the majority of their belongings. Meanwhile, the same small cabal of property owners and legal representatives employ the banks, own the lands, fund the churches, run the pharmacies, authorize statistically uncertain bank loans, serve on the school board, and hold the lion's share of mineral rights.[16] This small ruling class additionally serves as legal representation when their banks foreclose upon property owners. For those that downsize to accommodate smaller spaces, the same "pious" community leaders then rent out their personal storage units built on their extra land. But if tenants miss a payment the units become auctioned to the public or doubly repossessed by the owners.

If read as a closed-circle for community subjugation, *Nowhere* thus functions as the mythological embodiment of the archetypal town patriarch(s) that control everything and everyone, in this case split between half a dozen families or so. Amidst economic plight and public humiliation coupled by the backdrop of national and global

recession and historic unemployment, my parents' rent tripled. The local economy surged for investors and workers in oil and natural gas. Due to the influx of migrant oil and gas workers—as well as the town's notorious use of illegal Mexicans as hired hands—the apartment rent for a petite two bedroom upstairs apartment in the small bum-shackled town *Nowhere*, out on the edge of civilization, rose 250% in a few short months. If I used actual figures, the numbers might seem paltry among coastal or urban-based readers, but median income statistics for this region generally report among the lowest wages and highest affordability in the country. In an era where single provider income remains stagnant over three decades but average rent increases (Eichelberger & Vicens, 2014), in this case by over 250%, broad observations denote unethical inflation coinciding with dramatic class and wealth segregation in the United States. In "Western" myths, these kinds of economic actions occur as a result of land barons, range wars, carpetbaggers, and the like. Generally audiences of Westerns root against these narrative tropes as opposed to supporting them.

In this case, unethical inflation against families who lack stakeholder status in the oil and gas or mineral rights industry yields a dystopic exodus from Edenic paradise. My family's eastward march back toward metropolitan civilization underscores emotional and financial tragedy and highlights a demythologization of the political rhetoric used to prop up Red State ideology and the "Western" American Dream. Fittingly, migration resonates with *HoW*'s transitory narrative of liminal characters and westward mobility. As both *HoW* and personal experience dictate, everything has a cost, and progress is no exception. Time and progress dictate rules and values. I still revel in the West and "the Western experience" and appreciate the dualistic realities it

creates among diverse audiences. Yet I concurrently believe that the western ideal of Main Street America is dead or dying. Or maybe it's the *utopic idea* of Main Street America that seems dead inside. In its place exists a melancholic erosion of community, ethics, and small-town "justice", receding to the point that faithful and faith-filled families become unceremoniously removed until all that remains is "just us." Displacement as a narrative theme runs through the Western genre like rivers flow through valleys.[17] *HoW* narrativizes cyclical displacement that ranges from the Cheyenne, Sioux, and other tribal nations to railroad workers and the lost souls among its core characters. Arguably the drama's displacement emphasis holds rich semiotic value when considering contemporary adjustments in migratory patterns, ideological belief changes, economic socio-cultural shifts, and even transglobal conflicts over "progress."

Apologia and Projections Between *HoW* and *Nowhere*: A Conclusion

In fairness, I have framed my reflections of *Nowhere* in ways that identify with the bleakness depicted in AMC's *HoW* through examples that draw upon personal hardship growing up in a small "Western" town. There are many aspects of my childhood and people in my life that helped mold, mentor, and educate who I am today. I am grateful for many positive experiences in *Nowhere*, while at the same time negative occurrences cautiously inform me as I navigate contemporary economic climates and raise my own family. To risk cliché, those that fail to study their own [Western] histories may indeed be doomed to repeat them. I recognize the communal generosity townspeople piously afforded my mother and family over the years, yet I also observe how those prominent in town restrained their prosperity more as economic

tokenism that protects their class placement. There is an ugly oppositional narrative that repeats at a slow burn over time, the large price a small town pays to maintain its hegemonic status quo. I consider this real-life Western scenario both an ethical and (im)moral issue.

AV Club critic-blogger Alasdair Wilkins acknowledges how *HoW* revises Western historical triumphs into questionable (im)moralities. "Indeed, if there has ever been a coherent subtext underpinning *Hell On Wheels*, it's that its post-Civil War setting captures a time when America has been shattered, and the unforgiving march of progress is more than any sane or moral man can bear. This is a bleak, unforgiving cosmos, and one must either go mad or throw away one's old ethical codes" (Wilkins, 2012). Wilkins assertively warns that ideologically persuasive terms like "progress" come at a human cost more frequently than many historians or politicians prefer to acknowledge. Ultimately, *HoW* denotes a historical revision of apocalyptic proportions for its characters, their migrational surroundings, and the principles of progress that separate/unite the tumultuous status quo. Perhaps if the townspeople of *Nowhere*—so deeply ingrained and self-identifying with the "Western" American Dream—could ruminate upon *HoW*'s terse and divisive textuality, then arguably they might better navigate future potentialities that suggest impending cultural epoch.

Rhetorical Recap: Straight-shooting with the Western

Unlike chapter six's Western genre analysis of *SoA* and chapter seven seven's Western genre reading of *GoT*, *Hell on Wheels* is a straightforward Western that does not disguise its dramatic (and genre) pretenses. However, in genre terms of imitation and innovation, *HoW* works hard to bend and blur the conventional eras of Westerns in

film and TV in creative directions that suggest intertextual genre-mixing iconicity. This is one sign of the postmodern Western, which often reflects narratively on its own meta-history. But as contemporary cable drama, *HoW* also benefits from reflecting on the tropes and conventions associative within the cable televisual dramatic spectrum. In addition, just as cable dramas infuse polysemic (e.g. Western conventions and codes) and polyvalent ideological coding (e.g. themes concerning/negotiating family, community, religion, class, power) into their narratives, *HoW* functions as a Western that can critique the status quo through its generic Western archetypes. This works to support the utility of the Western genre as a vehicle for understanding how America *codes itself* ideologically, socio-politically, and even mythologically.

Autoethnography proliferates as contemporary reflexive theory and performative method used by communication scholars. In this way autoethnography works as a form of *praxis* for scholars and thus forms a pedagogical function. By drawing upon genre analysis of a western with my autoethnographic-perspectival framing, I was able to highlight tenets of the former and latter, while arguably extending the utility of both. This effectively demonstrates how a more marginalized cable drama like *HoW* can generate into a more spreadable media, rather than the traditionally sticky apparatus of the American Western.

In the next chapter, polyvalent ideological and socio-political encoding and decoding processes remain a focal argument. Here I close watch *SoA* for how it arranges political discourse, deliberative action, and whether this narrative arrangement is symptomatic of or a remedy to contemporary political persuasions in America. Then I shift political emphasis to the gender politics rendered in *SoA* before broadening those

cultural ramifications to identify and theorize an emergent cable TV drama convention in the rotten aesthetic.

Chapter Eleven

"To Be or not To Be": Reading Rhetorical Style in TV's *Sons of Anarchy* as Mediating Critical Rational and Conservative Counterintelligentsia Negotiation

Deliberating Context for a Political Reading of *SoA*

Binary oppositions are not exclusive functions for Western theologies of morality, Eastern philosophies of Zen equilibrium, or even theoretical continuums for organizing genre. There is perhaps no greater example of binary opposition among lay Americans than the political spectrum between conservative and liberal ideology. Such functions work to persuade constituents even when political agendas diverge from the public good. For this reason, a large percentage of Americans have grown callused to such political rhetoric (the *other*, negative connotation) and prefer a blind eye to engaged and sustained. Indeed, if previous national elections (sans 2008) are any indicator, a majority of Americans have given up their electoral right altogether (if not due in part to increasingly entangled voter ID laws by Republicans).[1] With voter suppression the new normal among Republicans (e.g. coded *upper class*), these power maneuvers not only leave lower class enclaves rejected but also establish a pattern of elitism whereby over time working class poor vacate basic rights of Democracy in jaded frustration.

Thus emerges a situation whereby political discourse no longer holds popular sway at "the family dinner table." In truth, how many families still sit down for dinner when familial fragmentation over decades has become compounded by low-wage jobs that require multiple shifts at odd hours. The disintegration of the nuclear family has emerged as a familial pattern for decades, but only in the last decade have TV shows begun to engage this demystification onscreen. Such is the case with the primary text of this project, *Sons of Anarchy*. *SoA* steeps itself within the traditional televisual and American ideological concepts of "family" and "community." With socio-political

discourse now a clearly *discouraged* public form, alternative political frameworks must emerge. This chapter emphasizes one text that materializes democratic critical-rational discourse under the guise of the biker/crime/family drama genre hybrid. As far as processes of encoding/decoding go, not all audiences are privy to the subversive political qualities *SoA* emits. Celeste Condit (1999) advocates the position of a privileged reader and recognizes, "it is not the case that all human beings are equally skilled in responding to persuasive messages with countermessages. The masses may not be *cultural dupes* [Hall's term], but they are not necessarily skilled rhetors" (p. 501). That said, close watching *SoA*'s political subtext will demonstrate the potential political platform such programs possess, thus arguing a case for *SoA*'s rhetorical power and by extension of previous chapter analyses the theoretical existence of polyvalent qualities.

Politics Reimagined as Grunge Aesthetics

"To be, or not to be, that is the question: Whether tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them?" – William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

The backs of the wooden chairs creak as the aging leaders take their seats. The weight of the decision looms large over the judicial body. Beginning with the President, a meeting commences, complete with updates on priority issues, both town and private business settlements, and new business necessary to take a to a vote. Yet despite all the identifiable policy markers of agenda setting, this is not a congressional or even a city council meeting. Instead, the stench of cigar and cigarette smoke (or perhaps reefer) rises as the group takes their turns updating the latest gunrunning activities. A large

White male covered in tattoo sleeves paces the room, padding down members with a metal detector. Matted beards nearly touching the hand-carved wood-stained table, an all-male council reports the earnings, or kickbacks, they have received. Beer bottles clank across the table, as new ventures are proposed. And with the vote in favor, and the smash of a gavel, the meeting adjourns as the motorcycle club, dubbed SAMCRO (or SC) disperses, revving and riding their motorcycles throughout their town and surrounding region.

While critical-rational thought tends to surface less often than impulsive vigilance, the fictitious motorcycle club portrayed on FX's cable drama *SoA* arguably engages counterpublic practices while acting as an influential public in their fictitious town of Charming, CA. Jurgen Habermas theorizes a blue print for his conceptualized ideal form of a *public sphere*:

> The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor (Habermas, 1989, p. 29).

Habermas's definition helps outline or simplify the use value of a public sphere as an emerging voice within the state, outside traditional power hierarchies of state control, centralized within the literate, critical-rational-minded public bodies of individuals seeking greater political equality through the circulation of thoughts and opinions via social discourse. While Habermas's definition aids him in unpacking the social

structures of the public sphere, it hardly captures the complexities of SC. Due to Habermas's initial limitations of conceptualizing a public sphere, alternative additions serve to circumvent the shortcomings of Habermas while extending the virtues of his earlier renown work.

Nancy Fraser introduces an alternate model of the public sphere in *subaltern counterpublics* or "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Frasier, 1992, p. 123), which answers her criticism of Habermasian exclusion found in the bourgeois model by theorizing a purposively excluded counterpublic. This extension adds validity to complex offshoots that do not fall under traditional categories of democratic praxis of critical-rational thought by privileged bodies. Fraser joins a host of scholars continuing conversations rooted in Habermas's initial public sphere, while branching into categories capable of suiting modern and postmodern situations of the political process.

Returning to the media artifact *SoA*, I posit the cable drama captures and projects the essence of democratic practice within counterpublic (or perhaps counterintelligentsia) groups, in this case the fictitious Sons of Anarchy. By examining the nature of their unique practices and communicative functions, I contend the show highlights numerous publc (and largely bourgeois in the Habermasian sense) tenants aligning with the discourses within public sphere theory. Yet the show performs these democractic functions by presenting itself as a counterculture counterpublic. Thus along with Habermas and Fraser, the show mirrors theoretical discourse offered by Catherine Squires, Oscar Negt and Alexander Kluge, Michael Warner, Danielle S. Allen, and

Robert Asen. In addition, *SoA* reflects many qualities of motorcycle gang history, mirroring many of the real-world counter-culture political practices invoked by similar groups. Identifying these markers boost the rhetorical power of the program as a road weary Rorschach of motorcycle culture, democratic citizenship, post-9/11 America, and the TV show's circulation of ideas as a public modalities practice of a public.

I intend to demonstrate that within the show, SC participates in tactics of conservativism and critical-rational thought that further eschews the polity of Fraser's initial posit of a subaltern counterpublic. I employ Asen's (2009) analysis of William E. Simon's examination of a conservative counterintelligentsia as a method for demonstrating a case of a conservative counterpublic. I argue that while the show functions as a fictitious drama presented for entertainment purposes, the dramatic rise in the show's popularity signifies its growing circulation and influence, due in part to the rhetorical power of its stylistic representations. In addition, the complex raunch culture orchestrated by creator and show-runner Kurt Sutter constitutes a diverse avenue for subverted commentaries about democracy, capitalism, "anarchy," and the history of motorcycles clubs in the public sphere. I engage these areas in an attempt to highlight and distinguish the rhetorical strengths of *SoA* as a continuing commentary on the tragic status of American democratic practice.

In the following section, I review *SoA*'s diegetic context before discussing the relevance of Habermas, Fraser, Squires, Asen, as their conversations relate to the text. I summarize their works to contextualize the framework of my close watching of *SoA*. I also preview Brummett's *A Rhetoric of Style* to identify how style functions in drawing public attention and thus increased circulation to texts like *SoA*. From theoretical work

on biker gangs as social movements to exposés on the real-life functions of storied clubs, I posit a deeper consideration of their counterculture as politically viable for public sphere theory discourse. I then return to the show and analyze its dialogic narrative for tensions between Habermas's democratic concern for critical rational debate and Asen's theorization of a conservative counterintelligentsia. Describing the show's political template provides a synchronized understanding of its depth for both viewers of the drama and readers unfamiliar with its crass world.

Sons of Anarchy

Since *SoA*'s premiere, the show received attention for its grueling depictions of violence, misogyny, patriarchy and various lewd content. In other words, Sutter works to achieve as "realistic" a translation of biker culture as possible. But the drama also emphasizes a supposedly unique form of political activism. The show centers around prodigal son "Jax", who is haunted by the legacy of his dead father and the anxieties of soon running the motorcycle club (or MC). Jax's father John served as President alongside six other original members, including Jax's stepfather, and current President, Clay. Thus for Jax, his role in the organization serves as a kind of counter-culture birthright. Furthermore, Clay functions as father figure, promoting resonant themes of insulation and family. Jax's mother Gemma benefits from her relationship with Clay as club matriarch, a kind of MC den mother. The drama highlights tensions of family and community, and like *The Sopranos* before frames such ideological concepts within marginalized criminal underworlds.

Relationships between characters drive their motivations and dramatic tensions, as Jax, Clay, and the others communicate complex power relations manipulated within a

closed-system patriarchy comprising counterpublic behaviors. “Anarchy” as a theme, is stylistically symbolized on the vests or patches worn by members and in the club’s conflicting anti-establishment motives and actions. The club operates under its own value code. These values often depart from traditional American moral behaviors, while also reflecting conservative principles. The MC posits itself as a “club” and not a gang. They operate out of a legitimate automotive dealership. Yet underneath the surface, the MC profits from illegal arms. Barry Brummett demonstrates how a motif like *SoA* registers plausibly within the show and with viewers when he notes, “Gun culture is a style composed of signs that will largely be read as working class” (p. 156). By registering the show as a commentary on class warfare, Sutter and co. garner the sympathy necessary from audiences for the show to prosper from a viewership standpoint. Nonetheless, within the narrative SC’s idea of social action includes maiming, injuring, or even killing if the situation warrants. SC values the club above all else, at least on the surface, and decisions about the organization occur at team meetings they call “church”.

It is thus in these church meetings that deliberative democratic principles emerge within the fringe group. The club votes on all matters, while certain participating bodies like the President Clay, or Vice President Jax hold a large amount of influential sway over factions in the group. Amidst these factional tensions for power, a conversation emerges which bridges concepts of biker culture and dialogues concerning publics and counterpublics. I argue tensions between traditional methods of hegemonic control and a Habermasian method of critical-rational debate pivot within the show’s grand narrative. In particular, I posit that *SoA*, with its crude language,

performances of machismo and patriarchy, and anti-establishment morals and practices, constitutes a rhetorical style of a counterpublic. In addition, this style lends the show credence to circulate political issues to audiences through the mediated lens of TV drama. I argue that between these pretenses of liberal behavior and anarchistic intention, the show reinforces traditional conservative values like limited government, the right to bare arms, and privileging individual white male rights over collectivist attitudes and practices. However, in demonstrating the virtues of critical-rational deliberative democracy, the show also stresses Habermasian notions of democratic practice through the stylization of a counterculture morality play.

Public Sphere Literature and Rhetorical Style as Counterculture Biker Scholarship

In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt (1958) theorizes the public and "the private realm" (pp. 21-78), where she sees relationships between household and *polis* as central to "conditions of freedom" (p. 30-31). Arendt organizes dichotomies between public and private including: "necessity and freedom…futility and permanence, and…shame and honor" (p. 73), serving her point to answer questions of exclusion by distinguishing that certain activities should and do take place in distinct sites in order to maintain their "political significance" (p. 78). While Arendt, writing in *The Human Condition*, focuses on *vita activa* and/or speech-action, her contributions note the evolving complexities of public sphere theory. In Craig Calhoun's *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Fraser (1989) flips the conversation began by Habermas and continued by Arendt, and updates the dialogic terrain to a more contemporary setting. Here Fraser introduces an alternate model of the public sphere in *subaltern counterpublics* or

"parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (p. 123), answering her criticism of Habermasian model by theorizing a counterpublic.

While conversations of counterpublics continues to pick up speed and attention, Michael Warner (2002) attempts to blur such distinctions in *Publics and Counterpublics*. Warner argues, "the public sphere in Habermas's influential account *is* private in several crucial senses" (p. 30), citing Fraser's critique as monumental toward Warner's case (p. 36). Warner calls for "stronger modification" of Habermas, updating understandings of public sphere theory by examining the fluid nature between what constitutes *public* and *private*, how each can easily transform into a version of the other. Upon presenting distinct offerings of public and private, Warner concludes, "None of these terms has a sense that is exactly parallel to or opposite of private. None are simple oppositions, or binaries. Because the contexts overlap, most things are private in one sense and public in another" (p. 30). Here Warner's thoughts serve a critical function in highlighting the problematic identification constituting public, private, counterpublic, etc. Yet the discourse continued by authors to distinguish such barriers remains intricate to explicating how spheres function socially.

In "Rethinking the Black Public Sphere: An Alternative Vocabulary for Multiple Public Spheres," Squires (2002) innovates the public sphere dialogue by extending and redirecting many of its core terms and meanings. Squires asserts, "the language of public sphere theory is ambiguous" (p. 446), in what I read as a personal extension inspired by Fraser. Understanding the blossoming of multiple diverse spheres, or

"coexisting counterpublics composed mainly of 'subaltern' [groups]," Squires immediately renames *subaltern* as a stand-in for marginalized.[1] Squires contends current understandings and conversations present counterpublics too broadly, complicating utility for subsets like Black political counterpublics (Squires, 2002). Thus, Squires splinters her understanding of these groupings into three distinct avenues: counterpublics, enclave publics, and satellite publics. Branching new categories like these innovates distinctions between political agents, emphasizing the role diversity plays in distinguishing group sets.

Situated in the political, Squires (2002) contends, "these responses…emerge not only in reaction to oppression from the state or dominant public spheres, but also in relation to the internal politics of that particular public sphere and its material and cultural resources" (p. 448). Squires (2002) theorizes enclave public spheres, "requires the maintenance of safe spaces, hidden communication networks, and group memory to guard against unwanted publicity of the group's true opinions, ideas, and tactics for survival" (p. 458). She even cites the African American experience with the Jim Crow South as a central example. This standpoint differs from Squires view of counterpublics, when she contests counterpublics suffers from broad application to diverse groups. For Squires, counterpublics emerge as oppression decreases while access to group resources increases (Squires, 2002). Squires' third category, *satellite publics*, comprise "those that desire to be separate from other publics" (p. 463), signifying a theme of alienation or departure, which inverts the goal of many groups seeking ties to larger publics and counterpublics. This third model forms an intriguing counterbalance to political goals of inclusion perhaps sought by enclaves or counterpublics. These categories offer a rich

opportunity to test the counterculture leanings of the SC, and I contend a comparison between SC, Squires's sub-groupings, and Asen's (2009) theorization of a conservative counterintellegentsia might espouse a stronger understanding of how the fictional group functions on a social and political level.

Likewise, in *A Rhetoric of Style*, Barry Brummett (2008) situates style at the center of popular culture. In addition, Brummett reveals how social and commercial avenues structure style, which in turn creates political consequences. In this manner, he argues style constitutes rhetorical power, a pervasive marker in twenty-first century America. As an appropriate comparison to my interest in the gunrunning Sons of Anarchy, Brummett analyzes gun culture in America through his theoretical lens of rhetorical style. Thus utilizing Brummett's theory of style, I address his analysis in order to understand the weight style plays on aesthetic texts like *SoA*, and the manner in which this show communicates style as a political tool. Academic interest in these grey area practices of democracy also shows how biker cultures denote rich and complicated texts with significant political views and practices. Yet these complicated representations must be unpacked in an effort to understand how they operate politically. In the following section, I examine the fictitious organization SAMCRO. My effort here is to highlight how SC navigates between concepts of counterpublic and conservative counterintelligentsia. Spotlighting these contradictory elements aids my final analysis of the show and its in-text deliberative democratic narrative tensions.

"SAMCRO" – Counterpublic, Conservative Intelligentsia, or Both?

"To address a public or to think of oneself as belonging to a public is to be a certain kind of person, to inhabit a certain kind of social world, to have at one's disposal certain

media and genres, to be motivated by a certain normative horizon, and to speak within a certain language ideology." – Michael Warner, Publics and Counterpublics

Given the show's attention for hyper-gratuity, perhaps Sutter works to achieve "a certain kind of social world" through access to "genre" and a particular "normative horizon" where negotiations occur "within a certain language ideology" (Warner, 2002, p. 10). In other words, Sutter attempts an accurate aesthetic rendering of biker culture. The core cast of lead characters highlight tensions of family and community, muddled within the shadows of conflicting ideologies regarding the club's illegal gunrunning and otherwise criminal behavior. *SoA* characters are motivated by their relationships with the other characters, which also provide the drama with its dramatic tension. Interactions provide examples of dissent and unconventional power distribution within a closed-system patriarchy. By a closed-system patriarchy, I refer to the agreed upon patriarchal code of the club that everyone generally abides by. The central theme of "anarchy" is ever-present. In the season one episode *Patch Over*, the club's definition of Anarchy appears spray painted under a bridge. Their definition reads:

> *Anarchism* stands for liberation of the human mind from the dominion of religion, liberation of the human body from the dominion of property, liberation from shackles from the restrain of government, stands for social order based on the free grouping of individuals.

Irony is coded in this old definition as the club has lost its values. This results in many dramatic tensions within the club. Anarchy also appears as a physical symbol on the vests worn by the members and could be interpreted by audiences through the club's continuous conflicts in and out of the club. However, the end of the spraypainted

definition “anarchy” coincides with Asen’s (2009) understanding of a conservative counterintelligentsia, where a key book by Milton Friedman similarly acknowledges, “individualism and freedom” as “paramount” to the conservative cause (p. 274). If the show’s ideological understanding of “anarchy” mirrors conservative modes of freedom, then the “anarchy” must be read as a loaded term intended to lure in a particular audience.

Perhaps instead of “anarchy,” club vests might read “counterpublic.” Or perhaps not, since Warner (2002) notes counterpublics began as amidst the liberal tradition’s critique of patriarchy. Still, *SoA*’s immoral values dramatically depart from typical American practices of moral behavior. The club’s illegal practices demonstrate a resistance to the moral status quo, yet their club ideology reflects such beliefs as limited government and the right to bare arms. So where does this situate SC? Warner offers an interesting rendition of Habermas’s *Structuration of the Public Sphere*, believing Habermas, “wishes to show that bourgeois society has always been structured by a set of ideals that were contradicted by its own organization and compromised by its own ideology” (Warner, 2002, p. 46). Upon closer examination, this fits SC’s situation well, as their hegemonic patriarchy, preaching liberty and freedom, disavows females and most minorities from participation at team meetings called “church.”

Warner (2002) notes that, “Just as the gendered division of public and private kept women from challenging their role in any way that might have been political, public interactions are saturated with protocols of gender and sexual identity” (p 51). In SC’s church meetings, gender identity designates who can and cannot participate

democratically. President Clay, or the VP Jax wield heavy political influence among factional enclaves.

Supporting the case of counterpublic, the clubhouse "church" meetings are held in what Squires would identify as "spaces and discourses" that are "hidden, used/produced solely by group members" (p. 458). Again, I posit *SoA*, with its crude language, performances of machismo, and anti-establishment morals and practices, constitutes a rhetorical style of counterpublic. Squires believes the above scenario exists closer to her splintered counterpublic term *enclave*, "resources" are "few", "goals" are "to preserve culture", and "sanctions" include "violence and disrespect from state and dominant publics" (p. 458). Each of these markers match the cabalistic practices of SC, but as a patriarchal organization controlled by White males, the club diverges greatly from Squires emphasis on Black Public Spheres.

In addition, despite overt pretenses of liberal forms of resistance framed as so-called anarchistic intention, the show reinforces traditional conservative values like limited government, the right to bare arms, and ultimately privileges individual rights over collectivist attitudes and practices. Maybe a stronger association to SC might be found in Asen's critique of a conservative counterintelligentsia. Asen charts how Simon, a well-established Wall Street broker, "issued a call for counterpublicity," claiming a shift to the marginalized, arguing "business [class] people suffer at the hands of a liberal ruling elite that could control American society" (Asen, 2009, p. 275-276). This ideological argument against a liberal ruling class plays out in the season two episode *Gilead*, as SC finds themselves unprotected in San Juaquin County Prison. Clay

approaches a black gang leader named Russell, who responds with the following evaluation:

> Russell: Understand ya'll got safety concerns.
>
> Clay: Just a bunch of short-timers lookin' for some friends.
>
> Russell: Monumental times, my brothers, Black man in the White House, Black saving White in the Big House.

Russell highlights an ideological shift in power between White and Black class, historically privileged and marginalized, respectively. Noting this scenario puts Clay in the role of Simon, alluding to a supposed decline of White male privilege and thus organizing his negotiation around an ideology of a conservative counterintelligentsia.

Having already explored ways in which *SoA* acts as both a counterpublic and a conservative counterintelligentsia, I re-examine Habermasian principles as they intersect in the show's narrative. In the following section, I examine how *SoA* mixes messages between a conservative intelligentsia and Habermas's ideological understanding of a critical-rational bourgeois public sphere. I argue the show arranges mixed-messages that, while compromising on the one hand, may in fact promote democratic social discourse due to its political-metaphorical polyvalence on the other hand. This in turn creates a counter-culture program that endorses the negotiation of social discourse through narrative fiction while simultaneously entertaining the masses. Thus the show bridges forms by speaking to political-minded public sphere theory scholars while satisfying the aesthetic expectations of popular culture scholars and TV criticism. Next, I emphasize areas of the text that question methods of democracy, specifically tensions surrounding speech and action. I showcase how the Habermasian

notion of critical-rational thought plays a pivotal role in *SoA*'s narrative, which in turn teaches the audience a Habermasian moral lesson in democratic theory. In effect, the circulation of this text offers a platform for mediated public engagement in an updated version critical-rational reflection, much like the psychological novel performed a similar function in Habermas's ideal public sphere state.

The Politics of *SoA*

In early seasons, Clay Morrow serves as founding MC member and President. Clay's words and actions follow a traditional pattern in club history. Thus Clay functions as a stand-in for a conservative adherence to the status quo. After the attempted hit on Clay in season one, Clay sits down with the leader of the rival Mayans. Negotiating terms of a ceasefire in the Sons' favor, Clay presents the news at a team meeting. Reaction is severe, as multiple members, including co-founder Piney question why Clay would forge a club decision without the proper "club vote." Speaking in double talk, Clay notes that nothing is final without the vote, yet the apparent value of this situation emphasizes power structures and the leadership rules bending when it benefits those in charge.

Before any major action occurs (e.g. crime), the club votes for majority approval. In the episode *Patch Over*, the Indian Hills Nevada club must reckon their inability to function independently. A vote is forced to decide whether the club will dissolve or become absorbed into the Sons of Anarchy Charming branch. While the group indeed votes to "patch over" to SC, the political pressure predetermines the vote, as Jax and co. arrive on site to convince the charter President of the impending decision. As the show operates under the pretense of supposed "anarchism," the drama regularly

features scenarios in which hypothetically democratic processes becomes puppet displays for predetermined outcomes. Technically, this recurrent theme reflects the American Democratic system two-fold, both in the electorate process and in the behind-the-scenes pre-negotiations that often sway outcomes beforehand.

Just as *SoA* mirrors the democratic process of legislative action, *SoA* also mimics criticisms that politics function as incestuous or exclusionary decision-making processes. In the episode *Hell Followed*, the MC votes in favor of putting a hit on a prominent figure behind the club's current illegal arms-related debt. Typical club meetings feature an open democratic discussion surrounding the pro's and con's of risk versus gain. Usually speeches given by Clay evoke more pathos or emotional appeal. Jax tends to share equal input, yet his disposition to disagreement and contra-planning schemes favor a logos or logical appeal, provoking an ideological wedge between stepfather and son. Other members offer input based on their perspective or association to a given situation, but ultimately sway swings between Jax's persuasive alternatives and Clay's powerful influence.

Heidi Hartman (1985) defines *patriarchy* as, "a set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women" (p. 322). There is no disputing that within the context of the male-heavy narrative, SC operates as a system that allows males to embrace lifestyles of excess that subjugate and disenfranchise women. The MC functions as a hierarchical system in which men almost always have the upper hand, financially and otherwise. Hartman notes, "hierarchies 'work' at least in part because they create vested interests in the status quo" (p. 322).

Gramsci's (1971) theorization of hegemony spotlights the ways in which social systems impose the ideological dominance of one group over another. As an organization, SC meets several criteria denoting patriarchy. Hartman stresses, "the areas outside the home where patriarchal behaviors are taught…enforced and reinforced" include "churches, schools, sports, clubs, unions, armies, factories," etc. (Hartman, 1985, p. 322). For characters in the show, SC amalgamates many of these organizations, and every decision made by the SC is repeatedly described as being "for the good of the club."

Another scene that privileges democratic and hyper-masculine patriarchy occurs in season two's *Small Tears*. Ole' lady Luann's porn business faces foreclosure due to penetrating raids by the FBI, and new threats from rival porn king Georgie Caruso. Jax forms a plan to both protect Luann's interests and the MC. At a team meeting he proposes SC claims a stake in Luann's porn business by leasing their unused gun warehouse as a studio, splitting profits 50/50.

> Jax: There's a ton of guys like Georgie out there. [If] Luann can't pay her tab, they'll keep comin'…so to speak.
>
> Chibs: So she wants her 50k [that Luann previously loaned to help the club in season one]
>
> Tig: But that's not gonna happen.
>
> Jax: Obvisouly but we can offer her something else, a partner…The empty gunhouse we just built. Same size as Caruso films.
>
> Clay: All of a sudden you're Larry Flynt.

Jax: Georgie's just a scumbag with muscle and a lease, right. His staff and talent do all the work. We already have staff and talent, Luann.

Bobbi: So we're the scumbags with the lease and the muscle.

Jax: Why not? We offer protection, a space, front her a little cash for the shit the Feds took. Split the profits.

Juice: I could upgrade her Internet shit. There's plenty of room for servers in that space, and that's where the real cash is.

Chibs: And I was blessed with an excellent eye for casting.

Clay: Clubs get into trouble when they take on too much.

Jax: Guns have been downsized, we could use the extra income. [Clay sighs] It's a *legitimate business* Clay. We run it clean, Feds think we've turned over a new leave, and they go away.

Chibs: And, at the very least, we get Bobbi laid

Clay: Thoughts?

Chibs: Everybody loves pussy.

Opie: I second that.

Juice: Third it.

Tig: I'm a very big fan of pussy.

Clay: All in favor, like I gotta ask…

All together: [yelling in unison] Pussy!

Jax's use of a critical-rational approach via his emphasis on the investment as "legitimate business" underlines a Habermasian approach to the democratic practice of the club. Yet as the true trickster figure, Jax uses a primal persuasion, sexuality, as a

temptation no club member can reject. Gratuitous invocations of words like "pussy" support the show's self-presentation of grunge style and patriarchy. Brummett contends, "The engine of style's influence in organizing culture is not by way of explicit propositions but by modeling, performing, and aestheticizing" (Brummett, 2008, p. 45). Repetition of gratuitous behavior signifies cultural identity and orients audiences toward SC's style of *raunch patriarchy*.

Later in the episode, Clay reprimands Jax on his spur-of-the-moment decision to frame a SC revenge kill on the 1-9ers gang. He lectures:

> That little judgment call you made, for the good of the club, came back to bite us in the ass, [and it] almost killed Bobbi. Whatever you think the truth is, everything I do is to protect what we got. It's never *arbitrary*, and it's never *reactive*. [my emphases] I've been doin' this for 30 years, I know a few things."

Here Clay plays Jax's game, and appears to present a critical reflection on the MC decision-making process. As the audience is aware, Clay typically handles his problems individually, and in secret, dramatically affecting decisions prior to club consultation. Clay's aggressive style signifies conservative politics, as his patriarchal methods go against the grain of how Warner posits the liberal tradition.

Yet Clays appeal, while coded and covert, employs both logic and partial truth. In the season one episode *Fun Town*, Clay prophesied an apocalyptic future for SC if they do not remain proactive in the fight for control of Charming. Following the vigilante execution of a child rapist linked to wealthy landowner-businessman Oswald, Clay's blackmails Oswald away from selling his land to a group of developers. Clay

warns, “If Oswald’s land goes commercial, that means housing developments, population rises, more cops, state and federal involvement, Charming goes Disney, and SC gets squeezed out by the oldest gang of all, *Old. White. Money.*” (original emphasis). Acknowledging Disney by name evokes a dual emotional response, both to the MC and the viewer. As Brummett (2008) attests, “If style is a site of political struggle, then the globalization of style…means that to some extent, global politics converge” (p. 98).

On one hand, Clay’s speech against the greater evils of big business recall William E. Simon’s call for a counterintelligentsia:

> The function of a counterintelligentsia is, above all, to challenge that ideological monopoly: to raise the unnamed issues, to ask the unasked questions, to present the missing contexts, and to place a very different set of values and goals on the public agenda. - William E. Simon, *A Time for Truth*

Here Simon’s plea for counterintelligentsia aligns smoothly with Clay’s misguided intent toward protecting small town lifestyles and resisting forms of social law and government control. Clay demonstrates “a very different set of values and goals” through his medieval tactics of vigilante justice. Certainly his violent methods relieve the ideological monopoly of the police state. SC intervenes when necessary and thus challenges the status quo by “raising unnamed issues” like the U.S. court system’s failure to adequately prosecute child sex offenders. Here, Clay rallies a conservative counterintelligentsia that reaches back to frontier outlaw or even medieval ideological codes of justice.

On the other hand, Clay's stylistic delivery in the moonlit woods outside Charming holds a particular persuasion highlighting the immanent threat to SC. In "What is Enlightenment?" Kant writes, "The *public* use of reason must at all times be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among men; the *private* use of reason, however, may often be very narrowly restricted without the progress of enlightenment being particularly hindered." Clays speech diverges from the public use of reason as his plea comes within a private arena. Clay also leaves little room for a critical-rational debate (at least in this moment), what with the castrated dead body of a carnival clown at his feet. Dead bodies also signify a departure from the democratic practices of a public or counterpublic with SC functioning as a fringe state. But this fringe state simultaneously allows the club to experiment, testing out differing methods of deliberative democracy.

Habermas contends the ideal bourgeois uses publicity over power to its advantage (Habermas, 1989). SC blurs this line and uses publicity and power, not through print mediums but other commercial avenues of publicity, which they refer to as "sending messages". In the culminating scene of the episode *Smite*, following a car bombing outside the clubhouse, the MC must make a critical decision that will dramatically affect the future of the organization: whether or not to retaliate immediately against Zobel, a new businessman in Charming with ties to the white supremacist League of Nationalists. Clay, in favor of immediate retaliation, makes an emotional plea, organized around the idea of active citizenship within the club. Jax retorts with a rational plan. While both Jax and Clay previously approached all key voters prior to the meeting, the results remain unclear headed into a vote.

> Clay: Its been a shit year. I know we were layin' low, tryin' to shake off this ATF stink, and I would never put a member of this club at risk. But, we underestimated Zobel, and the League's reach. Now he hurts a brother? [If] we don't act now, its gonna be a sign of weakness. They do it again. And we got an obligation *to this club*, *this town*, to crush this threat. Retaliation must be *harsh*, and *immediate*. *That's what we do*. It's what we've always done.

Here Clay's words reify the status quo in his persuasion to follow traditional methods of retaliation-action in the club.

> Jax: I agree with everything you're sayin'. We underestimated Zobel. We gotta protect our club, our town. Retaliation is undisputable, but if we do it now, we're doing it half blind. These guys aren't gangsters, their *moneyed*, their *smart*, and connected, [on] both sides of the law. [Jax goes on to cite two examples that back up his claim] Out here [Zobel's] not using muscle, he's using the law… We gotta wait. Due diligence…wait, learn.

The resulting vote is split 4-4. Half the club votes on emotion, siding with predetermined loyalties, while the others vote utilizing critical-rational thought. As a result, the 4-4 tie holds no majority and the club must "wait on retaliation." As a post-9/11 reflection on U.S. politics, this scenario is comparable to democratic debates between Bush Administration ideologies of preemptive strikes in the war on terror [literally, SC has been bombed inside their compound] and the logical call for a deliberative process including U.N. sanctions [i.e., let the "neutral" Charming P.D.

handle it]. However, as a post-9/11 critique, the subsequent fallout in the following episode highlights a would-be scenario for true accountability and the consequences of failing to adhere to Habermasian principles of a critical-rational democratic public.

In the season two episode *Falx Cerebri*, a "church" meeting following a car bombing by Zobel's Nationalist group shows the club licking its wounds. Clay uses this window as an opportunity to rally an emotionally charged speech. His speech ends with a rhetorical question, closing any prospect for a club vote. After trading ideas on Zobel's whereabouts, Clay over Jax's incessant reliance on SC's contemplative methods of reflection.

> Clay: You know, I don't give a shit what the plan is! I am tired of sittin' here, playin' 'what happens *if*'! Zobel tried to kill two of us in the last 12 hours, this charter doesn't wait any longer, *we kill him!* [Silence fills the rooms as members slowly shake their heads in agreement. Clay shifts to a sarcastic feminine tone before closing his speech with a rhetorical question.] Do I need to take a vote?

With this speech we see a return to Second Sophistic tactics, where the fanciful persuasion of the argument, mixed with the emotion of the moment, sways the group beyond critical-rational approach. Yet by episode's end, Clay is proven wrong once again. After locating the supposed hiding place of Zobel, the gang bursts in on a church-sponsored family dinner, rigged with surveillance cameras. As SC attempts to flee the scene, the San Juaquin Policy are already on site, ready to apprehend and arrest the group. This mistake elevates Jax's critical-rational approach over Clay's less democratic militant surge. Hence at season two's mid-season crux, the club faces a

crossroads as they head off to prison. Clay's rejection of a critical-rational discourse not only causes the MC's actions to backfire, but his emotional and thus individualist decision threatens their freedom.

I return to Asen's critique of Simon one final time, as Asen's assessment demonstrates crucial parallels between Simon's conservative counterintelligentsia and Clay's Second Sophistic ethos:

> Simon's articulation of freedom circumscribed the freedom of others, thereby signaling an aspect of privilege in his call for counterpublicity. Embracing an exclusively negative notion of freedom and insisting on an unbreakable link between economic and political freedom served to limit the context for understanding human agency and frustrate government attempts to redress inequalities. With respect to context, Simon highlighted individual behaviors while ignoring situational constraints (Asen, 2009, p. 278).

Asen's final assessment mirrors SC's plight as they follow Clay's supposedly club-motivated leadership. His propensity for "negative" actions led by individual motivations signifies his privilege as President. His inability to separate actions from the economic politics of SC's illegal business endeavors further jeopardizes the organization. Finally, Clay ignored the "situational constraints," (e.g. the threat of prison) that resulted in imprisonment and cost club members temporary freedom. Thus, in Clay's ideological individualism and defensive counterpublicity, we can see Asen's critique of Simon as constituting a conservative counterintelligentsia.

In effect the club's decision to act without critical reflection only signifies a temporary downfall. After all the show borrows a loose template from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, where drama functions to support the narrative as a morality play[2]. Or perhaps, given the shows propensity for gratuitous "mature" content, *SoA* operates as a kind of *immorality play*. The pivotal moment of *Falx Cerebri*, and the downfall of the club, stems from ignoring a critical-rational debate. Reading the text in this way, the moral of this story centers on consequences faced when ignoring the Habermasian principles central to a democratic public sphere. Thus I argue by centrally locating a political moral at the heart of a mediated drama, the circulation of this text among its audiences, (approximately 10 million views,[3] a number that grew over consecutive seasons) the show challenges its audience to reconsider the benefits and detriments of certain political practices within a modern democratic system. By framing these political tensions within the stylistic structure of a counterculture morality play, the show executes what Brummett means when he says, "The moralization of style is helped by the stylization of morality" (p. 103).

The tensions between Clay's individualist desires and Jax's self-determination to change the club culture reinforce similar tensions Brummett locates in gun culture. On one hand, Brummett (2008) positions "Individuality and Self-Determination versus Rules, Order, and Deference" (p. 160), and on the other hand, Brummett sees conflict between "Rural Work Contexts and Urban Threats" (p. 165). These two sets of tensions highlight the conflicts at play in *SoA*. Clay and Jax's ideological debates over what is "best for the club" communicate deliberative tensions of the former as they attempt to navigate the legislative rules for the organization. Meanwhile, their united justification

of gunrunning stems from the ideological perspective shared by actual rural gun owners when government threatens arms legislation based upon urban crime examples. One tragic *irony* of the show lies with the criminality of SC. The club supplies the guns to urban gangs, so that they might afford the luxury of maintaining a rural status quo in Charming, and therefore maintain hegemonic control over the community. This 'ends justify the means' perspective critiques backwater ideals as sharp as it critiques big business globalization. And just as the club functions as liminal trickster figures of gun culture ideology, the show mediates a blurred political stance, which then challenges audiences to participate in a critical reflection of the major themes. Following this line of thought, the show engages its public (the viewing audience) in the political, circulating ideas reflective of a critical-rational deliberative democracy, as mediated through the stylistic guise of a counterculture biker drama.

Concluding Thoughts on the Political Ramifications of *SoA* as a Deliberative Public Space

In a way, *SoA* revises the histories of biker culture by combining a Habermasian history lesson in critical rational thought with Asen's critique of a conservative counterintelligentsia. Such fictional revisions, like the ancestral psychological novel, critique and cope with civilization in ways that straightforward debates have failed. Thus, in their fictional place, Charming, and operating in a fictional space, the club house and beyond its borders, SAMCRO deliberates and negotiates a fictional political space while simultaneously the show, *SoA*, negotiates mediated space as a text, presenting anti-democratic ideologies, both in contention and in harmony, with Habermasian deliberative democratic practices of critical rational thought. Future

interrogations of *SoA*, and reflexive meditations on its consuming public, may offer a more qualitative resolution to this pragmatic conclusion.

In critiquing society through rhetorical style and through Shakespearean tragedy, Sutter and co. might offer a new hope to an otherwise bleak perception of society. I have demonstrated how *SoA* functions as a conservative counterpublic capable of teaching democratic lessons by attaching a morality clause on the use of critical rational thought. Future studies might consider *SoA* as a kind of *techne*, where in *Public Modalities: Rhetoric, Culture, Media, and the Shape of Public Life*, Brouwer and Asen specify that, "A techne resists identification with a normative subject" and "Techne marks a domain of intervention and invention" (Brouwer & Asen, 2010, p. 19). In addition, the show might also compliment another public modalities framework like *screen*, where screen offers a "metaphor for assessing the implications of a media-scaped social environment for conceptualizing and studying publics" (p. 10). Further exploration of the rhetorical power circulating through Sutter's counterculture narrative offers scholars an opportunity to lessen the perception that mediated texts form closed circuits of consumptive hegemony. Instead, scholars might consider how media discourse can evolve and what role the evolution of such psychological narratives plays in the public sphere.

Rhetorical Recap: Reading Personal Politics in Televisual Spectacle

As a resident Gen Xer, I identify with certain attributes where "boundaries are fuzzy, arbitrary and culture-driven," among feelings of "pessimism about retirement," of being "low-slung, straight-line" and caught "between two noisy behemoths" in Baby Boomers and Millennials (Taylor, 2014). Such cultural pessimism leads me to seek

alternative modes of understanding, digesting, and negotiating political identity and cultural values. As an advocate of current events, I read online news ferociously, but I've also watched more episodes collectively of *The Daily Show* and *Colbert Report* than any network news or cable news combined since starting grad school. Coming of age to recognize the binary oppositions at play across cable news networks gave me great pause. Under such Gen X pretenses, it simply makes sense to question such mediated modalities previously assigned as "authority," (growing up in a decade marked by visual binaries between ripped jeans and corporate khakis).

So when I approach a text like *SoA*—with its contradictory politics and clear gender problems—the text offers me great pause into the kinds of faux-Democratic scenery encapsulating state and country. Will this televisual drama imitate American politics or innovate them? Does it serve as a reminder of American political foibles or posit the potential for reform? Ultimately, SC notoriously cooks many of their votes just as many active political bodies working today. Yet whereas the coded anarchistic conservatives of SC ultimately vote to extend their club beyond racial lines, I close watch the puppet threatrics of local state legislatures as they refine laws that restrain definitions of marriage. Kind of like when inanimate corporations have more protected rights than me, resulting in fewer hours at work not because of my job performance but because of the liability I pose as a human requiring healthcare. Talk about social-political-ideological anarchy.

I mention the gender politics of SC in the preceding paragraph, and this theme is worth expounding upon in great detail. In the following chapter I explore the ways in which feminist politics play a subversive role in the *SoA* world. Like this chapter, I

utilize a canon of feminist scholars to intentionally highlight how varying voices from feminist and gender studies history take dialogic form among the female characters in *SoA*'s diegesis. Given the drama's heavy emphasis on masculine qualities and exclusionary gender politics, these back-to-back chapters play an important role in looking at the oppositional nature between politics and gender, masculinity and femininity. One common theme shared between these oppositional values is the emphasis on gratuitous social action in both word and deed. Hence this emerging through line plays a pivotal role in chapter thirteen, where an innovating TV genre convention emerges in the rotten aesthetic.

Chapter Twelve

Daughters of Anarchy – The Feminist Discourse of Raunch Culture in *Sons of Anarchy*

In “Undoing Gender” Francine M. Deutsch responds to West and Zimmerman’s (1987) “Doing Gender,” which studied social interaction and gender construction. Deutsch’s work describes gender as ultimately persistent, creating an “inevitability of inequality” (Deutsch, 2007, p. 106) and thus calls for the term “undoing gender” as a way to suggest “resistance” (p. 122). Deutsch finds West and Zimmerman’s “doing gender” as creating language of conformity, language that cannot escape the gender difference the term invokes. The women in the FX biker drama *Sons of Anarchy* (*SoA*) appear to engage in Deutsch’s debate regarding the persistence of problematic power structures of gendered language. For example, the show’s frequent use of the word “pussy” by both male and female characters highlights an example of conformity versus resistance. The use of vulgarities like “pussy” to establish moods of hegemony and patriarchy posit a key element of *SoA*. Yet a closer examination of the characterizations of women in *SoA* and the interactions between the female players on the show reveals a rich text full of discursive elements blending key feminist scholars like Betty Friedan, Jean Bethke Elshtain, and Donna Haraway. Specifically, in this paper I examine the interactions between the key female characters on *SoA*, highlighting patterns of hegemonic patriarchy and potential resistance, and I explore how female characters in TV can create spaces for mainstream gender critique. In this case a critique within the fictitious patriarchal world of biker counterculture.

Stuart Hall’s (1981) *circuit of television* describes how media is circulated to produce meaning. Hall identified three potential decoding processes: 1) “the dominant-hegemonic encoding/decoding” signifying “preferred meaning,” 2) the “negotiated code” offering more flexibility and adaptability, and 3) “an oppositional code” in which

progressive contra-decoding occurs (Barker, 2008, p. 328). While TV texts appear largely fixed in form as Hall describes, I contend that new forms of postmodern storytelling and increased creative control on the part of some nonconformist creators work to create diverse forms of TV consumption and mediated reflection. These new ways of interacting with TV texts provide for greater reflexive potential, allowing audiences to participate in "alternative discourses" (p. 331). By alternative discourses, I refer to non-traditional and oppositional readings of the text. Specifically, I argue that the style of *SoA* contains aspects of *raunch culture*, signified in the sexually charged language employed by female and male characters. My goal is to engage an oppositional reading of *SoA*'s narrative style of heightened hegemony. By highlighting instances in which female characters engage in discourses, using selections from Friedan, Elshtain, Anzaldua, and Haraway among others, I will determine whether the use of raunch culture heightens hegemonic patriarchy or counteracts it. The outcome of this test may determine whether *SoA* works as a counteragent against traditional TV norms, or as an agent of the status quo.

In my analysis of several key conversations between characters, I seek to chart the ways *femininity* is negotiated on the show, and how these negotiations reify and/or problematize the hegemonic status quo. Using selective feminist positions from Betty Friedan and Jean Bethke Elshtain, I theorize how several of their feminist positions emerge within the dialogue and actions of the women in *SoA*. To clarify, I will present a thought or stance held by a feminist theorist, demonstrate how her ideas resonate in dialogues within *SoA*'s text, and then establish whether this integration succeeds or fails to resist the show's hegemonic patriarchy. Finally, I propose that the hybrid methods of

interaction employed by the female characters in the mediated context of the show posit a kind of blurred meditation akin to that described in Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto." Thus in this way, though *SoA*'s females exist in the framework of a hyper-masculine patriarchy, I examine whether the liberal feminist positions and liberal feminist critiques I review occupies a legitimate space in post-millennial cable TV.

Sons of Anarchy

FX President John Landgraf notes their specific intent to offer "FX's brand of edgy risk-taking" (Bianculli, 2008). The show centers on Jackson, the prodigal son of the motorcycle club or *MC*. Jackson or "Jax". Jax's father, John Teller, served as President and founding member of the Sons. Six other original members, including Jax's stepfather and current MC President, Clay, are also featured on the show. Thus Jax's role in the organization is a kind of counter-cultural birthright. Jax's relationships with his father and step-father illustrate the insular culture and hegemonic power structure of the MC Jax's mother, Gemma, inhabits the role of Clay's "Ole' Lady" and den mother or matriarch to the motley gang Gemma is known for her pithy comments. As "club Matriarch", she never acts surprised in public when hearing about SC's latest problems, only disappointed. Gemma often responds to bad news with a disappointed, "Aw shit" or "its that goddamned [whatever external factor can be blamed]". Gemma's unsurprised yet empathetic tones indicate maternal qualities. Creator-Show Runner Kurt Sutter calls Gemma, "the show's moral center" (Grossman, 2010). The core cast also includes Jax's childhood sweetheart Tara, with whom he has rekindled a romance. The web of relationships between the show's lead characters highlights the tensions of family and community in the context of the world of criminal activity.

The characters on *SoA* are motivated by their relationships with the other characters, which also provide the drama with its dramatic tension. Between the core characters of Jax, Clay, Gemma, and Tara, their interactions provide examples of dissent and unconventional power distribution within a closed-system patriarchy. By a closed-system patriarchy, I merely refer to the agreed upon patriarchal code of the club that everyone generally abides by. The central theme of "anarchy" is ever-present. In the season one episode *Patch Over*, the club's definition of Anarchy appears spray painted under a bridge. Their definition reads:

> *Anarchism* stands for liberation of the human mind from the dominion of religion, liberation of the human body from the dominion of property, liberation from shackles from the restrain of government, stands for *social order* based on the free grouping of individuals.

The irony presented in this old definition is that the club has in some ways lost its values, thus the dramatic tensions within the club that turn up as a result. Anarchy also appears as a physical symbol on the vests worn by the members, and could be interpreted by audiences through the club's continuous conflicts in and out of the club.

The club operates under its own core sets of values.[1] No matter how democratic they appear, make no mistake the members of this club operate violently and without remorse. They value "the club" above all, at least on the surface, and decisions about the organization occur at team meetings that they call "church." While the club forbids females from participating in "church," examples of feminist discourse occur outside of those confined boundaries of power, where female voices displays alternative methods for the negotiation of space. In the season one episode *Seeds*, Gemma approaches

Donna, SC member Opie's wife, following her public humiliation of a check bouncing again at the local market. Donna is resistant to SC following Opie's stint in prison. Gemma reaches out to "console" her, with an outstretched hand full of groceries:

> Look, I know what you went through. [I've] been there, with two husbands. Lose your man, kids lose their dad. You get pissed off, wanna blame the club. But SAMCRO is not the enemy, it's the glue, the one thing that will always be there to pull you through the ugly shit. You gotta stop fighting this Donna, you need us.

This example like many, exhibit Gemma's loyalty to the club. Yet the example also demonstrates Gemma's non-violent and verbal negotiation of space, in this instance the extension of monetary space in the interest of helping Donna.

SoA as a Hegemonic Patriarchy

In her 1985 article "The unhappy marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a more progressive union," Heidi Hartman acknowledged the existing but "not inevitable" relationship between patriarchy and capitalism (Hartman, 1985, p. 324). Hartman noted specifically that, "*Patriarchy is not simply hierarchical organization*, but hierarchy in which *particular* people fill *particular* places" (p. 324) [original emphasis]. The fictitious motorcycle club [or *MC*] in the show exhibits a similar pattern of male hierarchy. Women have specific roles outside the organizational channels of the MC. If they are in a sustained relationship with a club member, women hold the title of "Old Lady." The Old Lady of the club president receives reference as the "Club Matriarch." Women on the fringe, who have yet-to-be-designated a man's *Ole' Lady* seem to live only for the sexual gratification of the men. Thus, *SoA* presents a system of

patriarchy and a hegemonic status quo in which women can only achieve secondary status within the club.

Hartman (1985) defines *patriarchy* as, "a set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women" (p. 322). There is no disputing that within the context of the male-heavy narrative, SAMCRO [or SC] operates as a system that allows males to embrace lifestyles of excess that subjugate and disenfranchise women. The MC is a hierarchical system in which men almost always have the upper-hand, financially and otherwise. Hartman notes, "hierarchies 'work' at least in part because they create vested interests in the status quo" (p. 322). Gramsci's (1971) theorization of hegemony spotlights the ways in which social systems impose the ideological dominance of one group over another. As an organization, SAMCRO meets several criteria denoting patriarchy. Hartman stresses, "the areas outside the home where patriarchal behaviors are taught…enforced and reinforced" include "churches, schools, sports, clubs, unions, armies, factories," etc. (Hartman, 1985, p. 322). For the characters in the show, the SC stands in for many of these organizations, and every decision made by the SC is repeatedly described as being "for the good of the club."

One extreme example of hegemonic patriarchy can be observed in the season one episode *Patch Over.* After refueling their bikes on the way to patch-in[2] the Arizona club, Jax and Bobbi can't help but intervene when a non-Harley biker sits on Jax's bike. After Jax gives the poser a physical beating, Jax steals the man's girl Suzy, who is

"headed nowhere special." After exchanging a kiss in the gravel parking lot, Bobbi addresses Jax's way with women:

Bobbi: Man, you are the James T. Kirk of the MC world.

Jax: Goin' where no man has gone before…

Bobbi: Let me tell you brother, I think every man's gone there before.

Yet Suzy remains unfamiliar with club codes. She becomes confused when Cherry, a self-described "hangaround" who is waiting to become an old lady, "hooks up" with Clay at the "patch over party," despite Cherry's clear feelings toward club Prospect Half-Sack.[3] Suzy thus questions the role of women in the group, and Cherry gives her a thoughtful breakdown of the gender hierarchy:

Suzy: I thought you liked that guy [Half Sack]

Cherry: I do

Suzy: Then why did you sleep with that old guy [Clay]?

Cherry: Because that's what we do.

Suzy: You mean you sleep with who ever they tell you to?

Cherry: I take care of them, and they take care of me. It's a *family*. And when I finally hook up, I'll belong to that guy and that guy only [Half Sack]. You see, good *Ole Lady's* can make or break a club.

Cherry inevitably sleeps with Clay after receiving the go-ahead command from the Sons President of the Indian Hills, NV charter. Her submission to the patriarchal club rules concerning female sexuality hurts her chances to win over Sons Prospect "Half Sack," and later causes a rift between Clay and his wife. Inevitably, the sexual transaction between Cherry and Clay that was sanctioned by the Sons President causes

difficulty for everyone involved, while only offering temporary pleasure to Clay, even though it was perfectly aligned with the rules of the club. In this example, we see Clay abusing a hegemonic form of patriarchy. Here, the privileged white male receives the sole benefit from an act that everyone, including Clay, ultimately suffers from. Yet despite the consequences, the characters remain faithful, not to each other, but rather to their outlaw code.

Deeper readings of the text demonstrate that corruption is rampant in SC's power structure, and the male characters are prone to making self-centered compromises of the group's values. This individualism reflects the Western polarized self/other ideology that is heavily critiqued by radical feminist scholars like Marilyn French and Mary Daly. In *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals*, French (1985) theorizes about the association between female and nature as antithetical to the patriarchal status quo associating male and the technological. The male reaction to these female qualities resulted in a gendered rejection of them and hegemonic suppression of nature (French, 1985). In *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*, Mary Daly (1973) further highlights the segregated qualities of masculine/feminine, he/she, ect., dating back to Aristotle's I/Other logic. Daly ultimately re-introduces these terms through hyphenated revisions like *Be-ing*, *subject-subject*, etc. (Daly, 1973). These critiques of traditional Western thought posit a more dialogic and thus androgynous approach to gender.

While the male characters represent the status quo in terms of their hegemonic practices and patriarchal attitudes and behaviors, I argue that the women of SC, the *daughters of anarchy*, engage aspects of raunch culture and negotiate their gender roles

through interactions that recall liberal feminist ideas and critiques of Friedan, Elshtain, [and later Haraway], in ways that challenge individualism inherent in patriarchy and offer more androgynous approaches to thought and action. Looking at these examples of interactions and their context within the show will reveal whether they support a more liberal feminist position within the show or simply reinforce the show's hegemonic values. In the following sections, I examine several interactions from seasons one and two of *SoA*, highlighting key dialogues that reify liberal feminist thoughts and critiques from Friedan and Elshtain. I argue that while these dialogues propel the women of *SoA* beyond traditional stock female characters on TV, their actions and motivations still support patriarchy. Through this exercise, I also highlight the ways the female characters on *SoA* embody alternative visions of femininity countering traditional TV representations.

Gender Negotiation and the Women of *SoA*

Sherry et. al. (2004) argue, "themed spaces are both gendered…positioned in the market-place as attractive to those already holding particular views of gender roles and relations…and gendering…they also reinforce a system of existing gender roles and relations" (p. 157). According to this definition of themed spaces, the women in *SoA* must, at least to a certain degree, operate within the pre-determined patriarchal culture of the motorcycle gang, which so far suggests negative consequences for women. I am particularly interested in the characters Gemma, "the Matriarch," Tara, "the doctor", Agent Stahl from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms [or ATF], Luann, the ex-porn star Old Lady, and Cherry, the "hangaround." I pay particular attention to Gemma and Tara, as they reflect larger roles within the show.

In *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan (1963) reasoned, "any woman, like any man, can meet all of her personal obligations and become free to assume significant roles and responsibilities in the public world" (p. 330). The character Tara signifies a break from the club culture, having left the small town of Charming, obtained multiple degrees, and returned as a medical surgeon. Thus on one hand, Tara has arguably assumed a much more valuable "roles and responsibilities" through her medical career, both from a monetary and societal perspective. In earning more capital through a career steeped in aiding humanity, she embraces liberal qualities through a conservatively profitable profession. One the other hand, some of the dramatic tension in show is created by Tara's return to her roots and her high school sweetheart Jax. Yet Tara's determination to approach the hegemonic structure of the club on her own terms, and not through the channels of the "hangaround" like Cherry, indicates her shift to an alternative, more Friedanian liberal feminist mindset.

Friedan (1981) explained in *The Second Stage*, "unless women's assimilation into the public world is coupled with simultaneous assimilation of men into the private world, women will always have to work harder than men" (p. 112). Tara, who works after hours, patching up bullet wounds and other injuries for the club, illustrates Friedan's observation. While these charitable acts communicate Tara's willingness to help the club and solidify her loyalty, her labor is being exploited .[4] Tara initially functions as a lost soul "looking for her place" in the club and in life. Therein lies a specific problem; that the show portrays Tara as an accomplished, independent, and yet incomplete and effectually needy person. It is implied that Tara's situation stems from what Gemma calls "daddy issues." However, from a narrative perspective this problem

functions as a way to present the character with flaws that can evolve over the course of the series. In later seasons, Tara achieves heightened levels of confidence and balances roles of motherhood and workplace satisfaction[5].

In contrast, Gemma is a bedrock member of SC. Gemma, former Old Lady to Jax's dead father, founding member John Teller, owns her role as "club matriarch." Consider the following example. In the season two episode *Fix*, Gemma confronts Tara about her apparently passive public reaction when a pornstar flirts with Jax. The two converse as Jax pulls up on his bike outside the motorcycle shop. Jax is escorting the pornstar Ima as a gesture of "protection." As Ima gives Jax a goodbye kiss, the act, witnessed by Gemma and Tara, ignites a dialogue between the two on feminine culture in the club. Tara's motive in season two focuses on *trust* with Jax, yet her passive reaction cues Gemma's matriarchal warning. Gemma advises a lesson in club culture:

> Gemma: You good with that [Ima] rubbin' on Jax.
>
> Tara: I trust him.
>
> Gemma: Its not him you worry about. It's them. They think he's a free dick…[You] gotta educate. Set the bitch straight. Others see it, everyone knows.
>
> Tara: [Out of her element] Like what, hit her?
>
> Gemma: Kick, scratch, whatever.
>
> Tara: I'm not 18 years old Gemma, my cat-fighting days are over.
>
> Gemma: We'll see.

In this exchange Gemma, in her growing emotional bond with Tara, embraces emotion as strongly as she exhibits critical-rational thought through a dialogue of strategy,

recommending if necessary, physical altercation. This scene allows Gemma to embody both traditionally feminine and traditionally masculine characteristics. Liberal feminists agree that, "the single most important goal of women's liberation is sexual equality, gender justice" (Tong, 2009, p. 34). Gemma communicates a kind of raunch culture dialectic that "celebrates sexual objectification and physicality" (Barker, 2008, p. 312), empowering her character by giving her a kind of linguistic agency with lowlife MC members. The problem is her empowerment never yields her a place at the table in MC "church" meetings. Thus, her power always remains limited within the patriarchic hierarchy.

Liberal feminists sought to "free women from oppressive gender roles, which are used as an excuse and/or justification for giving women a lesser place" in society (Tong, 2009, p.34). Gemma's raunchy language, through constant utterances of "pussy," "shit," "goddammit," "bitch," "whore," "gash" and other serendipitous terms less prevalent on network or cable TV, might also be understood as reifying the male status quo. I argue she uses it for her advantage, but also to advantage the club. Consider the following exchange between Gemma and fellow Old Lady and porn producer Luann. In episode 8, *The Pull*, the MC owes the Irish a debt of $135,000, an issue in need of immediate settlement. Gemma, acting on behalf of the club, visits ole' lady Luann again, in an effort to squeeze her out of some porn cash:

> Luann: You want me to front the money…that's a lot of cash. I don't know.
>
> Gemma: I got a pretty good idea about your bank account.
>
> Luann: What does that mean?

> Gemma: Oh come on, don't get all humble now. You're always bragging about *the business*. The money, the corvette, the new tits. Here's a chance to use your cash for something that matters.
>
> Luann: I paid my dues. Six years of taking two in the ass while some teenage blew his load on my face, I earned that 'Producer's Chair'.
>
> Gemma: No one said you didn't earn it. But Otto's the one that fronted you the money…pulled those dicks outta your ass so you could put it in that chair. Don't you forget it.

Gemma's coercion succeeds as Luann offers up to $55,000 for SAMCRO. Yet as she attempts to barter a steep interest rate of 20%, Gemma embraces a more masculine form of dominance in her direct threat to Luann: "You better rethink that percentage. Bad shit happens to greedy whores." Here Gemma resorts to masculine tactics and adheres to threatening a fellow women in the assistance of the patriarchal order. This complicates Gemma's adherence to strict notions of liberal feminism, but as I hope to demonstrate, she later evokes qualities of Friedan and Elshtain. I introduce the remainder of characters in-context, examining raunch culture and associations with the feminist works of Friedan and Elshtain as compared with *SoA*.

Raunch Culture as a Postmodern Feminist Perspective

As noted, dialogues of representation on *SoA* depict a counterculture ripe with gutter trash human behavior. From biker hegemonies to shady porn businesses to sexual objectification of women, *SoA* works hard to translate the seedy world of biker counterculture. Yet the stylistic presentation of this white trash culture executes its style with such pastiche that the raunchy atmosphere of *SoA* serves as a kind of counter-

glamour gaze for viewers. By counter-glamour gaze, I mean the mixture of sharp High Definition camera work, pithy crackling dialogue, strong character development, cinema-quality acting, and cliffhanger narratives produce a high-quality drama situated in a low-brow society. Levy assesses that, "Raunch culture is not essentially progressive, it is essentially commercial" (p. 29), in some ways a kind of gender evening field where, "Both men and women alike seem to have developed a taste for kitschy, slutty stereotypes of female sexuality resurrected from an era not quite gone by" (p. 34). For some, raunch culture posits a controversial feminist paradigm. Chris Barker (2008) explains, "*Raunch* advocates sexually provocativeness and promiscuousness by women as women. It liberally employs references to pornography and celebrates sexual objectification and physicality" (p. 312). Once the women of SAMCRO adhere to the decidedly male code, they embrace the male-privileging rules by flipping these hegemonies to their advantage.

For example, consider the opening lines of episode 3, *Fun Town*, in which Gemma and Clay, both over 50, trade sexual innuendos in front of club members and the general public, while visiting the carnival:

> Gemma: Let's go into the photo booth. Come on, let me give you a quick hand job.
>
> Clay: I already got a picture of that.
>
> Gemma: This time it'll be my hand.
>
> Clay: You been a bad girl.

After a visit from a local townsperson, and a visit to the photo booth, the two emerge smiling as a club member approaches Clay about business.

MC member: The Irish are coming.

Clay: Go find the others. [Looks at Gemma] Sorry, baby. I might have to finish you off later.

Gemma: I heard that before. [Taunting Clay] Gimme' some more quarters, I'm going back in the booth.

Perhaps mild to some tastes, the scene, a white trash carnival, mixed with the setting, small town biker culture, and the context of 50-plus deviants engaging lewd acts in public places, evokes specific associations with definition of *raunch culture*. Specifically, Barker's notion of "sexually provocativeness and promiscuousness" ties well to Gemma's sexually indiscriminate choice of a carnival photo booth. While Clay leaves Gemma for club business, privileging club patriarchy over intimacy, their sexual act indeed highlights raunch culture. Furthermore, Gemma's response to Clay that she's "going back in the booth" celebrates an androgynous sexuality, undetermined by patriarchy, embracing Friedan's urge for "beta women to develop their bold, assertive, commanding, or adventurous masculine qualities" (Tong, 2009, p. 32).

Another example comes from the season two episode, *Albification*, in which Gemma and Tara engage a frank conversation concerning Tara's future with Jax and the club. On her budding relationship with Jax, Tara asks, "Where are you on this?" Gemma responds, "You really want my advice? Total disclosure…it's the only way it works between you and him. You're too smart, too neurotic to *live in the vague*. He needs to tell you everything: *No truth, no pussy*, draw the line." As Tara reacts, "I'm not sure I want to know," Gemma warns her, "Then this'll never last," later adding, "You love the man. You *learn* to love the club. [If] you can do that, there's no truth you can't

handle." In this short exchange, Gemma reclaims the hegemonic raunch of the word "pussy" and re-appropriates it as a tool for women's empowerment.

From a theoretical standpoint, advocates of raunch culture "reject the idea that women should behave as victims and claim that right to do whatever they want to their bodies and to look how they wish to look" (Barker, 2008, p. 312). Thus Gemma's constant use of the word "pussy" on *SoA* takes the power of the word away from the men, and makes it a tool at the disposal of women. By "owning their pussy" females can negotiate space in different ways, causing ripple effects within the club. An example follows in *Albification*, as Tara withholds sexual intimacy from Jax. As Jax stands naked in the bathroom, having just showered after assisting in a club revenge murder, he breaks a sacred barrier between club members and old ladies, confessing his crimes to Tara. To use Gemma's words, Tara "owns" her "pussy" by using it as a tool to negotiate an emotional intimacy, honesty. Her negotiation successful, Tara gains a greater foothold with Jax, and by extension, the club.

Levy cautions, "Raunch culture is not *only* a rebellion. It is also a garbled attempt at continuing the work of the women's movement" (p. 75). Thus, raunch culture comes to symbolize something eschew in the postfeminist collective, connoted in *SoA* by the mixed-message communique espoused by SC women and Gemma in particular. But Levy also champions that, "Raunch provides a special opportunity for a woman who wants to prove her mettle" (p. 96). Describing raunch culture, Barker contends, "One might describe raunch culture as postfeminist party-time" (p. 313). Barker (2008) notes popular examples like Madonna, Christina Aguilera, Paris Hilton, and even Jenna Jameson. These "public" figures are the subjects of abundant imagery and news reports

centered on their decidedly public sexual behaviors. Thus we see contradictions and dissentions alongside celebrations of raunch culture mediations. I extend this line of exemplars of raunch culture to include fictitious mediated characters as seen in *SoA*. In particular, the supporting cast of female characters employs raunch culture to guide their words and actions as they compete for space and position in a male-dominant counterculture.

Friedan and Elshtain as Spoken Through these Women of Anarchy

Friedan worked and reworked her views on feminism through her key publications *The Feminine Mystique*, *The Second Stage*, and *The Fountain of Age*; the female characters of *SoA* also evolve in their thoughts and practices. Despite numerous instances of adherence to the hegemonic patriarchy of SC, *SoA* women also embody numerous iterations of feminist thought from many waves and influences. As Tong reviews:

> In *The Second Stage*, [Friedan] described as *culturally feminine* the so-called beta styles of thinking and acting, which emphasize "fluidity, flexibility and interpersonal sensitivity," and as *culturally masculine* the so-called alpha styles of thinking and acting, which stress "hierarchical, authoritarian, strictly task-oriented leadership based on instrumental, technological rationality." Rather than offering 1980s women the same advice she had offered 1960s women—namely, minimize your feminine, beta tendencies and maximize your masculine, alpha tendencies—Friedan counseled 1980s women to embrace feminine, beta styles (Tong, 2009, p. 31).

Like with computer software testing, notably called Beta testing, academics work through ideas and philosophies over the course of their careers, changing their views in response to feedback from other scholars and the shifting social terrain of the public sphere. Likewise, the women of *SoA* navigate the treacherous terrain that constantly challenges them to examine their world from new perspectives.

For example, in season one after Tara cannot shake the ex-boyfriend who continues stalking her, she reconsiders her position on outlaw justice. A second example can be seen in season two, where Gemma, a critic of religion (as I note later in detail) reconsiders her stance after suffering an unprovoked attack. While both of these examples depict female crossing over to reconsider decidedly masculine viewpoints, Jax emerges as a character constantly considering more feminine perspectives. Earlier I mentioned Jax's willingness to break his masculine code with Tara. In season two, Jax consistently begins adhering to a critical-rational debate based upon principles of compromise, which runs contra to the traditional methods of the Clay and SC. Thus the tensions between stereotypically masculine and feminine ideologies occur in both male and female characters.

Tong resolves that ultimately Friedan uses *The Second Stage* to "encourage men and women alike to work toward an androgynous future," encompassing "both traditionally masculine and traditionally feminine traits" (Tong, 2009, p. 32). As evidenced through the examples above, some of the same themes occur between Friedan's evolutionary path as a thinker and *SoA*. In Friedan's third key text, *The Fountain of Age*, she reinforces the values of *Second Stage*, advocating, "aging alpha men to develop their passive, nurturing, or contemplative feminine qualities, and aging

beta women to develop their bold, assertive, commanding, or adventurous masculine qualities" (p. 32).

These masculine-feminine tensions play out with regularity throughout the long narrative of *SoA*. Jax, wrestling with the philosophical ideas in his late father's journal entries, repeatedly attempts to facilitate club decisions that reflect more dialogic, non-aggressive, and mutually beneficial outcomes for insiders and outsiders. Simultaneously Gemma, as-MC Matriarch, employs aggressive tactics, typically verbal in form, to accomplish bold and assertive goals that command attention to her position of power within the club. I illustrated Gemma's coercion of cash from Luann on behalf of the MC, and continue to chart her interactions with Tara. Friedan and the characters of *SoA* differ, however, in their endgame. In *Fountain,* Friedan sees life reaching a rewarding epoch if greater androgyny can be achieved in the post-fifties age bracket. Gemma addresses the challenges of turning 51 with less grace in the episode *AK-51*.

When "hangaround" Cherry rolls into Charming in the season one episode, *AK-51*, she breaks the code by mixing "the road" with "home." Gemma, acting with almost superhuman perception, identifies the tension between Clay and Cherry immediately. Gemma visits fellow ole' lady and confidant Luann, at her workplace, an adult film set.

> Gemma: Can you believe the balls on that little whore, showing up at the goddamn clubhouse?
>
> Luann: Clay couldn't have known.
>
> Gemma: So what. The rules got broken. What happens on a run, stays on a run. It does not show back up and slap me in the goddamn face. *That does not happen to me*.

Perspiring with discomfort, the true culprit of Gemma's agitation begins to surface.

> Gemma: She's *so young*
>
> Luann: And dumb. And before she knows it, she's gonna be *old* and *wise*, like *us*.
>
> Gemma: How am I supposed to handle this? I just wanna rip [Clay's] goddamn heart out.
>
> Luann: Estrotol, solution 15
>
> Gemma: I didn't come here for a diagnosis.
>
> Luann: Sure you did. You're lucky baby. My wells went dry at 45.
>
> Gemma: I'm only 51. I'm not ready for this.

The midlife transition among women is a sign of shame within the club, and Gemma's emotional negativity toward her transition to menopause reifies her subjugation to masculine hegemonies about female sexuality and womanhood. While Gemma diverges from Friedan in her trepidations about menopause, she is simultaneously embracing critiques *of* Friedan, in line with the voice of Jean Bethke Elshtain, which I will address shortly.

Yet as the female characters of *SoA* demonstrate, lesser patriarchal and greater emotional, dialogic methods open up a potential space on TV for female agency in theory and in practice. Alyssa Rosenberg (2012) of *Think Progress*, offers the following short critique of Gemma's character development in season one:

> One of the things I appreciate most about *Sons of Anarchy* is the way Gemma is allowed to have specifically female problems, and to have those problems treated as if they're on a level with the hurts and angers

> of Jax, Clay, and the other members of the club. When, in the first season, when Cherry shows up in Charming after sleeping with Clay, and Gemma breaks her nose with a skateboard, the show could have decided to treat Gemma as ridiculous, as if she's overreacting. Instead, we get that very funny scene of her and Clay hollering at each other in jail, Gemma refusing to be bailed out. Both halves of this late-middle aged couple are acting as if they're teenagers. They are equals in their absurdity, both permitted to feel overpowered by their reactions to each other.

Rosenberg's thoughts identify a difference between the how physical aspects of patriarchy exude, while more feminine layers of emotion are explored from a narrative perspective. Rosenberg also touches indirectly on how Gemma and Clay, at times, integrate the alpha and beta switches Friedan suggests of post-50 males and females (Friedan, 1993).

Gemma's actions throughout the show exemplify an array of Friedan's androgynous techniques that blend warm familial and feminine interpersonal encounters with assertive masculine aggression. But while exceptional examples of Friedan's *Second Stage* and *Fountain of Age* can be observed in *SoA*, they might be critiqued as unobtainable goals within the restraints of the TV medium. I argue that due to the [masculine] constraints of serialized TV formatting—that is, the episodic nature of the show and its need to reinforce dramatic tensions with regularity—Gemma may never be allowed to progress to Friedman's ideal state, as her character becomes too wrapped up in the criminality of her situations. As Agent Shahl points out during an interrogation,

Gemma has "enough secrets in that pretty little head to topple an empire." The show also occasionally suggests, without conformation, that Gemma played some role in the death of Jax's father, a suggestion that if true, foreshadows a tragic end for her over the course of the show.

In the short run, however, episodes highlighting the nature and character development of Gemma and Jax depict strong examples of androgyny, as actualized in a visual storytelling medium. I posit the mediating of such strategies on television allows for extending dialogues and reflections about the show from audiences, a tactic that engages and continues aspects of Friedan's work regarding culturally feminine and culturally masculine qualities that become queered with increased androgyny (Friedan, 1993, & Friedan. Tong (2009) recalls how Friedan's later work communicated shifts in *feminist* thought toward a more *humanist* mindset, ultimately stressing both sexes form "new [human] politics that must emerge beyond reaction" (Friedan, 1981, p. 342). In his several attempts to move the motorcycle club beyond their history of violent reactions, Jax tries to reshape the culture and ideology of the club in a more humanist way, aligned with Friedan's work.[6] As Jax under the philosophical influence of his dead father, who may have died because of his dissenting philosophical [or perhaps more feminist] ideas,[7] the longer argument of *SoA* becomes a critique of form *against* the aging standards of hyper-masculinity and male-dominated thinking.

Thus, despite the abundant themes of dominance, aggression, violence, masculinity, hegemonic thoughts and practices, subjugation of women, etc., *SoA* works to highlight the flaws in these themes, as the decisions to engage such activities often leave characters damaged and disadvantaged. For example, the MC's "eye for an eye"

code only begets more bloodshed and loss. The more violence SC inflicts, the more violence seems to lash back against their cause. In effect, the show *uses* archetypal symbols of masculinity to critique its primitive nature and inevitable decline: violence, alcohol abuse, criminality, coupled with copious tattoos, unruly facial hair, and endless use of stimulants like cigarettes and cigars.

Gemma as Feminist Voice Critiquing Societal Systems of Patriarchy

While Gemma embraces and indeed subverts herself in the male-centric counterculture of *MC*'s, she remains a vocal antagonist of traditional forms of hegemonic patriarchy like religion. In a later episode, *The Sleep of Babies*, Gemma embodies a feminist voice in her critique of masculine systems of control in religion in general and Christianity specifically. As Jax's drug-addicted ex-wife Wendy attempts to rejoin the family fray, Gemma confronts her judgmental behavior and ill-advised faith in God, joking, "The sooner you accept that [you are becoming more like me], the sooner you put down that holy crutch. Jesus…is just a guy that cuts my lawn." As a meditative figure evoking both the Madonna and the whore, Gemma owns her femininity and sexuality, and willingly uses it to elevate her power in controlling a given situation. Concurrently, Gemma demonstrates very Christ-like acts of charity and good will, signifying her association with the Madonna figure.

Outside a convenience store, Gemma approaches a young single mother of two who is holding a beggar's sign, blaming "Uncle Sam" for "cutting off [her] aid." Gemma remarks, "You look pretty able-bodied to me. There's gotta be something better you could be doing than holding up clever signs and begging." The girl replies, "its hard for me to hold down a job, on account of the mental illness. [I] tend to fly into rages for

no apparent reason." Gemma responds, "Since when is that a mental illness," before reaching into her purse for a cash offering. Here Gemma acts as the merciful Christ figure to the downtrodden,[8] the misfortunate; those jilted by the promise of government intervention in Man's world. The act demonstrates Gemma's complex dualism of vicious female trickster and graceful do-gooder, highlighting the contrast typical between Gemma's words and deeds, the mouth of the Whore and the heart of the Madonna. Roberts (2007) stresses, "Trickster is contradiction, and that is highly significant. [Her] ambiguous actions do not make each other mutually irrelevant; on the contrary, they reinforce [Trickster's] position and [her] intercultural rhetoric" (p. 174). Like Madonna the entertainer (not the archetype), Gemma toggles between good and evil choices, these ends justify means kind that mark her as both empathetic and tragic. Such a liminal position connotes the progressive contradictions with both postfeminist discourse and postmodernity.

Tong (2009) notes that, "like classical liberals in general, classical liberal feminists favor limited government and a free market" (p. 35). Rights remain of the utmost importance to liberal feminists, as "freedom of expression, religion, and conscience play a major role in the psyches of classical liberal feminists" (Tong, 2009, p. 35). Tong's emphasis on *conscience* is fascinating, considering Gemma's heated warning, "Nothing get in the way of *me* taking care of *my* family…especially my conscience." While Gemma embraces many attributes that align with progressive feminist thought, and Friedan's second wave influence in particular, she never hesitates to contradict these philosophies when placed in a Darwinian situation of *fight or flight*.

In episode 10, *Better Half*, the ATF attempts to gather intelligence against the Sons by targeting the club's "weakest link," the women in their lives. One by one, the Feds target Luann, Cherry, Donna, Tara, and Gemma, the respective romantic partners of Otto, Half Sack, Opie, Jax, and Clay. Each of the encounters features the female ATF Agent Stahl, a woman who fights for a place in the men's world by speaking and acting with aggressive tactics of raunchy and threatening language that equal those of the men with whom she interacts.

Gemma, no stranger to *raunch* in her own language use, visits an Irish man being stashed at a remote cabin. As the scared Irish man sits thumbing his rosary, he asks Gemma if she "believes in God." Pausing briefly, Gemma responds, "I believe in family," before challenging his weaknesses by asking, "Who are you kidding, sitting here picking off hail Mary's…You think that gives you a heavenly pass?" The Irish man retorts, "A few acts of contrition[9] could make you feel good too," but Gemma conjures the snakelike reflexes of her linguistic bite, remarking, "There's only one way these beads could make me feel good, love, and it involves a whole different act." Gemma's overt sexual innuendo both subverts the pull of religious tension from Western theology, and indoctrinates the Irish man into her branch of raunch culture.

Gemma's personality is matched against a female opponent in *Better Half*. Here a competition among butting heads of two alpha females heightens as Agent Stahl confronts Gemma in the local supermarket. Agent Stahl, an equally aggressive female who uses her sexuality to advance over male authorities, shows an equal lack of restraint in her sexual harassment of females. After apprehending Cherry for questioning, Stahl approaches Gemma, and the following dialogue ensues:

Gemma: That little tart doesn't know anything

Stahl: What about the porn star? We've got her in custody too.

Gemma: She'd probably teach you how to give a great hummer. But I'm guessin' you've got that covered.

Stahl: I get by.

Gemma: Pickin' off the ones that have the most to lose. Smart. I'd do that too.

Stahl: Yeah, I've seen you in action. You almost killed that one with a skateboard.[10]

Gemma: We've mended fences.

Stahl: I guess so. What was she doing, asking for the queen's advice, what lies to tell?

At this point Stahl begins stroking her hand through Gemma's hair, as if to sexually taunt her while also signally her superiority, like a mother stroking a child's hair.

Stahl: I'll bet there's enough secrets in that pretty head of yours to bury an empire.

Gemma: I'm just a wife and mother, darlin'. You know, you might wanna unscrew that penis of your sometimes. Its fun bein' a girl.

Gemma then responds by moving even closer face-to-face with Stahl, both competing with dueling ambiguous smirks, in a kind of nonverbal standoff.

Gemma: If you want me, you know where I live.

In this engagement, Stahl appears as the more masculine of the two, and Gemma momentarily employs a feminist critique of liberal feminism in the vein of Jean Bethke

Elshtain. Elshtain (1981) critiques liberal feminism's emphasis on male values. Elshtain highlights three critical flaws of liberal feminism's claims: that "women *can* become like men if they set their minds to it," that women "*want* to become like men," and that "women *should* want to become like men" (Tong, 2009, p. 40). Gemma's use of this critique may seem counter to her own actions, but viewed in the context of the situation of the show, the critique makes sense. Stahl is attempting to build a case against the SAMCRO using the women in their lives. Gemma, an advocate and practitioner *of* liberal feminism, verbalizes Elshtain's critique in an attempt to lead Stahl away from the truth. In essence, Gemma uses Elshtain's critique, along with simple Southern language like "darlin'" and "its fun bein' a *girl*" as a mask to hide her true, equally aggressive, liberal feminist beliefs and practices. Thus, their conversation engages a critique/counter-critique of the values of Friedan's liberal feminism, with the critique merely serving as a decoy to their mutual admiration of Friedan's principles.

In each of Stahl's confrontations (or should they be read as *temptations*?), her use of threatening language stalls, for lack of a better term, as she attempts to drive a wedge between SC and their Old Ladies. Ironically, it is only when Stahl employs similar tactical style toward Luann's incarcerated husband Otto that he nearly breaks his loyalty to SC. Thus an interesting paradox occurs as Stahl's more aggressive, threatening, and typically masculine tactics only appear to generate emotional responses from male figures. Yet just as Stahl, the show's lone female authority figure appears to gain traction, the club manages to get a message to Otto at the last minute. In the episode's final moments, as Stahl presents Otto's testimony for his signature, he lashes out, smashing her head into the table multiple times. Through physical violence, the

[female] threat to the motorcycle club is subverted, and the hegemonic status quo remains in tact to survive another episode. From a theoretical standpoint, Stahl is punished narratively for her embrace of liberal feminist principles and literally victimized as payback. Perhaps a foreshadowing that her character develops into a more villainous persona. Meanwhile as a TV drama, it is the strong female representations that fall victim to patriarchy in the same way Stahl is defeated. Thus, a claim of authentic feminist representation cannot wholly be supported.

Tara and Gemma's Tension as a Feminist Dialogue

The general dynamic between female characters in the show emerges clearly in the interactions we see between Gemma and Tara. Tara, Jax's first love and high school sweetheart, recently moved back to Charming after finishing her medical residency at the University of Chicago. She now works as a medical practitioner and surgeon, but this cultural capital carries little weight with Gemma. For Gemma, Tara represents instability and abandonment, having fled their small town and broken Jax's heart in the process. Tara's personal and professional accomplishments are secondary at best. This tension reveals Gemma's motherly instincts to protect her son. As the club matriarch, Gemma's believes her role is to stay at home, looking after her [extended] family.

While Gemma appeared to use family *alone* as a reason to appear unaware of any club business during her confrontation with agent Stahl, she actually does embrace Elshtain's critique of liberal feminism in her valuation of family. In her critique, Elshtain (1981) argues, "Mothering is a complicated, rich, ambivalent, vexing, joyous activity which is biological, natural, social, symbolic, and emotional. It carries profoundly resonant emotional and sexual imperatives" (p. 243). Each of Gemma's

encounters highlights her priorities, which are loyalty to the club, and more specifically to the institution of family. For example, Gemma lied to Stahl because she believed she was acting from her obligation to protect her family, Jax and Clay, as well as her extended family, SAMCRO. As Gemma explained to Donna outside the grocery store, she believes family is everything. Given these examples, it remains difficult to gauge Gemma's authentic perspective. Ultimately, it seems that Gemma's criticisms of Tara don't reflect Elshtain's argument for the valuation of "motherhood" so much as they show that Gemma accepts a very patriarchally defined role in the organization and resents Tara's efforts at self-definition as a woman outside the MC. Yet as Tara proceeds to prove herself over time, her relationship with Gemma grows to one of admiration, respect, and even love.

Or perhaps Gemma embraces aspects of the shape shifter, as described by Gloria E. Anzaldua in *The Bridge We Call Home*. For Anzaldua (2002), a key way to escape Western patriarchy, which views existence as fixed/static, is to employ the "lechuza eyes," or the eyes of the shape shifter (p. 556). By doing so, we can shed the identity markers associated traditionally static or fixed patriarchy, and our identity becomes less fixed in the process (Anzaldua, 2002). In addition to Gemma's dual motives of protecting and concealing the club, I interpret her methods of deception as taking on the shape shifter-like quality that Anzaldua's model describes. Reading the text in this light helps clarify how Gemma juggles so many misleading or half-truths (again suggesting the archetypal Trickster). By embracing the more feminine form of shapeshifting through the way she tells partial truths to her encounters with Tara, Stahl, and Donna,

Gemma avoids the static, fixed, or masculine forms of truth that would otherwise entrap her.

Reading the character of Gemma through a feminist lens of combined and competing perspectives highlights the richness of her character while also demonstrating the continuing dialogues of feminist thought. In the concluding section, I present a final interpretation of Gemma and Tara, combining elements of both characters with the show in general, in hopes of theorizing *SoA* as a kind of mediated cyborg for feminist consideration, both in success and failure.

Concluding Implications on the [Daughters] of Anarchy as Mediated Cyborgs

The characters Gemma and Tara, the Matriarch and significant Other of *SoA*, use both actions and words to communicate aspects of what Donna Haraway considers in her *Cyborg Manifesto*. Tara, the medical practitioner, the healer, the educated one willing to enter the club lifestyle on her own terms, offers some new future possibilities for the club, one "of couplings between organism and machine" (Haraway, p. 362). Tara is presented as a "creature of social reality" in the show's use of media and narrative, and the text of the show itself as it is circulated to mass audiences. Yet Tara is also "a creature of fiction" in so far as she does not exist in reality; Tara the character represents a product on a program (p. 362). Thus, she is programmed. But Tara, like Gemma also offers mythic potential in her representations of "transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities" (p. 363). In literal terms, Tara's use of medical tools and practices is a cybernetic extension of the body. Yet she extends the

club through processes like her mystical abilities as a "healer" and her eventual organic contributions via her reproductive qualities as a mother.

Gemma reflects similar cybernetic qualities in her role as club matriarch. As demonstrated, she fuses the masculine and the feminine in her role, gaining power within the patriarchy. While her character may appear deceptive due to numerous instances of contradictory alliances and self-presentation, perhaps instead Gemma might be understood as straddling what Haraway considers "troubling dualisms" (p. 370). Haraway theorized cyborg imagery as a way out of dualistic thinking, and Gemma, in her mediated (via the TV show) and thus cybernetic form, imagines for the audience, displaying actions that blur dualistic distinctions. Thus through blurring these dualistic distinctions, an opportunity exists for audiences to meditate on these characters' fictitious actions, and perhaps consider these blurred strategies as an alternative to gendered negotiation within patriarchal societies. While Gemma and Tara will likely wrestle with issues of patriarchal oppression and self-definition until the show's end (xor at least until the end of the sixth season), perhaps the clearest indicator of its potential comes from feminist TV critic Rosenberg (2012), as she writes, "until I started watching *Sons of Anarchy*, I don't think I realized how thirsty I was for the perspectives of older women on television." Perhaps while the show cannot fill the chasm felt by a lack of authentic feminist perspectives on TV, its rich storytelling and passionate viewership can motivate expanded attention toward scripts that further tease out the views of feminist scholars like Friedan, Elshtain, Anzaldua, Haraway and others.

The female characters on *SoA* offer the show much more than archetypical stock characters. They convey mixed masculine and feminine qualities, invoking feminist

dialogues and techniques of androgynous behavior while practicing modes of conformity within systems of hegemony and patriarchy. Critically, the *SoA* characters of Gemma and Tara are able to fight or resist traditional forms of patriarchy at times but also often fall victim to the show's male-driven narrative style. Indeed, themes of fighting and victimage play into each character's fate over subsequent seasons. While the dialogue of *SoA* at times reflects scholars like Friedan, Elshtain, and Haraway, these voices are often suffocated amidst the show's more patriarchal portrayal of raunch culture. Ultimately, *SoA* has the potential to further elevate or detract from aspects of this critique as the show finishes its run on television. Hegemonic constructs of patriarchy remains a troubling dominant presence on the show and on TV in general, and I contend intertwining values within *SoA* remain a challenging and fertile ground for future dialogues on feminist thought and its relationship with televisual mediated programming. Ultimately, it remains to be seen whether raunch culture's ability to titillate audiences in dramatic spectacle contexts functions as a true liberating force or masks tradition modes of constraint. Perhaps like the liminal Trickster, raunch culture performs a little of both.

Rhetorical Recap: Feminist Raunch Culture as a Gateway Aesthetic?

I didn't necessarily grow up in a culture as rough as the one 'produced' for aesthetic affect in *SoA*, yet that doesn't make the gendered negotiations I witnessed any less significant. I've seen my mother play both the subservient role as instructed by so many male authorities in the communities (like *Nowhere* in chapter ten), by local businessmen who control the status quo, and of course by the authoritative voices in the churches attended. And given how patriarchal norms often suffocate numerous female

voices on the series (sometimes literal suffocation is included), I [close] watch the women in my life succeed and fail in varying degrees under similar if not less exaggerated conditions. As a social issue and a polyvalent theme, the work of women is not done, and the conditions unto which oppression occurs are not limited or exclusive to gender or race or class.

In some ways this chapter benefits from sitting in the wings and gaining perspective from blind reviewers at conferences and in journals. Reviewers heavily steeped in gender studies are quick to point out the trappings of how the confines of space (the prototypical 25-page admission maximum) does not allow for the complete unpacking of a single theorist (much less a bushel of them) or appropriately the many voices of agreement and contestation that emerge over decades (particularly Freidan's critics of her WASPY tendencies).[11] This speaks to issues of length and breadth on one hand but also encourages dimensions of expansion as scholars also recognize the important work that can develop out of televisual analysis.

Refining multiple perspectives and competing dialogues within feminist history can be difficult task to say the least. I have tried to introduce several key conversations in feminist history as to demonstrate how these competing ideological perspectives reanimate to varying degrees within the diegetic conversations, interactions, and character makeups on *SoA*. Notably, not every perspective is encoded equally and I have far from decoded the breadth of feminist dialogics at play within the show's world. But rather I see unique opportunity in the way raunch culture pivots as a postfeminist phenomenon that takes on a liminal role when mediated for television or dramatic purposes. These liminal qualities (marks of the Trickster as Roberts would say) help

contextualize how raunch culture might be modified and reread as a companion to an emerging televisual convention I identify in the rotten aesthetic next chapter.

As I conclude chapter twelve, I previously noted but one of many eventual problematics such feminist voices (if we can even call them that) face particularly rooted in a series that literally revels in dominant-hegemonic positions of hypermasculinity and patriarchy. I suggest future scholars explore *SoA* terrain with a wider scope for how the text functions in its series-long treatment(s) of women, the negotiations they undergo, and also larger and more detailed inclusions of feminist theorists and movements. While this chapter functions well as a singular examination of the gender dynamics at play with relation to selective voices in feminist history, scholars from women and gender studies could go further in assessing and introducing additional theorists, theories, and criticisms that would further shape this conversation. I see this chapter as a conversation starter that could easily grow into its own book-length examination under the right scholarly hands. Given the voluminous historical perspectives that can be further unpacked, *SoA*'s critical polyvalence endows a kind of spreadibility in its own right.

For my purposes, the muddled world inhabited by the Ole' Ladies and Crow Eaters of SAMCRO communicates a specific diegetic tones reminiscent of contemporary raunch culture. Levy's conceptualization of a social and gender-flavored phenomenon comes to represent a key catalyst in how such shifts in taste expand in for audience consumption across the televisual landscape specifically. In the next chapter, I bring together the suggestion of raunch culture from chapter eleven and the formal integration of raunch culture in chapter twelve in an effort to reconceptualize cultural

interest in raunch as an emerging narrative convention within the cable mediascape. I identify this convention as the rotten aesthetic, a term that borrows from literary roots (literary imitation a thematic through line) but also speaks to new modes of storytelling (cross-genre televisual innovation) that resonates with contemporary contexts concerning audience interests and institutional practices.

Chapter Thirteen

"Rotten is the New Raunch" – Displacing Raunch Culture for a Male-Centered Genre Theory of the Rotten Aesthetic

"Something is rotten in the state of Denmark." Shakespeare's infamous words from arguably his most recognizable work *Hamlet* signals erosion in two distinct arenas. First, the iteration of this line from *Hamlet* conveys dual meaning in the context of Shakespeare's play. On one hand, the words denote the situation in which Hamlet, having heard the voice of his dead father, experiences a moment of awareness or awakening to his Uncle's corruptive power. On the other hand, the phrase connotes that an issue of ill reform resides in Denmark's state or governing body and hence a cultural dissonance emerges between guardsmen Horatio and Marcellus. Second, this original intent represents the primary meaning of the phrase in its context and a secondary association to my immediate investigation into recurrent trends of visual and narrative rot gaining popularity among genre programs, producers, and audiences on cable TV.

I address this issue by turning to the significance of television content, particularly the production of scripted dramas granted the most artistic freedom (e.g. creative control). With a few exceptions, these dramas tend to reside on cable and paycable channels. As television serves among the most widely consumed of mediated forms, a clear pattern emerges between audience scope and cultural impact. Indeed, as Marshall McLuhan (1967) observes, "Innumerable confusion and a profound feeling of despair invariably emerge in periods of great technological and cultural transitions" (p. 8). Perhaps the despair of great social change, amidst cultural climates of recession, class distinction, and continuing shifts toward globalization, thus conform into narrative themes mediated as a kind of *rotten aesthetic* upon the cable drama spectrum. This rotten aesthetic thus posits perhaps an emerging narrative convention toward a new form of genre programming, hybrid in appearance, which benefits from and joins

conversation with Jenkinsian terms like *convergence culture* (applied in chapter five) and *spreadable⇔sticky media* (discussed periodically throughout).

Network TV, in terms of creative innovation and artistic execution, resides like a post-apocalyptic landscape, a wasteland figuratively in danger of being overwhelmed by zombies (in the narrative and theoretical sense). In some ways, the zombies have already overtaken the landscape, as noted by the increasing ratings in macabre-themed shows like *The Walking Dead* and *Game of Thrones* and *Sons of Anarchy* to name an opening few, dramas grappling with issues of survival, class identity, and dramatically changing cultural landscapes.[1] Yet just as the medium of television grapples with a changing landscape that includes varying formats and methods of presentation and consumption, the concept of *genre* experiences similar corruption. For genre theorists like Cawelti, Altman, Frow, and Stam, terms like genre must become redefined in accordance to their specific utility.[2]

Some theorists already propose terminology that highlights the magnitude of multi-media convergences. In *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*, Ariel Levy (2006) conceptualizes a theory of *raunch culture* as a way to define and update mediated interpretations of female sexuality. Instead of subscribing to postfeminist subjugation issues, male gaze/fetishism debates, and privileged White male cultural hegemony, Levy argues her research reveals, "This new raunch culture didn't mark the death of feminism…it was evidence that the feminist project has already been achieved" (p. 3). Levy's claims theorize how gratuitous advances in mediated representations of female sexuality actually re-empower the female subjects. While the author is notably at odds advocating her own findings—indeed her polemic goes against

the grain of raunch culture in her conclusion—I employ Levy's theory as a convergence culture cross-reference for my own theorization of a male-driven rotten aesthetic, an emerging TV convention among cable dramas that arguably seeks a masculine reclamation of perceived loss of power for males viewers, but as TV time progresses, such gender specificity renders non sequitor. Moreso, cable TV producers seem driven to regain lost powers (of television) in ways that attracts lost or vacated audiences. Whether raunch culture reclamation succeeds in reclaiming any tangible manifestation is not in question here. What is in question is a greater understanding of what this *rotten aesthetic* is, where it occurs, how it functions, and how genre theory helps us understand and make sense of this produced phenomenon.

In order to perceive a theoretical counterpart to Levy's raunch culture, I first examine how scholars debate understandings of genre, genre conventions, and the evolution of their roles in the TV medium. Second, I present a more thorough investigation of Levy's raunch culture. Third, I offer textual examples that help demonstrate the emergence of a rotten aesthetic. Through close watching numerous current cable dramas, I inspect how such gratuitous aesthetic narrative devices—particular choices that from a generalist perspective titillate male viewers—function individually and collectively in ways that purport larger socio-cultural commentaries. This is the end of the long argument regarding polyvalent potentcy and genre-mixing iconicity that I have been fulfilling throughout this project. While my theorization is substantially subjective in nature, I draw my claims from various data samplings that span the most popular and critically acclaimed adult series on TV. I allow the nature and content of these series to inform my formalization of a rotten aesthetic, a term that

might extend greater understanding of how TV and media theorists analyze and view TV conventions, genre, and convergence culture. In the following section, I examine some of the traditional views on genre among scholars and critics.

Genre-bending versus Genre-bent: What Constitutes Convention?

Genre theory constitutes a peculiar debate between critics, viewers, and even academics.[3] Denis McQuail (2010) distinguishes variant definitions of genre particular to diverse mass media perspectives. McQuail differentiates between film studies use and mass media or journalistic use. He also offers an inclusive series of criteria of which genre might characterize:

- Its collective identity is recognized more or less equally by its producers [the media] and its consumers [media audiences].
- This identity [or definition] relates to purposes [such as information, entertainment or subvariants], form [length, pace, structure, language, etc.] and meaning [reality reference].
- The identity has been established over time and observes familiar conventions; cultural forms are preserved, although these can also change and develop within the framework of the original genre.
- A particular genre will follow an expected structure of narrative or sequence of action, draw on a predictable stock of images and have a repertoire of variants of basic themes. (p. 370)

Clearly, McQuail's research as a statistician lends him arguably less poetics in his broad description of genre, yet the information he presents posits focused observations of how media producers and consumers organize, understand, and make meaning of genre.

Yet there exists a divide between viewing genre as a stringent placeholder for conventions versus an expressive way to destabilize traditional conventional norms. Hall (1974/1980) and Radway (1984) articulate two traditional theoretical approaches where they capture and categorize genre conventions in the TV Western and afternoon Soap Opera, respectively. Dyer (1977) also attempts to confine the complex matrixes of genres, although Dyer's analysis in "Entertainment and Utopia" segregates genres into the following categories of utopian sensibility: *energy*, *abundance*, *intensity*, *transparency*, and *community* (Corrigan, et al., 2011, p. 470-461). Dyer contrasts these utopian sensibilities against five "specific inadequacies in society" that include, "scarcity, exhaustion, dreariness, manipulation, and fragmentation" (p. 473). Dyer's work breaks away from severe theoretical compartmentalization of genre into more interpretive frames of understanding how genre functions. Dyer's essay informs my theorization in so far as I subscribe to his methodological process of theorizing beyond the traditional boundaries of what constitutes genre, whereas approaches by Radway and Hall demonstrate a more classical representation of genre theory.

Other scholars offer opposing and thus more flexible expressions of genre. Deuze (2007) looks at corporate modes of control and contrasts between "linear and liquid differentiations" of production whereby, "liquid differentiation occurs in the production of groundbreaking, unconventional new media formulas, hybrid genres, and unexpected or otherwise experimental storytelling formats" (p. 51). Jason Mittell (2001) concurs with what I might call postmodern approaches to fragmented content in his analysis of how media like *The Simpsons* organize meaning through "genre mixing," "genre parody," and "complex" configurations within "cultural hierarchies" (p. 17-18).

Danesi (2012) calls such confluation emblematic of postmodern cultural pastiche. I argue modern cable drama operate closely with this postmodern genre-mixing variant, particularly in terms of soap opera-style cliffhangers, neoWestern archetypes, and genre convention self-reflexivity (or "increasing self-consciousness" as Richard Schatz might call it (Corrigan et al., 2011, 462).).

In my theorization toward a new extension of TV genre convention, Andrew (1984) offers a decisive definition when he explains:

> [Film genres] are specific networks of formulas that deliver a certified product to a waiting customer. They ensure the production of meaning by regulating the viewers' relation to the image and narrative construction for him or her. In fact, genres construct the proper spectators for their own consumption. They build the desires and then represent the satisfaction of what they have triggered (p. 110).

Andrew's definition works well to establish patterns of *audience expectation*. A demonstration of audience expectation might further render the value and powerful role audience expectation plays in the formal repetition of genre.

Prior to TV's recent onslaught of superhero Network TV series including *Smallville* (2001-2011)*, Heroes* (2006-2010), *Arrow* (2012-present)*, The Flash* (2014-present)*,* and ABC's *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* and *Agent Carter* (2014-present), consider for example that moviegoers of superhero films pay money to watch a certain set of superhero genre conventions unfold. Peter Coogan (2006) classifies prototypical superhero genre conventions as contains the trifecta of *MPI* or "Mission," "Powers," and "Identity." Take the case where Batman, who's alter ego Bruce Wayne is protected

by the dual *identity* of Batman, faces the *mission* of saving or protecting the status quo of Gotham City, aided thus by the super*powers* of wealth, privileged access, and innovative techno gadgets. Executing these conventions meets audience expectations of the form, and when or if the narrative thus deviates from the form, the movie or brand runs the risk of dueling responses in the form of surprise/praise or contestation/opposition. Lack of imitation perhaps suggests why some audiences find Fox's *Gotham* so sluggish with Bruce still a child, while a small stable of supporters recognize the show's innovative switched-emphasis on the canon's colorful criminal underworld. Like NBC's *Hannibal*, these shifts suggest an interesting twist in yet another text moving antagonists from margin to center. In considerable contrast to Fox's attempt at "edginess," The CW's *The Flash* posits a return to heroism but with an attempt to move away from the camp factor that immerses so many of *Flash*'s televisual superhero predecessors.

Thus, we see the potential risk versus reward scenario that unfolds once a genre becomes marbleized. This tension between risk versus reward becomes a kind of silly putty for many creative artists. John Frow reminds that, "Genre classifications are real. They have an organizing force in everyday life. They are embedded in material infrastructures and in the recurrent practices of classifying and differentiating kinds of symbolic action" (p. 13). Traditional TV categorization divides genres that might include sitcoms, dramas, news, reality, infomercial, and other conventional representations. Again my focus emphasizes this manipulation of conventions that violates audience expectations by way of an emerging rotten aesthetic betwixt and between post-Network cable dramas. This rotten aesthetic grows exhibits the

spreadability of a televisual weed, distantly observable and memorable amongst meadows of traditional grass. Yet this weed spreads fast and with authority, as I shall demonstrate, and over time redefines what constitutes the normative values of TV drama. Before I examine the rotten aesthetic and its visceral manifestations across the televisual landscape, I look again to Levy's theory of raunch culture and bridge a context for understanding its cross-pollination toward a theory of aesthetic rot.

Peeping into the Fame of Levy's Raunch Culture Window

Raunch culture is currently a controversial feminist paradigm. Chris Barker (2008) explains that, "*Raunch* advocates sexually provocativeness and promiscuousness by women as women. It liberally employs references to pornography and celebrates sexual objectification and physicality" (p. 312). Yet Levy (2006) warns that, "Just because we are post doesn't automatically mean we are feminist" (p. 5). In other words, traditional cultural values and practices still yield significant sway in popular culture and thus over the public. Raunch culture simply identifies an area where women perform what bell hooks (1994) might call, "teaching to transgress," except there is little emphasis on Blackness and/or teaching, and an over-emphasis in the deviant sexual expression of women in the popular-public eye. But hooks's seminal reflexive work does suggest the pedagogical function these texts play in critiquing the status quo.

This form of teaching to transgress might be demonstrated best through an example from HBO's 2012 series *The Newsroom*. In the episode "News Night 2.0", newly appointed executive producer on the fictitious cable news program "News Night" Maggie MacKenzie confronts attractive Ivy League-educated broadcaster Sloane Sabbath about coming on board their program. Mac not only observes Sloane's

journalistic integrity but also her [liberal] moral integrity when Sloane refers prefaces a corporation on air with the term "which" instead of "whom". Mac tests Sloane's moral loyalty by asking why Sloane doesn't work directly for Wall Street and then if she likes working longer hours. Sloane finally breaks the interrogation and notes, "I get that I may not actually look like it, but I'm an economist." Mac then offers her a "primetime" slot on their show, but admits more informed candidates "don't have your legs." From a theoretical standpoint, raunch culture advocates "reject the idea that women should behave as victims and claim that right to do whatever they want to their bodies and to look how they wish to look" (Barker, 2008, p. 312). In the *Newsroom* example, Mac not only admits to the hegemonic patriarchal control over the TV industry, but also manipulates that rule to the advantage of her show and female workers.

Rosalind Gil writes about "The sexualization of culture" and recognizes current pervasive trends where "[p]orn chic'…has become a dominant representational practice in advertising, magazines, Internet sites and cable television" (p. 256-257). Zizek (1991) contends that, "In pornography, the spectator is forced a priori to occupy a perverse position" where "the spectators are reduced to a paralyzed object-gaze" just as "[t]he real subjects are the [performers]…trying to rouse us" (p. 110). But why relegate pornography, as Levy (2006) critiques, "Sex appeal has become a synecdoche for all appeal" (p. 30), where "The glossy, overheated thumping of sexuality in our culture is less about connection than consumption. Hotness has become our cultural currency" (p. 31). Indeed raunch culture reveals that titillation functions not only at an individual level but also at a mass cultural level. But Zizek argues the spectator posits an immobile sense of power control while the subject-performer occupies true agency. Thus, I extend

this discussion and acknowledge further theorization of raunch culture's increasing reach (or speadability) should include conversations of cultural convergence. These points of convergence offer consumer-audiences multi-dimensional platforms for media consumption, regurgitation, repetition, replication, redistribution, and recollection in the personal and public consciousness.

Yet if Levy situates raunch culture within the female postfeminist spectrum of social consciousness, what binary opposition might best postulate a male/masculine counterpart to this and other confluent social themes? I argue that examining rampant themes of male-catering deviance on cable TV—content dressed as cutting edge aesthetics, rich in narrative persuasion and cultural implication—might posit a visualizable aesthetic, an emergent genre convention of the TV drama format that represents and reflects these antihero perceptions that White male power inhabits a current cultural decline in privilege. This aesthetic thus celebrates the repetitious dismemberment of the body, the return of primal dominance, all the while servicing traditional and conservative TV conventions. These conventions replay the medium-old tension between re-integration and disintegration of family. In the following section, I surf through a host of cable TV dramas, texts typically popular among critics and audiences, and I argue this popularity stems largely from their latent adult, nay rotten, aesthetic composition and its significant socio-cultural implications. I note that "emergence" of the rotten aesthetic, that is to say, its televisual origin and the context with which it arose. This is not to say the aesthetic is an exclusively "male-oriented" phenomenon or exclusive to masculine tastes. Of course the aesthetic has become homogenized as a result of broad-audience appeal. But the cultural context from which

it initiated calls for an examination of a moment in time where masculinity seems in crisis, an argument echoed not only by the televisual spectrum but also from critics and scholars.

"This may hurt a little" – Amputating the Cultural Rot from Cable TV Aesthetics

Televisual Evolution. Horace Newcomb theorizes in 1976 that, ""New" shows break old patterns of action, move toward varied value orientations, and refuse to indulge in the predictability of most television" (p. 211). To qualify that his observation stands the test of time would be like saying that *only* 76 million households tuned in to see who shot J.R. Ewing on *Dallas*. Yet indeed, as time changes, so do shifts in cultural taste, style, and acceptance. Butler (2010) posits, "beautiful television may be the product of dozens [if not hundreds] of workers" (p. 18). Even beyond the binary tension between TV producers and consumers, the State apparatus plays a pivotal role in what constitutes TV programming. As Anderson (2011) recalls, "The pedagogical—one might even say didactic—function of much televisual historiography derives from TV's mandate, once an official part of networks' licensing by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), to inform citizens" (p. 28). Anderson notes the historical lineage government plays in the TV game, a role that has decreased considerably with time.

Mullen (2008) follows this historiographic path and traces the evolution of the TV medium to its current fragmented and thus arguably postmodern state (Danesi, 2012, Berger, 2011, Roberts, 2007). Mullen's account explores the technical side of federal regulation, TV innovation, and the rise of satellite, cable, and what she ultimately calls "the multichannel years" from 2007 onward (Mullen, 2008, p. 179).

Specifically located within Mullen's observational history, the author outlines the emergence of what some consider the game-changer of TV programming, HBO. While Mullen charts HBO's evolution from satellite experiment to pay cable trend-setter, Leverett, Ott, and Buckley (2008) investigate the content side of programming in "It's Not TV: Watching HBO in the Post-Television Era." In *Watching HBO*, Lisa Williamson explores elitist cultural trailblazing styles that HBO comedies perform in efforts that "challenge sitcom conventions" (p. 108). David Marc inspects the "continuing actions between two essential [genre] elements: conventions…[versus] inventions" (p. 102). A final essay from *Watching HBO* comes from Janet McCabe and Kim Akass. Their work sets up an argument of importance in this essay, the *branding* of "Quality TV" as a distinctive marker between the [haves] paycable channels like HBO, and [the have not's] everyone else. McCabe and Akass chart HBO's institutionalization of exceptional programming,[4] a go-for-broke concept for execution of quality control that promises and delivers cutting edge material guaranteed separate from the TV competition. I depart from McCabe and Akass and conjoin with a host of other TV critics and scholars and recognize a leveling off of the playing field between HBO and its cable competition.

HB(Uh-)O(h): Survival of the Sickest and the Cable Drama [H]arms Race.

Particularly, the dawn of the most current cable drama explosion occurs in part because of the departure of HBO's *The Sopranos*. During *Sopranos* culturally impactful run, HBO attempted and failed to attract viewers to alternative genre-based dramas. Between *Carnival* and *Deadwood*, HBO developed a knack for cancelling their

strongest niche programs before their natural artistic conclusions. And while the network enjoys the benefit of allowing some smaller shows like *The Wire* or *Treme* the chance to conclude artfully, the impassioned *Deadwood* fans spit vitriol and antagonize HBO and creator David Milch for their joint decision. Arguably these cancelled shows and other serviceable low-key dramas like *Big Love* result in a mild blowback for HBO. Perhaps due to these repetitious pitfalls in HBO's niche genre-benders, both audiences and the network learned valuable lessons.

One on hand, audiences and competing producers relaxed HBO's stranglehold on "Quality Branding" the TV drama, and thus networks like FX, AMC, and even paycable rival Showtime started putting greater trust in their products and injecting them with bolder flare to match audience appetites. During a period when HBO sunk *Carnival* and *Deadwood*, FX surfaced *The Shield* and *Nip/Tuck*, Showtime allowed *The Tudors* and *Dexter* time the creative space to grow, and eventually AMC allowed two of its risky and low-rated dramas *Mad Men* and *Breaking Bad* several seasons to attract critics and later mass audiences. Now each of these networks continue to not only add new shows of increasingly lurid content, but also these shows demonstrate an upswing in viewership, "resonant violation" (Phillips, 2005, p. 8), and critical acclaim.

On the other hand, HBO seems to have learned its lesson. Niche programming has once again become the staple of HBO's output, and its current top-three rated programs, also its three most expensive shows, specifically extend themselves to niche audience tastes first and foremost. *True Blood* caters to schlock-horror fans while cashing in on this latest cycle of Vampiric zeitgeists in popular culture. *Boardwalk Empire* appeases subversive appetites for the beloved gangster genre in the wake of *The*

Sopranos's absence. Finally, *Game of Thrones* posits the most innovative risk for HBO, a medieval drama drenched in both realistic fatalism and magical fantasy. It is situated between this cable [h]arms race that I dedicate the remaining analysis toward a genre theory of the rotten aesthetic convention. Through this analysis, I demonstrate how the [h]arms race posits an aggressive programming campaign that maximizes gratuitous output particularly enticing coveted male viewers. I then argue the potential reasons why these aesthetic markers activate a more masculine beacon, before I conclude with a theorization of the socio-cultural implications suggested by this new trend toward a rotten aesthetic.

Formalizing a Genre Convention Theory for the Rotten Aesthetic.

Mark Deuze (2007) understands that *culture* "is both manufactured and managed: it is produced and experienced by people, in specific social and organizational contexts, with certain purposes" and "increasingly important" for the business world "as more goods and services become cultural commodities" (p. 45). But if what Deuze purports is representative of all aspects of culture, then what does the commodification of televisual gratuity look like, and in what ways might the commoditization of deviant aesthetics reflect if the televisual landscape itself reflects society? Before I can answer the latter, I look to some startling examples of the former. Due to structural restrictions in length and style, I arrange these examples in no particular order as each demonstrates what I theorize to be the emergence of a rotten aesthetic among the current cable TV dramas in circulation. As these rotten variants each occur within dramatic narratives, they suggest a kind of convention in that they manifest across divergent brands of niche programming that ranges from *Boardwalk*

Empire's depression era bootleg settings to *Breaking Bad*'s New Mexican meth labs, from the fictitious medieval Westeros on *Game of Thrones* to everywhere/no where remoteness of Charming, CA in *Sons of Anarchy*. In order to contextualize the temporal and cultural implications of the rotten aesthetic, I draw an analogy of how these genre manifestations generate and circulate in response to cultural climates.

Rotten Recurrence in Mediated Narratives. One of the best ways to understand how the rotten aesthetic blends imitation and innovation is to examine how similar ghastly conventions functioned in film history. In the 1950s, British film studio Hammer Films acquired rights to redesign and redistribute the core monster characters previously brought to cinematic life by Universal Studios in the 1930s and 1940s. Avoiding too steep a film history lesson, Hammer legitimized a cultural brand and a cinema legacy built on their successful string of relatively independent but unapologetically popular horror films. These films succeeded in their ability to imitate famous literary and film creations while innovating definitions of "horror" on film. Through Hammer's success the Horror genre innovated in four distinct ways: visually, tonally, dialogically, and culturally.

Visually, Hammer horror re-presented the monster canon in color for the first time. In addition, Hammer horror pushed sensory boundaries with the inclusion of gore (a Hollywood first!) at strategic narrative junctures. Tonally, Hammer Horror leans heavily on dualistic atmospheres of pleasure and dread. Gothic-Victorian mise en scene such as lush costuming and atmospheric set design function in deep contrast to haunting operatic musical scores and slow burn plot dissensions. Hammer's deliberate slow narrative pacing communicates two distinct values, one economic and the other

allegorical. First, the economic function communicates how films of that era relied on dialogue to build tension and develop character. Slow pacing taking place on a limited number of sets reinforces budgetary restraint. Second, the slow pacing and rise and fall moments of tension allegorically connote overt/covert relations concerning how horror cinema functions erotically. In particular, each film's climax typically features a key revelation of the grotesque, where the ultimate horror act transpires between protagonist/antagonist or antagonist/"monster." These narratives suggest obvious yet subverted (and subversive) erotic qualities titillating audiences in company with scaring them.

Hammer also played with cultural binary oppositions between repression (Gothic Victorian settings, upright Puritanical sensibilities, strict dichotomies between good and evil) and indulgence (voluptuous corsets, allegorical sensuality, villainous behavior moved from margin to center). The fact that Hammer horror reached its epoch of economic and cultural resonance during the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s speaks to the dualistic contrast between the films' explicit horror content and British (e.g. American) cultural sensibilities. These British/American sensibilities were controlled by a dominant-hegemonic status quo emphasizing conservative tradition, upright citizenry. Yet the dawning of dissent over social and civil rights would grow in dissent in the decades to come. Thus, these texts performed culturally in ways that reflected the Gothic sensibilities of unrest bubbling beneath the service of society.

Of these characteristics in Hammer (visual, tonal, narrative, cultural), these qualities in some cases can be refined to the following conventional characteristics: Color (e.g. technology), Gore (aesthetics), Narrative Climax (genre form), and Cultural

Resonance (audience reception and political reflection). Notably, these distinguishable categories share close ties with the television studies tenets of programs, audiences, institutions, and contexts. In addition, these distinct areas can be seen and heard and felt, imitated and innovated, throughout the televisual emergence of the rotten aesthetic. Thus while reviewers not privy to the long argument of this project, the rotten aesthetic functions metaphorically as a rotting cultural affect that in Literary-Gothic fashion bubbles up to the surface. However, instead of the slow burn simmering as seen in the Hammer horror tradition, today's aesthetics boil as an uncontrollable overflow, no longer able to stay surpressed beneath the surface.

The Visual Context for the Rotten Aesthetic Emergence

In the preceding section, I demonstrated the collective components that propelled Hammer horror as an imitative and innovative film form. In this section I survey how the four qualities I noted resonate in updated form within the cable TV drama genre. In addition, I will explain how these qualities also satisfy and engage the four theoretical tenets of the television studies model. Visual representations come to signify the rotten aesthetic more than any other area. Like the advent of color to film and Technicolor as a preeminent technological brand, TV's transition into *high definition* in the 2000s marks a similar technological shift with far-reaching cultural impact. This media(ted) epoch coincides with a millennial shift not unlike the technology-horror themes that haunted post-Victorian English literature and Western Europe's cultural zeitgeist in the twilight of the 19th Century. In effect, High Definition—as innovated mass media—epitomizes a technological paradigm shift and

thus represents the context under which programs, audiences and institutions converged to the televisual medium.

HD technology marked a monumental shift in television economics. HD televisions helped create a market boom while audiences became enamored by the crystal clear imagery. Institutional updates required studios to invest in digital cameras and accompanying equipment. With so much detail available to the human eye via high definition, television's innovated visual spectrum changed in terms of expectation and experience. Arguably, television's definitional understanding of *perspective* altered in a new way. Alternating approaches to the perspective of what TV could accomplish also changed. Technological changes coincided with maturation in audience interest and artistic output of serialized storytelling. While programs like *Oz*, *The Sopranos* and *The Shield* played with combinations of stand alone episodic and serialized storytelling, innovative action-adventure series like *Alias*, *24*, and later *Lost* pushed the boundaries of fragmented serialization in the TV drama. With networks still accomplishing innovating moves, cable series worked to fashion distinct visions for smaller niche audiences, primarily catering to declined demographics of white male viewers.

But while the traditional broadcast networks updated visual aesthetics for HD standards, cable took liberties to revel in the newly invented "TVMA" rating, wearing it as an edgy signifier instead of a brandishing marker. This was evident in shows like *The Shield* and *Nip/Tuck* where characters might randomly break into previously unseen acts like in-pants handjobs, onscreen bullet headshots, sexual victimization including subsequent psychological ramifications, and previously unexcused utterances like "bullshit," "cocksucker," and "goddammit" among many other signature curse words.

Thus in a way, cable established a kind of *gentleman's club simulacrum*, where hyper-masculinity and antihero hedonism operated unchecked and in high order. Debauched behavior was in high fashion, and devoured by male audiences at first and then general audience preferences over time.[5] Lowbrow behavior became high-class narrative convention. It is likely this tr ansition was tolerated for a couple of subtle and less discussed rationales. First, programs like *Oz* and *The Sopranos* were produced for paycable and thus functioned more like pay-per-view modes of operation. Not unlike the gangster films in pre-code Hollywood, both shows emphasized hardened criminals in recurring instances of dehumanization and thus allocated a makeshift excuse for glorifying wretched onscreen behavior. It is a genre/sub-genre, crime/gangster after all.

FX's *The Shield* then piggybacks the momentum *NYPD Blue* already gained throughout the 1990s, except it took those gratuitous innovations (the first program to gain a pre-credits warning for nudity and adult language) and up the ante in degrading content and negative character motivation. When FX's programming caught flames through underground buzz and critical acclaim, they replicated the "TVMA" conventions of antiheroism in *Rescue Me* and *Nip/Tuck*. Yet none of these series attracted the level of viewers nor reveled in a heightened combination of negative behaviors to the extent of *Sons of Anarchy*. *SoA* celebrated antisocial activity onscreen with such nihilistic ambivalence that viewers revered the non-conformist attitude that works concomitantly alongside its serialized storytelling, rebellious outlaw character development, and greasy-grunge aesthetic escapism. Thus, by disguising narratives as "criminal," cable networks progress the adult-ness in their storytelling stylistics. Over time, such change denotes an ideological shift in the kinds of content produced by

artists and institutions, the kinds of programs consumed by audiences, and ultimately the varying contexts or mediums with which audiences receive televisual media. This brief televisual history in some ways represents a *retelling* of the previous context I produced in chapter one. However, this version is strategically modified to account for significant tonal shifts in televisual content that have been sprinkled throughout this project but boil to a head in this chapter.

Tone: An Unholy Trinity of Gratuity (e.g. Sex, Drugs, and Violence)

Overall support of the rotten aesthetic has been unanimously positive at least in the acknowledgement and identification of some kind of clear yet strangely opaque phenomenon in the uptick of graphic and gratuitous content on television. Yet some blind reviewers question the use of the term "rotten" as an identifying marker. I make a case stressing several distinct criteria that supports the term rotten aesthetic as both intertextual imitation and extratextual theorization of the innovatingly bleak storytelling stylistics concomitant across the dramatic cable televisual mediascape. Not only is this aesthetic rotten, but its allegorical cultural criticism speaks to extratextual concerns that equally qualify as a rotting constance resonating out of the dominant-hegemonic status quo. I examine several core tropes and conventions that comprise the rotten aesthetic and consider how they function as social critiques.

Incest and Rape Themes: Incest recurs as a narrative trope throughout several series. Incest plays a pivotal role in the manipulation of characters and action from the initial episode of *Game of Thrones*. In addition, incest surfaces as side-story, intended as treacherously black humor, in season three of *Sons of Anarchy.* In *SoA*, a key character flirts with, makes out, and nearly penetrates his half-sister, until

knowledgeable parties intervene just at the tipping point. Whereas incest might reside just beyond the wall of taboo indecency, even harsher depictions of rape recur throughout TV drama narratives. Season one of *American Horror Story* features a mass murderer in a black latex suit. His face covered to disguise his identity, the perpetrator becomes the penetrator when he rapes and impregnates the mother of his girlfriend. Seeing as he also deflowers the daughter-girlfriend, he commits incest by proxy as serves as stepfather to his girlfriend's unborn sibling. Season three depicts a mother-son incest session that lingers on her physical violation of his body in ways that speak to exploitation more than narrative fidelity. A&E's *Bates Motel* hinges its premise on the Oedipal relationship between Norman Bates and Norma, er, "Mother," and titillates viewers with constant "innocent" wreslting and uncomfortably long hugs and positionality between the two. The second season finale even uses a lingering half-lipped kiss between them as its plot-dangling cliffhanger. Finally, perhaps *Boardwalk Empire* takes the cake for creating two full seasons worth of mother-son sexual tension before an outright flashback drunken night liaissance of Oedipal passion shared between the two.

SoA creates an entire season's emotional arc around a rape victim. The audience must carry her burden as well, since the season's first episode depicts an onscreen gang bang from a ruthless group of White Supremacists. In *GoT*, ruthless rape posits a cultural norm for males of the Dothraki tribe, while the "civilized" peoples of Westeros prefer an endless supply of supple whore from nearby brothels. *Boardwalk Empire* often depicts women in the helpless sexual throws of men, while *SoA* perpetuates a world of hegemonic patriarchy where adultery is a one-way street that almost always

favors men. As these scenes, and those on HBO in particular, often feature female nudity, the shows decidedly titillate the gaze of viewers [and male viewers in particular] without hesitation and indeed with purposeful intent. One *Vulture* interview reveals the story of an HBO executive standing behind the directors during a nude scene for *GoT*. The executive *insists* they show more, that it's *okay*. Such revelations speak to the gratuitous fortitude of these networks and further signify an aesthetic intent. But what kind of intent remains ambiguous and open to interpretation. Through close watching I observe the functions of these collective themes to resonate a certain brokenness from within, thematically in terms of "family" and socially as political commentary toward broken systems that reach within and draw from traditional corruptive norms rather than expanding new democratic potential.

Violence. Violence represents a hallmark convention in the history of television, but no other decade hoists the bowels of vigilant justice like current era. FX's tamest drama *Justified* features one stand-alone story where a recurring character awakens in a seedy hotel bathtub floating in his own pool of blood-water. As he stands, he slowly realizes his organs have been removed without anesthetic and the audience recognizes before him due to the cripplingly realistic gashes in his sides, the paleness of his skin, and the strained tint of the tub. *The Walking Dead* engages such routine violence that the gore factor becomes window dressing. The splatter of undead zombies and their human victims seems to racket up higher levels every few episodes. The combination of prosthetic and digital weave together so that audiences might have to examine paused frames to guess which disembowelment is "real" or "rendered". *Breaking Bad* holds no punches when the show lowers itself to violent extremes. One storyline in season one

features two meth cooks "dealing with" a dead body by melting it in a bathtub full of acid. Yet creator Vince Gilligan forces his sense of "realism" on the audience by having the acid eat through the pipes and flooring. Thus, in one horrendous scene the tub comes crashing through the ceiling of one floor and acidic human remains spurt and splatter all over the room and the cooks. The subsequent remainder of the episode details the clean up effort afterward.

While *Boardwalk* features countless juxtapositions between three-piece suits and soulless gangster violence, and *GoT* offers a bevy of retro-medieval torture and execution methods, perhaps no show prides itself in its violence quite like *SoA*. While each season features almost creative new innovations at brutality toward men and women, no season compares to the most recent. Season five features a father forced to watch his daughter burn alive in front of him, a prison gang bludgeons one club member to death including the onscreen death blow, a coked up grandmother crashes her SUV to the sound of blood dripping out of the mouths of her toddler grandchild, and even one prisoner requests his dead pornstar wife's crucifix, only to stab it into the neck of an on duty nurse. These season five escalations in violent behavior demonstrate another realm of cultural critique, the severed limb. Through close watching, collective violence frequently communicates processes of subjugation and methods of revolution, two qualities notably absent in the purported ideology of the controlled deliberative democratic State.

Amputating the State. Beheadings, dismemberments, and amputations comprise a recurring theme in each of these shows and I argue signifies a unified larger socio-cultural/political critique. *GoT* features the most obvious critique and significations of

power, as kings behead regularly, staking heads on spikes as a result. In a DVD commentary, it was revealed one such prop was a George W. Bush mold, which created a summertime stir for several media outlets. *Breaking Bad* again uses several heads and limbs to authenticate its narrative of the drug wars and border wars in the Mexican-American Southwest, including genre actor Danny Trejo's severed head ridign atop a tortoise across the Southwest desertscape. *SoA* features such mutilations as the castration of a pedophile clown, the dismemberment of a "thumb and tit" of a female hostage, and regular removal of limbs in the televisual lineage dating back most auspiciously to *The Sopranos*. *Walking Dead* offers the most severed heads and limbs per capita, but perhaps these most closely resemble a metaphor for the show's post-apocalyptic disintegration of the State.

American Horror Story (*AHS*) abuses the its audiences' sensory like no show before it. In a coding session for season two displays of gratuitous adult content, I recorded the following list of rotten observations from the first four episodes: Graphic depictions of an arm severing and prolonged scenes of bleeding with no treatment, numerous stabbings and shootings, exorcism and demonic possession, human skinning, skin grafting, and sewn skin wearing, alien abduction and human experimentation, anal interrogation, electroshock treatment on women, implied rape, implied mutilation, sadomasochistic punishment, sexual and metallic penetration, implied priestly sexual repression, onscreen rape, off screen rape, human appendage dismemberment, graphic depictions of mental illness, digital and prosthetic renderings of mutilation, murder, rape, exorcisms, Nazism, subjugation, suicide, mutation, scientific experimentation, religious desecration, domestic abuse, sexual aversion therapy, …and normal stuff like

sex, violence, language. No show abuses its audience more ferociously, simultaneously performing aural desensitization and co-conspiracy in its debaucheries. The permeation of a rotten aesthetic becomes conclusive as any semblance of morality slice away frame by frame. Taken together these examples comprise a growing body [or bodies] of work that visually penetrates viewers, subjugates the status quo to a new empire of gratuitous excess, and renders a cultural commentary too vivid to forget. Through close watching, collective copious and gratuitous recurrences of amputation, decapitation, and mutilation suggest destabilization of the body. As political critique, the body comes to represent the State, with amputation suggests a rot that must be removed, or destabilizing traditional power bases. And certainly as *GoT* not-so-coyly suggests, the head always comes to represent dominant-hegemonic and masculine-patriarchal control.

Thus like raunch culture celebrates the hyper-sexualization of women, I argue a rotten the aesthetic performs an equally gratuitous and pyschologically misogynistic and thus masculinized variant from Levy's cultural theory. The visual stimulation of the aesthetic point of shock, the prick or punctum as Barthes might call it [he wouldn't, I would], the penetration not only of the eye upon contact from the televisual stimuli but also a penetration of the mind's eye, often followed by the regurgitation of said experience through repeat reactions, critiques, conversations, blog posts, and alternative discussion through convergent technological means. While I savor discussion regarding convergence culture ramifications, I now alter modes of interpretation to account for the socio-cultural reflectivity and reflexivity that I argue surrounds the secretion of a rotten aesthetic.

Cultural Resonance for Shifts to "Darker" Entertainment Aesthetics

The Spirit of the Age. Oh yes, whenever themes emerge beyond a scattered few exceptions the conversation of an influential zeitgeist or spirit of the age must be considered. We see these themes resonate throughout popular culture and history. Recent trends include the post-9/11 shift to superhero permanence in their semiotic penetration of Hollywood and in the overwhelming cultural acceptance of these forms. But why might the zeitgeist posit a theoretical consideration for the emergence of a rotten aesthetic. Several reasons point to the celebration and heralding of the rotten aesthetic, perhaps less to do with a singular movement so much as a force of numerous separate cultural occurrences leading up to and guiding this shift in televisual style. Treat (2006) espouses how the Superhero zeitgeist emerges in popular culture due in large part to the fears, psychological frailty, and political rhetoric manipulating publics following the September 11 attacks, a sentiment shared by other scholars as well (Mirzoeff, 2009, & Lawrence & Jewett, 2002).

Decline of the Male Viewer. During the mid to late 90s, TV producers and industry experts panicked as the primary sought after demographic viewer, the male age 18-34, dramatically declined from longstanding TV viewing practices. Their departure caused a panic for TV producers while simultaneously the videogame industry suddenly burgeoned to new heights. Not only did video game sales spike dramatically in the late 90s and into the 2000's, these sales numbers began matching and passing monetary figures like Hollywood blockbusters. This unprecedented shift denotes a consumer paradigm shift and a formal exegesis for a generation of males that no longer identified with primary content produced for TV. However, what do video games offer that

television of the late 90s did not? First, as Jenkins notes, video games elicited a seemingly more active form of participatory culture (Jenkins, 1992). Whereas not every male retains the means or interest to engage in such popular fare as say, the *Star Trek* conventions peek popularity in the 90s, arguably a need for involvement *with* the content emerged in the generation that grew up with Atari, Nintendo, and the like.

Furthermore, I might hypothesize the 1980s and early 1990s represented *the* pinnacle era of action movies in American film history, a hypothesis 100% supported by comparing both domestic and international box office receipts of the last quarter century. Lawrence and Jewett (2002) support this claim that the cinematic formula for Actioners tires out with audiences [not unlike Westerns before them], demonstrated through both box office declines and critical reception, the desire for the aesthetic experience of action and violence lingers as an aesthetic desire. Following this void, or perhaps aiding the action decline, the advent of first-person shooters places gamers square in the action role, affectively shifting the paradigm of the action film genre to a closer approximation of personal experience for the viewer. Meanwhile, neither TV nor box office returns necessarily declined dramatically, but both industries broaden approaches and audience bases.

Yet while most scholars and film critics de-legitimize the action era as primitive fetishizing of Reagan era ideology in its best incarnations, Roland Barthes (1972) perhaps surfaces a more refined theorization in his essay concerning "The World of Wrestling", where he argues the underprivileged rungs of audiences may indeed hold a greater capacity for synthesizing the moral values on display in low culture forms of entertainment than traditionally recognized. Anderson concurs that, "It is no accident

that so many…TV shows revolve around moments of trauma, loss, uncertainty, or historical crisis", and theorizes such programming functions as "cultural therapy" through its repetitious form (p. 50).

Shifts in TV Taste. The decline of TV's top demo of male viewer sparked an opportunity for the medium to shift content output in a dramatic new way, *reality television*. While arguably reality TV preexisted through familiar formats like game shows, courtroom shows, and of course the cultural imprint of MTV's *The Real World*, TV producers conglomerated the old and new with the import a of popular European reality show, *Survivor*. By its first season finale, *Survivor* became a mammoth hit and opened the floodgates of similar competition-based reality shows of near endless varieties. Fox soon launched *American Idol*, a program that eclipsed *Survivor* in ratings, cultural capital, and imitation. The endless offspring of music-oriented competition reality shows continue to dominate the network landscape. Likewise, the *Real World* formula spawned an unfathomable number of imitators including another European import, the surveillance-heavy *Big Brother*.

Narratively Situating the Male TV Viewer.

Joseph Campbell traces the mythic origin of the heroic figure in his *Hero With a Thousand Faces*. Campbell avers that when the hero's journey comprises three repeatable phases: the departure, the descent into the abyss, and the return. When the hero faces the abyss and does not return, the mythic form is one of tragedy. Yet when the hero ascends from the abyss, he brings with him new knowledge, wisdom, and aura. Like Homer's *Odysseus*, the male viewer has returned from his mediated journey with new knowledge, skills, and awareness. Thus like Odysseus, the male viewer adventured

into areas that demand *more* from the consumer than passive consumption. Through new forms of interactivity, media convergence, new innovations solicit a consumer armed to engage the text and not merely consume it.

Slaying the Digital Dragon. Numerous causes emerge to in the theorization of the return to primal states and thus the emergence of popular entertainments and TV dramas in particular capitalizing on this trend. Neil Postman may offer one of the closest rationales for these mediated mediations concerning cultural calamity. Postman (1993) points to technology's ever-present role in society, from "technopoly" to "technocracy", from the "invisible" to the "symbolic", Postman reads technological encroachment as a "drain on individuality, cultural difference, and the authenticity of human agency (p. 21-164). Postman's technophobic cautions recall McLuhan's assessment of how mediums play a greater role than medias in determining societal synergy.[5] Considering these authors' attention on mediums, perhaps Jenkins offers the most digestible interpretation prevalent to the situationality of the rotten aesthetic within cable TV dramas.

Faux-getting the White Male Viewer's Burden: Socio-Political Cause

Additional arguments for the case of anxieties situating the primary demographic of the [privileged] White male viewer include continuing fragmentation of media and mediums, cultural influences including but not limited to two national wars following 9/11, a national and global recession, economic stagnation, healthcare cost increases, user decreases, recession-based limitations on leisure spending, decline in spending results in decline in jobs, thus a national rise in unemployment, increasing mediation of tensions between neoliberal and neoconservative talking heads, harsh

reaction against the policies of the Bush administration, perceived racial division as a result of the Obama Presidency, run control, border patrol, and drug war concerns, constant circulation of themes including global climate change, civil unrest, rise in Chinese power, exorbitant rise in oil prices, increased mediated attention to hurricane and other natural disaster phenomena, and other physical, psychological, and metaphysical experiences that redistribute the phallocentric ontology of the historical position of White male privilege and reframe the go-to "villain" of the world the stodgy White male [still] in power.

Marginalization of Unhealthy Living Practices. On a dietary level: no smoking, no transfat, no sugar, organic boom, high-fructose corn syrup hysteria, rises in obesity, diabetes, cancer, healthcare. In other words, a full-blown ideological shift in the cultural conception of all things familiar and comfortable now outlawed and forbade. Such a dramatic shift in such a relatively short time has to imprint some kind of social psychological influence that renders users as somehow outside of the conformed mainstream. To eat red meat from a steroid injected cow is the new form of misdemeanor criminality. Thus, consumers are pitted as both victims of the system and perpetuators of crimes against humanity. No wonder the 'Age of the Anti-hero' of the TV drama[6] emerges in the same decade as the Tea Party.

Secularization or the Exodus of a Collective Consciousness toward Salvation. A secularization of society might be read in the increasingly tolerant, decreasingly religious status quo in America. These signs owe no favors to the internal collapse in leadership judgment and crisis management by the Catholic Church following the outbreak sexual misconduct secrecy that festered until the rot could no longer sustain

the weight of suppression[7]. One might also read secular currents through cultural trends relating to hyper-individualization and self-gratification, me culture and iGeneration compounded by Baby Boomer generation of corporate sellouts, Wall Street Excess Greed, and the false hope/manipulation of the housing market. For example, witness the *Walking Dead* "Pilot" scene where Rick looks in on a farmhouse suicide. Blood smears on the wall reads, "God forgive us". Rick cannot see these words but the audiences/viewers can, thus charging the viewer toward questions of 'where have we gone?' Furthermore, the blood soaked plea does not ask for intervention, merely grace for darker transgressions. Understanding the grammatical difference communicates a cultural context for reading the secular as the new sacred.

Implications toward Cultural Convergence and Concluding Thoughts on the Artistic Expression of a Rotten Aesthetic

Not every explanation of TV's rotten aesthetic spells doom and gloom for the medium. Indeed, scholars like Buonanno (2008) argue we live in an *age of television*, and critics contend that the high quality value of modern TV production signifies a decided shift away from film as the dominant mode of storytelling. Johnson (2005) argues these kinds of texts make audiences smarter as they must navigate numerous layers of storylines, characters, supplemental materials, conversations, spoilers, and other related content. Jenkins (1992) identifies this level of attention and participation as "fandom" and argues, "fandom here becomes a participatory culture which transforms the experience of media consumption into the production of new texts" (p. 46).

The relationship between TV-producers and its audiences-consumers evolves in diversification. John Hartley coins the term *bardic function* to define "the active relationship between TV and viewers, were…TV programming and the mode of address use the shared resources of narrative and language to deal with social change and conflict…to make sense of the experience of modernity" (Hartley & McWilliam, 2009, p. 16). Thorburn argues TV peeks when it embraces its confines (Newcomb, 2007), yet perhaps what convergence culture demonstrates now is that TV no longer experiences the same confines. Instead, a multi-media convergence allows formats, viewing rituals, and consuming practices to fragment according to audience preference. This flexibility in turn extends the cultural reach and perhaps a kind of cultural dexterity that enables TV to simultaneously become more cinematic and thus epic, more gratuitous and thus like unfiltered Internet content, more serialized like comics and mini-series, and ultimately more creatively exorbitant palette for artists to render visions of the modern social imaginary. Viewed in this light, the rotten aesthetic becomes the latest televisual manifestation closest to artistic expression. Now every *Boardwalk* throat slice can evoke the pastel calmness of Breton, *AHS* the surrealism of Dali, and as for *The Walking Dead*, well, it continues imitating its comic book predecessor in ways hyper as much as juvenile.

The rotten aesthetic started as a visual signifier, a shift in content toward the macabre and grotesque *as* narrative titillation. But we see a slippery change again, perhaps as texts like *American Horror Story* grow into stale camp. The rotten aesthetic is not unlike the shapeshifter, except it functions beyond the visual. The rotten aesthetic convention initiated as visual signifier and indeed remains so within certain texts and

contexts, but now we see it re-emerge as distinguished cynicism. Consider the riotous popularity of Frank and Claire Underwood and their cold calculations again and again in Netflix's *House of Cards*. Or Lena Dunham's brand of millennial narcissism coded as fragmented feminism (*frenemism*?) where strong insecure females damage each other and their friendships and relationships in the name of "art" and "self experience." We leave with a question of whether the rotten aesthetic is a narrative convention that functions in the absence of moral allegory where in place now there grows considerable (im)moral tragedy.

Rhetorical Recap: Binary Opposition Between Rotten Aesthetic and Raunch Culture

The Rotten Aesthetic draws from or imitates the post-feminist observations that lead to Levy's theory of raunch culture, but it splinters off in order to observe and theorize a sideways phenomenon in the shifting conventions that wallpaper televisual programming under the genre banner "TV Drama." Themes may at times reflect heavily the same raunch culture patterns of outward and overt hyper-sexuality, particularly in mediations of women, but the rotten aesthetic diverges to consider all the vices suggested in TV's gratuitous uptick. Sublime ultraviolence, raunchy dialogue, grotesque human betrayal, sexual deviance, and the aesthetification of dehumanization as a propelling narrative device to seduce and retain audiences and generate cultural currency in the form of online paratextual discourse that in some ways replaces the "legitimization" process formerly distributed by markers such as high ratings and awards show accolades.

As I noted in the previous paragraph, unlike raunch culture, the rotten aesthetic transcends emphasis on changes in gender culture. Within the culture of TV, the rotten aesthetic applies to a myriad of production practices and industry players and paratextual discourses. The rotten aesthetic is most observable and impactful (arguably) at the visual level but it is just as potent in dialogue form and as a thematic device. But in conversation with Levy's raunch culture, the emergence of this new term suggests several scholarly implications. First, I contend that the rotten aesthetic at least initially in its cultural context functions as a rhetorically visual (and auditory at times) response to perceived White male privilege decline. This is in conversation with the accepted or en vogue theories regarding the antihero movement on cable TV during this same time. Second, the rotten aesthetic temporally marks the shift from film to TV as the dominant narrative medium, particularly with regard to long-term serialized storytelling and the narrative tropes, conventions, and genre-mixing iconicity that accompany them. Third, this visualization of postmodernity signifies a reaction to the natural unease that accompanies growth and the shift toward transnationalism in particular. Finally, each of these narratives perpetuate themes claiming reaffirmation of family in response to perhaps the secular paradigm shift. Yet so many of these texts, through their habitual reliance on the rotten aesthetic specifically, negate such familial claims and instead purport tragic if not nihilistic bliss. In conclusion, I read a couple of meta-televisual themes emerging in the rotten aesthetic. This includes conversations concerning: *empowerment versus disempowerment, escapist fantasy as a heroic return to the primitive TV medium, Darwinian survivalists rejecting TV's "reality" competition (drama's figuratively if not literally fighting for their existence), and the*

aforementioned shift from film to TV as a dominant narrative medium, an observation that immediately shows signs of cracking amidst millennialist shifts in consumption practices. I consider this thought with a final recap to conclude this project in chapter fourteen.

Chapter Fourteen

Rhetorically Recapping the Implications of a Critical Television Studies Model for Communication

Rhetorical Recap: Chapter and Unit Themes

This project was designed as a way to introduce and integrate a television studies model for communication researchers. Gray and Lotz's proposed television studies model privileges analytic admixture between TV programs, audiences, institutions, and contexts. Furthermore, I refine my communication studies approach to included mixed critical-methodologies. Limiting analysis to critical methods is intentional in order to help simplify the 4-tenet model of television studies while also demonstrating the analytic dexterity within critical disciplines of communication. In addition, emphasizing critical methods also compliments my theoretical and methodological extensions, which I unpack in the discussion sections to come. These theoretical and methodological extensions tie-in several overarching themes central to this project, but particularly discussions of genre as theory/method, the critical polyvalence communicated by contemporary cable televisual texts, and the ways in which autoethnography can compliment critical theories and television studies.

To recap, I propose a series of questions and answers in chapter one that helps establish a rationale and context for this project. In chapter two, I survey several key conversations from genre studies, and demonstrate how genre theory crosses disciplinary interest and utility just as genre offers mixed opportunity as both theory and method, particularly the key tenets of imitation and innovation. Chapter three comprises introducing the phenomenon of recap culture as a response to peek cultural interest in televisual texts. Informed by recapping as active engagement, I extend Brummett's rhetorical technique of close reading to propose a method of close watching. Close watching functions as a method and offers a strategy to assist scholars researching and

analyzing the televisual medium. The end result of close watching, especially for those relying on a close watching method, yields what I differentiate as a rhetorical recap. Thus like the genre theory that informs this project, close watching and rhetorical recapping follow the critical history of close reading, semiotics, and rhetorical criticism.

Chapter four transitions the project from introduction/theory/method setup to assessment and analysis. This chapter intentionally casts a wide net (as does its bookend counterpart chapter thirteen) in order to evaluate the contemporary slate of televisual programming. Chapter four plays with generic, conventional, and formulaic uses of time as a narrative device across the televisual landscape (cum mediascape). This broad genre analysis emphasizes programs and contexts before the chapter switches gears to assess how time functions as an institutional mode of temporal hegemony. Thus I conclude with the introduction of global temporialism, a term meant to add usefulness for scholars studying TV but also larger communication themes like post-colonialism, global media studies, intercultural, and international communication.

Chapter five kicks of a series of close watching genre analyses that survey individual texts per chapter. The first genre analysis examines the text *Sons of Anarchy* through the lens of Biker B-movie history. Given that biker movies recall film history, I also examine *SoA*'s use of film sound as evidence of the television industry's maturation and imitation of film. Yet *SoA*, standing in for the broader cable spectrum, innovates with changing audience and institutional technological practices, and offers a chance to evaluate how TV integrates with Jenkins' understanding of convergence culture as well as his formulation of spreadable media. Chapter six applies a western genre analysis (a favorite among traditional genre theorists) to *SoA* that helps

demonstration multiple modes of audience decoding and the polyvalent potency of ideologically charged codes embedded in popular texts. Chapter seven switches texts in order to demonstrate *SoA*'s success does not posit a singular occurrence but rather a cultural/industrial phenomenon. I emphasize how *Game of Thrones* draws from literary history and mythology as well as the remnants of western iconography, which communicate the text's polysemic and polyvalent complexity, as well as its cross-demographic appeal to audiences.

Cross-demographic appeals apply to more than program viewership. Contemporary texts enliven feverish audience reception that translates into active consumerist fandoms. Following this logic, chapter eight begins three distinct chapters emphasizing audiences. Eight specifically examines the interwoven relationships between audiences and institutions, which result in the manifestation and circulation of online paratextual discourses. I theorize how these online modes of communication function as oppositional engines, and suggest ways in which institutions work to control the cultural currency of the text or paratext, which can positively or negatively affect a show's textual mystique. Chapter nine attempts to refine audience/reception/fan studies to include an outlier from material culture studies in Prownian analysis. This chapter analyzes a *SoA* table lamp in an effort to isolate the artifact from its institutional source in order to test whether the piece reflects any values beyond its intentional coding as brand memorabilia. The test proves slightly problematic, in some ways due to the closed-coded mass-produced production style of the lamp (although my logical, historical, and mythological intuitions have proven more accurate given additional research over time). Chapter ten concludes the unit emphasis on audiences, and

proposes a third consecutive chapter of innovating proposals for audience/reception/fans studies concerning TV. In this chapter I apply autoethnography as a method for analyzing the allegorical values embedded in the current cable western *Hell on Wheels*. This show uses intertextual and meta-textual admixtures of the Western's history and thus ties to larger themes concerning genre-mixing iconicity and the American ideologies encoded in westerns. In this chapter I reverse the genre analysis and use *HoW* as a lens for evaluating personal history as it relates to small towns and America's status quo.

Chapter eleven continues the through line that TV texts work as political allegories. I return to my initial text *SoA* and evaluate how it embraces public sphere theory discourse including critical-rational thought and a dominant-hegemonic deliberative democracy. Dominant-hegemonic themes rank highly among many critical scholars and remains in play throughout chapter twelve. In this chapter, I switch from themes emphasizing class (chapter ten) and politics (chapter eleven) to conversations surrounding gender. Chapter twelve is meant to portray feminist history as a dialogic history embodied by several of the female archetypes in *SoA*. Yet *SoA*'s complex characters and the vastness of feminist history ultimately cannot be fully represented or evaluated in a single chapter. Fortunately, the introductions into the ways gender and politics become negotiated in a text like *SoA* are meant to 1) reinforce the polyvalent potency of TV texts like *SoA*, while 2) establishing how these texts overlay their criticisms with salty dialogue and gratuitous content reminiscent of Levy's phenomenological theory of raunch culture. Raunch culture as emitted on TV takes on a new form according to my assessment. Extending beyond female representations to

include the hallmark depictions of vice and other anti-social behaviors/action, I introduce the genre convention innovated by cable TV in the rotten aesthetic. The rotten aesthetic performs narrative and ideological work as it hooks viewers into becoming devoted audiences and potential fans, while at the same time it shifts what is considered normative for television content, which also works to reflect cultural criticism and refract contemporary issues in America.

Each of the three analytic units emphasize certain aspects of programs, audiences, institutions, and contexts over others. Yet hopefully it has become consistently transparent that many of these factors are inescapable of being wholly assessed without considering one or more of the alternative tenets. This is perhaps one reason that chapter nine struggles in its meaning-making process, since the relationships between the four tent-pole areas comprising television studies are never mutually exclusive of one another. Rather, these areas are in constant negotiation and renegotiation in their influence and impact on the others. The ways these four television studies tenets interact and interconnect reflect the key qualities of genre studies, namely imitation and innovation. We see imitation heavily contextualized in the ways paycable networks like FX and AMC develop their programs to resemble HBO's trailblazing style. At the same time, HBO represents "premium" cable and thus exhibits more institutional agency (e.g. lavish production values contrasted by hyper-gratuitous doses of rotten aesthetics).

Thus, FX and AMC must innovate to in order to legitimize their standing. The endgame innovations triangulated by these networks (and now imitated by countless competition) boils down to genre-mixing iconicity. HBO achieves this most

successfully in *GoT*, while AMC works this strategy across their programming slate (*HoW*, *Breaking Bad*, *The Walking Dead*) as does FX (*SoA*, *Justified*, *American Horror Story*). Producers are also guilty of "innovations" that function as naming or recategorizing more than actual innovative measure. Instead of the mini-series, shorter shows are called "event series"[1] or masked as "anthologies" the regurgitate stock casts,[2] plot themes, and problematic conventions.[3]

Mixed-Methods as a Theoretical Response to Genre-Mixing Iconicity

If it hasn't been overtly clear (as covert meanings often elicit as much if not more pleasure), imitating the bricolage admixture of cable TV's genre-mixing iconicity functions as part of the motivation behind exhibiting mixed critical methods in the execution of this project. Televisual texts succeed and fail based upon their organizational chemistry. Well-produced and positively received televisual imitations flatter in their innovations while those produced poorly flatline. For example, *Game of Thrones* thrived as high fantasy while Starz's lower-budgeted *Camelot* thudded despite its compelling bricolage of Arthurian mythology into the titillating format of serialized drama. Recently Netflix attempted to catapult into similar terrain with their quasi-"historical" *Marco Polo*. Interestingly, Netflix never releases official ratings or screening data for their programming, thus removing "ratings" as an official industrial measurement. Instead Netflix allows cultural currency to elevate and support programming, as is the case with *House of Cards*, *Orange Is The New Black*, and the resurrection of *Arrested Development* and *The Killing*. Yet despite the company's attempt to rewrite the institutional practices script, an assault of negative reviews for

expensive productions like *Marco Polo* tugs at Netflix's cultural and economic momentum.

Meanwhile, *GoT* popularity has surged to such a global extent that its cultural currency alone has granted HBO the collective courage to strike deals with Amazon, Apple, and launch their own stand-alone streaming service, HBONOW. While texts like Girls, True *Detective*, and John Oliver's *Last Week Tonight* offer continuous buzz in between the circulation of *GoT* seasons, there is no mistaking which text has dethroned *The Sopranos* at HBO and ascended the cultural hierarchy of "prestige" or "quality" TV while also balancing demographic interest between traditional viewers and millennial interests. The text as a product has achieved this means by transmedia (and might I also say *transmedium*?) merits. *GoT* is as spreadable as fans want to make it (paratextual discourse, memes, faux Twitter handles, fan sites, kitschy commodities, the whole fandom spectrum), while even the televisual text diverges and supercedes its own source material.[4]

GoT functions a bit different from *SoA*, where the text's popularity and cultural currency swelled each season but simmers down upon conclusion. This might be one reason FX seems so eager to plot and execute a *SoA* prequel before the property's buzz has time to cool.[5] Such an example proves obscurity no longer remains an obstacle in the televisual textual expansion journey. Thus, we see why *SoA* and *GoT* complement one another as works demonstrating textual polyvalence. This has also been a conversation about the *industrial rivalries* between companies. HBO sets a gold standard that FX successfully emulates and then innovates from. AMC also imitates the post-*Sopranos*/post-Network cable standard and then deviates its programming to

achieve unique critical/audience success with *Breaking Bad*, massive audience influx and cable ratings records with *The Walking Dead***,** and even manages to resuscitate dormant programming blocks (e.g. Saturday evenings) as a strategic marketing maneuver with *Hell on Wheels*.[6] While *HoW* will never achieve the postmodern adoration and zeitgeist attention of *BB* or *TWD*, it functions as a meta-reminder of the genre history and the role westserns in particular played in shaping the landscape of TV programming and cultural ideology. As a traditional genre, *HoW* thus fulfills a strategic tenet in the role genre plays in and among TV programs, audiences, institutions, and contexts.

The Misfires of Critical Mixed-Methods as Genre-Mixing: A Closed [Coded] Eulogy for Prownian Mixology?

If "History" Channel shows like *Pawn Stars* and *American Pickers* teach us anything about kitschy commodities, taste moves in cycles and there is an audience or consumer somewhere willing to covet, acquire, and revere just about any material artifact. This would be my prayer for the *Sons of Anarchy* table lamp and the accompanying baggage represented in the form of a contorted Prownian analysis. Like the beggars that barter for trade on cable, scholarly reviewers seem split on the value this contribution makes. As when Leonardo DiCaprio joined *Growing Pains* or Jonathan Winters birthing out of an egg on *Mork and Mindy* or when "The Itchy and Scratchy Show" morphed into "The Itchy and Scratchy and Poochie Show" in the metatextual season eight, episode fourteen of *The Simpsons* ("Hello, Roy!"), chapter nine works reflexively as a meta-commentary on the failed experimentation of critical mixed-methods as genre-mixing iconicity. Like the Paulo and Nikki appearances on

Lost, everything has a purpose until it doesn't. But hindsight often brings a valuable (if not pedagogical) moral lesson. I believe the spirit of Prown remains in tact in so much as the vivid and descriptive prose function as creative writing and analysis into the artifact. Yet the text perhaps comes too fully loaded in terms of its produced affect, thus denying authentic scholarly resistance within the analysis. This work could benefit from more contemporary sources, although the intent within the essay was always to draw upon classical material in an effort to render a more removed reading.

In Jenkinsian terms, the kitsch merchandise propagating *SoA* is too sticky, and thus resists a more spreadable reading. For Hall's acolytes, I might suggest the memorabilia has an issue functioning as an open-coded text. Chapter nine's artifact inevitably functions as an excellent meta-analysis into the issues of brand manufacturing in postmodernity and the problems posed when attempting a traditional approach like Prownian analysis. As reviewers of the journal *Technoculture* put it, the analysis may work best under the "creative essay" category, in that mixed methods has its limits. Ultimately, like the failed TV shows that try to emulate the success of a *GoT* or *Mad Men* or *SoA*, my attempt at a hybrid Prownian analysis may wind up closer to *The Lone Gunmen* or *After M.A.S.H.* or *Lost's* Nikki and Paulo, buried quickly never to be resurrected.[7] In pedagogical terms, such a lesson also highlights why so many scholars are fearful and quick to dismiss practices of interdisciplinarity. The ideas work better in theory than in practice. To put this in a kind of genre studies perspective, the conventions might be in play, but the formula does not work. There is resistance to meaning-making at the producerly or consumerly level, the misfire residue revealed in overt and/or covert fashion.

Yet I suggest the context as a whole in this project supports at least the attempt of Prownian analysis as an experiment in the limits of critical methods for television studies and crossover potential in communication. Thus in the spirit of pedagogical praxis, mixed-method analysis in chapter nine yielded mixed results at best and lacks conclusivity. That said, the Prownian analysis did make for a thorough predictor into Sutter's psyche. By this I mean the initial Prownian pilot study took place in spring 2012, three seasons before *SoA*'s endpoint. But if one revisits the text (breaking Prown's rule *after the fact*), the imagery suggested by my Prownian analysis functions as a predictor for the show's downward spiral, increased religious symbolism throughout seasons' six and seven, and even my meditations on medieval history and binary oppositions of light and dark denote accurate insights given the recent news that Sutter's next project will be a European medieval period drama that emphasizes themes of redemption (e.g. light) amidst dark times (e.g. the Dark Age). Such revealings may call for further reflection for future use even when applied to contemporary commodity culture.

Assessing Autoethnography as a Critical/Cultural Communication Method

Autoethnography posits a contentious method within traditional social science-leaning academics disciplines. But those in certain segments of the humanities are finding rich utility and necessity with the method. Clearly the heart of the issue involves the lack of *generalizability* that comes out of an autoethnographic experience. Autoethnography suggests the opposite of statistical reliability, indeed emphasizing its binary opposition, *individuality*. Yet we might recognize authoethnography as *informed*

individuality, where the researcher or scholar draws upon years of training in combined fields of theory and method. Ethnographic methods accompany heightened reflexivity (e.g. *auto-awareness* or *self-reflection* on an informed theoretical level). Indeed, the leading names in cultural studies, psychoanalysis, performance studies, and even rhetoric rely on an accumulated sense of Self in order to identify and extend theoretical and methodological discourse. Kenneth Burke worked out his internal anguishes with Modernity and his wartime labors inside bullet factories and the dissociation experience therein to inform his theorizations of how ideological concepts like *hierarchy*, *symbolic action*, and the *scapegoat* enable the social and rhetorical power of language. Slavoj Zizek cannot escape his own personal fixation with film form and psychoanalysis and how the two compliment one another to critique the political functions of power and ideology and social control. Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and Joseph Campbell each drew from within as much as they reflected on observable phenomena in their research.

Larger than these figures from psychoanalysis, the counterculture waves of post-Marxist philosophers throughout the 20th Century were motivated heavily by the combined global and personal events recurring throughout Western Europe in and around WWI, WWII, and the years subsequent. Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Claude Levi-Strauss rely on reflexive prose as conduits for forming dense theorizations of structuralist and post-structuralist thought. Barthes draws upon his own reflections used for column-writing to comprise his most critically cited work *Mythologies*. Levi-Strauss in particular used autoethnography as a method for his colonialist travelogue *Tristes Tropiques* just as Barthes labored over *Camera Lucia* as a method of grief for the departure of his mother toward the end of his own life. Undoubtedly Stuart Hall's

mix-race heritage and outsider status informed the way he diversified the standard issue communication model by explaining how processes of *encoding* and *decoding* have multiple points of interruption and interpretation. These theorists are not self-proclaimed autoethnographers, but their work directly draws from how each uniquely observes, reflects, and refracts their individual social and cognitive perceptions.

Indeed the theoretical realm is not the only arena where autoethnographic influence plays a heavy role in the metamorphosis of language and meaning making. Like the French New Wave auteurs of the 1960s that inspired a generation of American filmmakers in the 1970s, the television showrunner at the turn of the 21st Century marks a vivid transition into autoethnographically-inspired storytelling that simultaneously must navigate the complexities of collaborative production teams, impassioned audiences-turned-fandoms, and liminal status of a medium-in-transition in the television. Brett Martin (2013) reveals the copious childhood details and familial experiences David Chase drew upon in the creation of the characters and world of *The Sopranos*. David Simon taps into firsthand experience—over a decade at *The Baltimore Sun*—of all bureaucratic and socio-political levels comprising Baltimore's American erosion into urban dystopia. Kurt Sutter did not formerly belong to any biker gangs, but the religious and secular symbolism of his professed childhood and upbringing, along with his collective shared identity as an audacious and outspoken social rebel, come to life more over *SoA*'s successive seasons. Sutter even casts himself in roles that involved maimed and self-loathing individuals, not unlike the "tortured artist" persona he performs for Self and on social media.

Autoethnography is not unique to drama either, as stand up comedians fashion a living on honing their unique readings of culture and experience through individual brands that may or may not constitute definitions of "funny" based upon again the kairos of time, space, and place among audiences receiving their content. Tim Allen's career as "dumb dad," Louis C. K.'s self-loathing neurosis in *Louie*, and Jerry Seinfeld and Larry David's narcissistic nihilism depicted in "shows about nothing" in *Seinfeld* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. David in particular blurs the lines of meta-performance as he not only 'plays himself' on his hybrid sitcom but also *plays out* his personal experiences including his real-life divorce narrativized onscreen despite the exceptional chemistry between he and screen wife Cheryl David (played by actress Cheryl Hines). Thus in art as in industry as in theory and method, autoethnography drives both overt and covert messages and meaning making; this tool of perception a lens for construction of meaning and interpretation of phenomena.

In the preceding paragraphs, I introduce larger scholarly names (the term *public intellectual* has lost momentum in recent years) as well as a sprinkle of industry players and performers that capitalize on their ability to locate and transform television art from personal experience. Yet indeed contemporary scholars offer robust examples of authoethnography as a centerpiece tool. In fact, multiple department chairs subscribe to authoethnography's enriching potential. St. Cloud State University's Tami Spry (2001) employs autoethnography in performance studies as an active method for "methodological praxis" just as University of Illinois at Urbana—Champaign's Norman Denzin (2014) presents *Interpretive Autoethnography* as a staple read for scholars of narrative. Bryant Keith Alexander (2012)—Dean of the College of Communication and

Fine Arts at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles—employs autoethnography as a method for outlining performances of race alongside the historic and cinematic roots of the Black cowboy in America. Department Chair Nathan Stucky (2008/2003/1996) at Southern Illinois University employs similar strains with Spry as he encourages performances of ethnography and identity for use in theatrical production. Autoethnography even works to unearth experiences and contexts perhaps too difficult to penetrate from some perspectives. University of South Florida Department Chair Carolyn Ellis (2013a/2013b/2000) infuses autoethnography as a way to navigate Holocaust Studies alongside her portfolio of qualitative methodologies. Thus from just a small sampling we can locate an array of uses involving autoethnography and the informed (and performed) sense of legitimacy scholars bring into this area of research. Hopefully I have demonstrated ways in which autoethnography as a critical communication tool can compliment areas of television studies and genre studies and reception/fun studies without compromising the analytic merits of these respective fields.

Theorizing Cable Television's Polyvalent Political and Cultural Contexts

I want to stress the utility of applying Habermas and the subsequent lineage of public sphere theory discourse in conversation with the post-Network changes in television led by those produced along the cable televisual spectrum (and later imitated by streaming services and now in some cases networks in crisis). The *Public vs. Private* conversation is not "convenient" due to academic familiarity so much as *essential* for understanding that the rotten aesthetic movement predicates upon eroding boundaries of

what is public and private for audiences to view, consume, and experience. Post-9/11 as a cultural zeitgeist is not only about mediations of violence, returned paranoia of the cultural Other, or ideological-cum-physiological-cum-economical wars on terror. If 9/11 motivated a paradigm shift in any one area most it is the prevailing onset of technological surveillance that now blur social, political, cultural, global definitions of what constitutes "public" versus "private" behavior, who has access in under what circumstances and for what purposes. These experiences and fears and discourses play out on symbolic levels under guises of genre television, enriching both the product produced and the ability to decode or consume with coded reflexivity.

We could examine other programs and observe how metaphors of paranoia and exposure play out. FX's *Justified* leans heavily on the genre-mixing of Southern Gothic to inform the direction of its grand narrative. While many numbers tropes and conventions of the crime and western genres play roles in how the show organizes its overall diegesis, the infusion of Southern Gothic, particularly in the show's sixth and final season, resonates a clear identification of the many modern ways in which the past comes back to haunt the present (Phillips, 2005). Like AMC's *The Walking Dead* uses perpetuated fear and paranoia as its modus operandi. Characters cannot rest for too long in one place without fear or legitimate threat of undead and human attack. Yet the double bind comes in that exterior movement also brings great danger and fatal consequence. Compare this to millennials today that face everyday fears of exposure every time they delete Tweets or SnapChats or utilize social media to share inappropriate verbal and/or visual communiqué (this is in addition to the legal ramifications if the users are under age). The likelihood of such material resurfacing has

become a new form of anti-lottery whereby a person feels fortunate to not be recognized publicly.

And yet, there is a certain social segment that *desires* anti-normative recognition. If raunch culture and the emergence of a mediated rotten aesthetic show us anything its that there is a market for *everything*. Debauchery becomes a commodity either in active or passive form. But unique and diverse cultural and personal taste is not a new phenomenon, it represents the spectrum of human behavior. That said, the *genrefication* of formerly "private" content to the producerly/consumerly "public" spectacle of televisual output suggests a marked turn in the TV medium's short history. Television has always tethered between conservative ideologies of public good and government regulation and the more liberal aesthetic suggestions of music and film and art. What we might be observing instead of the overused and exhausted second or third "Golden Age" of TV might in fact be the medium's adolescent phase of teen rebellion. Or perhaps the antihero best represents TV's midlife crisis? These kinds of broad observations are slippery if not impossible to "prove."

But one observation is clear: television is a transitional medium now converging with iterations of its past, present, and the future of how content is produced and consumed. Television is on its own transformational journey, and cable in particular not only stands at a crossroads (figuratively, of course) but also stares into the abyss. The abyss is open-coded, naturally, and is representative of many factors, including surging popularity and use value for streaming services, increasing prices for consumers, networks and media conglomerates reorganizing individual content apps and independent economic contracts. Cable is in crisis.

Cable TV dramas keep telling audiences as much through meta-medium references like the *Boardwalk Empire* series finale, as Nucky Thompson wanders the boardwalk only to enter into a peddler's tent and discover the luminescent glow of a nickelodeon-esque precursor to the television. *American Horror Story*'s fourth seasonal anthology revolves around a circus freakshow in decline just as the dawn of television suggests the twilight of their future. Aaron Sorkin's *The Newsroom* toggles between the failure of cable news and the prospect of an idyllic return to form. *Game of Thrones* even experimented by reformatting the last two episodes of season four as an IMAX film feature, both a savvy and synergistic (or perhaps *cynergistic*) test-market strategy slash publicity effort. Meanwhile, AMC has cornered the market with a binary contradiction between neuroses and narcissism as they've delayed and split final seasons of *Breaking Bad*, *Mad Men*, and now even *Hell on Wheels* (Bell, 2014).

Such strategies simultaneously function as savvy in terms of awards eligibility and brand extension but also second-rate as if to suggest the network cannot trust its ability to generate new worthwhile content. These intertextual meta-messages are supported by the gaining momentum of streaming services (Moran, 2015), the decline of general audience viewerships across network and cable television despite increases in televisual consumption (Vranica & Ramachandran, 2015). Indeed, companies like Amazon and Netflix are "winning" through dramatic increases in customer memberships just as cable packages are in decline (Vago, 2015). Yet the symbiotic irony is that a lion's share of content *comes* from these ailing media institutions. In some ways, TV has become popularized to such an extent that it is *consuming itself*.[8] In effect, the most effective persuasive tool cable can afford is to *hail* consumers as

aggressively as possible. I identify lucrative narrative and visual stimuli cable dramas offer as but one component of this equation. In recent years, critics are becoming more cynical as cable dramas show overt signs of self-awareness. In genre terms, this is the cycle of self-parody. While indeed the "quality" and "quantity" continues to increase across the televisual spectrum, one starts to anticipate when and what the inevitable bubble burst will look like.

On *Game of Thrones*, hedonistic vices, grand palatial feasts and exorbitant weddings are used to distract the masses of King's Landing from thinking about the North's harbinger warning that "Winter is coming." The moniker is of course a seasonal allegory as well as a socio-political warning that a cultural, nay, apocalyptic paradigm shift lays in wait beyond the Wall. Martin fashions an age-old allegory, feast and famine. He borrows from cycles of repetition and replication, imitation and innovation. But the problem with open-coding and/or open-signifiers is the ability to read into the messages any number of competing and contradictory meanings or interpretations. Just as *all things come to an end*, genre's core tenets also suggest rebirth and renewal through innovative remixing. In this way genre can come to represent a sign of *hope* as much as the genre conventions at play in cable TV suggest fatalistic rot. Or not. In the meantime, just enjoy the riderliness of the text as a critical tool for scholarly utility and Self-assessment.

What have I (or others) Learned Here?

A lot of scholars are quick to praise that 'TV isn't going anywhere' as a sign of its sophistication and popularity and the heightened economic influx we are witnessing in this medium-in-transition. But as I just reiterated, I see *cable television* as an entity in

flux. This *has* been a coming since its birth. To study the history of television is not just to examine the shifts in content and programming but to acknowledge television's legitimacy often comes through its innovative ability to change with the times. Sometimes that means changes in content as this project has largely emphasized. Sometimes changes occurs with audience taste and consuming practices, as impassioned fandoms continue to exhibit, as millennials denote through shifts in primary reception techniques and technologies. The exodus from film does not equate film's demise so much as a medium-in-transition. Writers are falling all over themselves to talk about how film is caught between cultivating blockbuster franchises and the micro-independent circuit resuscitated by the cheapness of digital film. Thus film suffers a shift that is largely of a technological nature, although receding audiences speak to the ripple effects economic inflation has on previous business models.

Economic inflation and aging business models now threaten the cable industry as well. While critics, writers, audiences, and even millennials argue they *love* the output of televisual content today, cable companies are hemorrhage customers and their prices do little to combat this phenomenon. It is no wonder that in 2015 (but really since the legitimation of Netflix) there exists a televisual space race to compete for the promised land of streaming services as the new customer demand. As a side note, I often use the figurative comparison of a "space race," but in all honesty the macroeconomic media dogfight for streaming rights and standalone services *is* a legitimate space race in several distinct ways. First, media companies operate on efficiency and the contemporary consumer is predicated on space and time. Industries innovate televisions and second, third, fourth screens (laptops, tablets, phones, etc.) into

flatter “generations” with each cycle. Likewise conversations of “cord cutting” heighten new sensations of a (gar)den with black snakes running up walls—the only fruit in the form of spectacle, no stem necessary. Yet increased streaming services require increased Internet services, which will require increased data plans that are, oh by the way, mostly supplied by the cable companies.

Indeed change is on the horizon, and like the privileged and insured American corporations, portfolio diversification is important. This is why the leading broadcast network CBS announced its own stand along streaming service in late 2014, as did HBO before that. Under the heightened economic pressure (and competition) brought on by Netflix, HBO first signed over content rights to Amazon Prime for retired shows only to announce exclusive HBOGO content with iTunes as part of its HBONOW initiative to cut its own cord toward stand-alone streaming. The interesting word I used before was diversification. Instead of abandoning one ship, networks simply shift cargo across multiple vessels, in my corporate example of diversification, this is a form of hedging one’s bets. After all, these multi-media conglomerates are publicly traded and ultimately risk bottoming out stocks more than losing or gaining a few hundred thousand subscribers.

But content *is a changin’* too, and for some time now. It is nearing the twentieth anniversary of HBO’s *Oz*, and of course I still recall the scandalous *20/20* specials on David Caruso’s bare bottom (reviewers tell me I shan’t curse in academic papers) on *NYPD Blue*, and as I’ve mentioned, television studies scholars *cannot stop* gushing about *Miami Vice*’s virtues. Each of the three aforementioned TV dramas achieved acclaim for their robust storytelling and dynamic narrative techniques. But also these

shows represented aggressive and liberal departures from traditional form on television. They were innovators in a medium that cashes most of its checks on imitation. Likewise, the programs I've covered in much greater detail involved a fair shade of imitation but also deviate to healthy degrees. *SoA* owes much to its antihero crime drama fathers as much as *HoW* revisits its western history. *GoT* represents the largest departure and highest risk of the three (it is the most expensive and initially the toughest to sell to audiences), but of course I am mentioned in chapter one HBO worked out the historical-fantasy kinks (no pun intended) in previous series.

In examining, ahem, *close watching* and *rhetorically recapping* each of these series with ferocious rigor I have observed a number of fascinating and contentious and complementary and contradictory phenomenon. These texts represent unique auteuristic visions but also grand collaborations between writer and producer, actors and directs, set staff and network executives, even marketers and affiliate advertisers. I recently read one blogger who corrected critics that act shocked when a show puts out a dud, given the high quality era we purportedly live in. On the contrary, it is shocking when a great episode let alone season is produced, given how high of likelihood a show can fail at any one of a thousand points along the production process. Given the degree of difficulty to consistently achieve "quality control," it is understandable that shows dabble heavily in generic rules of imitation and innovation. Particularly for the cable TV drama, the temptation to borrow from iconic imagery and narrative devices is not only crucial, its virtually impossible not to. Yet what these televisual texts *do* with said borrowed ideas and images separates the output from holding polysemic potential to polyvalent resonance.

Each of the texts surveyed—despite pretenses of aggressive, antisocial, antihero(ine), and even *rotten* thematics—adhered to certain ideological principles involving family. Family embodies a centermost ideological quality in television history and these texts, more in word than in deed, adhere to that principle. In fact, much of the rot that manifests among these texts comes from their hollow follow-up on the family-first principle. Tony Sopranos habitually cheats on his wife just as he cheats his supposed brothers in crime. This lineage is passed throughout the antihero legacy: Vic Mackey cheats on his wife and his ethical code, Don Draper cheats on his wife, family, business, and himself, Dexter cheats the system, Walter White innovates one illegal system so that he may cheat on the traditional one, and so on. *SoA*'s characters preach the constance of family but of course revel in low-brow infidelity, outlaw lifestyles, and blackening morality. The railroad workers of *HoW* live and work as a hierarchic community, albeit one of disfunction, and filth, compounded by aggravations between race, class, and gender. Yet adhere to the corrupt status quo just to get by. *GoT* prioritizes familial relationships and patriarchal dominance only to subvert such ideological coding with increased succession.

Is Culture Being Challenged on TV or is TV Resisting the Challenge of Cultural Change?

Boardwalk Empire departs from its narrative universe in its final season, jumping ahead almost a decade in time, while the only flashbacks provide inform the turn of the century perspectives of its core characters. In essence the show departs from itself and thus does not create space for change or transition. Characters head into pitiful demise and indeed the cast collectively cultivates an understanding of the term "tragic

figure". Similarly *Sons of Anarchy* descends into its foregone Shakespearean roots of tragedy. Lead characters not already killed off spend the majority of the final season in subdued and mournful anticipation of their inevitable demise. The only enlightenment comes in the series finale, when a key figure of the club embraces his fatal destiny only to experience elated peace from recognizing the necessity of his own death.

The antihero movement condemns the white male protagonist but often without removing them from center. Numerous critics argue that *Mad Men* is not the story of Don Draper, but increasingly the story of Sally Draper, Don's would-be baby boomer daughter. There is some merit to this but when viewers go entire episodes without Sally but nay a segment or two without Don smoking, drinking, and cavorting, the argument becomes problematic. With the same token Walter White rides back for one last quest for redemption—saving Jessie and leaving his children a moderate nest egg in the process—yet he's damned himself, his wife, and their family to eternal suffering.

Eternal suffering functions as the most consistently reliable trope on *The Walking Dead*. The only solace viewers can claim is the promise of continued zombie mise en scene, gratuitous dehumanization, and the post-apocalyptic rendering of human suffering. Violence as Darwinian survivalism despite scientific claims of human evolution. While *TWD* often concocts overt religious symbolism into its visual storytelling, a clear disconnect distorts any allegorical meaning. But one religious allegory permeates despite the text's alternate half-cooked attempts, *wandering*. The *TWD* posits a collection of wanderers, often faithless, surviving by always in motion. Stopping proves hazardous time and again, yet no discernable journey ever establishes. One is reminder of the Hebrew story of Cain, the brother of Abel. Cain kills Abel and

hides from God, then lies when confronted with the truth of his sins. According to one translation, God asks, "Where is Thy brother, Abel?" to which Cain replies, "Am I my brother's keeper?" This is an interesting passage when weighted against the global burdens and cultural sins of the white male antihero. The white male stands a great creator, a hunter in pursuit of knowledge, progress, wealth, etc. But how has the symbolic patriarch *kept* his house in a social sense, in a cultural sense, in a political sense, in a global sense? Cain is condemned to "walk the earth," a wanderer, marked and in fear. One can appreciate the *mark of Cain* as it now seems a defacto convention to the white male antihero, the recirculation of one of the earliest narrative conventions in recorded history.

Of course this interpretation is but one rendering of many. Because I have blended concepts of myth, religion, and allegory to tease out televisual examples, I once more draw upon a Western Judeo-Christian narrative (many consider myth) to inform some assumptions that inform my perspective or my reading (and watching) of the text. I look to the story of Cain and Abel, and the story of how one brother living in a post-Edenic world wound up deeper down the dystopic rabbithole. But the Cain narrative is not exclusive to white chapel doors or congregational pews. I've watched the Cain narrative mythologized in superhero comic books, played up in fictions by occult ritualists, and see cross-cultural utility presented in alternative texts such as the Quran. Or alternative metaphorical readings of "Cain" posit his symbolic value alongside the origins of "evil." The negative or oppositional value of good along the diametrically opposed continuum of human behavior. Thus, read symbolically Cain reinforces one of the earliest narrative conventions in human drama. Again, the inclusion of the Cain

narrative is not an intentional ultimate theoretical connection. It is but one of a hundred observations scholars can pull from these converging and diverging texts. Yet the Cain connection perhaps indicates an important social tie in its suggested overarching allegorical value, that negative human social action carries the potential for long-ranging social, political, historical, and biological consequence. In this instance, the antihero narrative might best be re-framed as de-transformational despite many texts' heavy narrative emphasis on redemption.

Perhaps *Game of Thrones* best equips itself for narrative transition and transformation. In addition to the pleasure of the text in terms of unpredictability and breaking form, transformation occurs at both a diegetic and non-diegesit sense. One on hand, the narrative clearly sympathizes with and rallies around marginalized characters, particularly those afflicted by their second-class status as cripple, bastard, child and/or female. Yet the slow-burn reality and long-running Internet memes concur that author George R. R. Martin never allows sympathy to intervene characters from receiving un-heroically gruesome deaths. On the other hand, the HBO series shows the youth and virility that Martin lacks. The showrunners have now outpaced Martin's literary canon and continue to forge divergent narrative paths from the original source material. Time will tell whether a sympathetic change to narrative form leads to a more inclusionary challenge to cultural norms.

Rethinking the Rotten Aesthetic: A Genre Gateway into Reflexivity and Experiential Communication

If Ariel Levy's raunch culture offers a rich cultural theorization that helps navigate and interpret changes in produced televisual content, then perhaps her later

autoethnographic tragedy helps piece together why "rotten" might in some cases come to denote "experiential". In 2013, Levy writes about her own miscarriage experience while traveling through Mongolia on assignment for work (Hedgecock, 2013). If the physiological details brought to life through Levy's vivid horrific descriptions were not enough, the personal crisis and aftermath she faced once back at home suggests personal pain and anguish a medium like television could not authentically replicate. Physical/emotional pain, loss, grief, and inability to control personal/social side a/effects of each—these represent the attributes of authentic human experience in situations that challenge the human condition. Re-framed as televisual experience they would no doubt blur the lines of reality versus fiction, narrative versus excessive, human drama versus melodrama. If depicted in accurate detail, a produced rendering might possibly qualify under the broadening parameters of cable's rotten aesthetic. Yet such harrowing detail also suggested shared experience, and the experiential learning that comes through loss. Context matters, of course. Levy's experiences are only available because she has made them public, shared her autoethnographic trials just as she observes, reports, and theorizes the phenomenon of raunch culture.

The Significance of the Rhetorical Recap and of Close Watching.

A Game of Thrones author George R. R. Martin revealed in a public interview that the hardest part of writing is struggling through first drafts.[9] Once he has something initiated, Martin enjoys words on the page and the process of metamorphosis. Many scholars might agree, although I am sure the majority rushes their first draft right over to the publishers for print. But allow me to reverse Martin's assertion as it can describe processes of close reading and now close writing. I can never watch the same show

twice in that one I've experienced it I no longer share an identical pleasure of the text. This is not an assessment in personal pleasure so much as a direct acknowledgement that I cannot expect nor derive all the information out of a single viewing that will completely inform the direction(s) of an essay or project. Processes of close watching require keen insights that may come during an initial viewing for one program and a second or third time through for other episodes and programs. Context matters. I cannot close watch a program of key analytic interest if internal/external distractions ensue. I must create a context for close watching just as all texts represent a context from which they are encoded and decoded.

In addition, some texts simply hold up over repeat viewings better than others. First, I cannot come to this realization if I have no orientation about TV, its programs, its audiences, its institutions, and its contexts. Second, what makes one program interesting isn't necessarily what makes another program interesting or scholarly or worthy/unworthy of repeat viewing. But processes of close watching, of watching for pleasure but also taking pleasure in the playful dissection of the text and consideration of its alternative uses, this is necessary for scholars looking to study televisual texts. Third, studies denote (and many true crime procedurals show audiences) *human memory* is not as reliable as people traditionally give it credit. For that matter, I can try and dictate notes from dialogue and if I slow down and/or pause/rewind the text more often than not I find my inability to accurately record dialogue with precision. Issues like these privilege means and methods for re-watching.

So I "Close Watch(ed)" TV, Now What?

Reception across Communication [Channels]

Hopefully readers have worked their way through these chapters and have gained chief insight into the processes of encoding and decoding that generate meaning making in television today. In particular, I my goal is that readers gain a stronger footing into the institutional ways in which producers make use of genres as well as genre conventions, tropes, and most importantly, the genre-mixing of iconic words, ideas, and visuals that comprise contemporary televisual content. Ideally readers will finish this project with a sense of how what the television studies model can look like in practice, especially for communication scholars that specialize in critical methodologies. In addition to the methods used individually throughout this project—methods including genre analysis, autoethnography, reception/fan studies, industry studies, material cultural studies, gender studies, public sphere theory, and broader uses of semiotics and structuralism—I have outlined a process for further developing a method for critical and qualitative communication scholars of television in rhetorical recapping and close watching.

I have expanded upon contemporary modes of industry studies, media studies, television studies, postcolonial theory, intercultural communication, and cross-cultural communication with the terms temporal displacement and global temporialism. Critical/cultural communication scholars and those in film/media studies and genre studies may find extended use for terms like genre-mixing iconicity. Scholars of mass communication, popular communication, television studies as well as industry and audiences studies may find rich potential in my introduction of terms like corporate

softening, transmedia cultural resonance, oppositional engines, hyperlink labyrinths, intertextual reflexivity, temporal privilege, industrial fandom, and textual mystique. I have attempted to join many conversations in-progress and hope to extend (and initiate) many others. I represent communication, and I have tried to communicate these chapters in ways scholars in my field can reciprocate positively and put toward their own uses.

Earlier drafts of these chapters have already received warm reception within communication studies. Initial drafts of three of these chapters received "Top Student Paper" honors at the Southern States Communication Association in the Women and Gender Studies Division, the Rhetoric and Public Address Division, and most recently in the Popular Communication Division. One chapter is currently in press for the anthology *Television, Social Media, and Fan Culture* (New York: Peter Lang), another has been pre-selected for the edited anthology *Global TV After 9/11*, while a final undergraduate textbook chapter "Understanding Stuart Hall's *Encoding/Decoding* Model Through TV's *Breaking Bad*" has been extended from an example I use in the literature review in chapter two. This same chapter will appear in the upcoming textbook *Communication Basics for Millennials*, and if the title suggests anything, it is that there exists a strong communication audience interested in the utility television has to offer students and scholars in our field. Two additional chapters featured here have already been accepted to publication for *Cultural Studies⇔Critical Methodologies* and upcoming in the *International Review for Qualitative Research*. As well, another chapter was briefly teased in an online column for *In Media Res*, a site specifically endorsed by Gray and Lotz (our feature communication scholars and television studies

specialists) as an influential starting place television studies scholars might initiate works. Many smaller conferences worked as testing grounds as some of my shakier ideas took form. One published chapter was also presented at the 16th Biannual Rhetoric Society of America Conference. Finally, two additional chapters were presented at the 100th Annual Convention for the National Communication Association. There should be no protests, this is a labor of communication love with themes that stretch across a larger than average number of warmly receptive communication divisions. Along the way there have been many helpful scholars, blind and peer-review, from conferences, journals, and email correspondence. In addition, the continued support of the committee speaks to the levels of trust bestowed on this project throughout its many incarnations.

Theoretical and Methodological Extensions

This project has been about the convergence of television studies and the emphasis on Gray and Lotz's call for works focusing not on singular analyses with limited focal points but dynamic investigation along four crucial tiers: programs, audiences, institutions, and contexts. I have emphasized *genre* as a central way to understand and hopefully extend conversations of programs, audiences, institutions, and contexts. In addition to a theoretical emphasis on genre, a second key goal of this project was to extend a television studies model for closer applicability to communication studies. I have achieved this goal by highlighting a televisions studies model that imitates and innovates numerous critical methodologies familiar and practiced among numerous communication divisions, including: critical/cultural studies, popular communication, mass communication, ethnography studies, performance studies, and rhetoric to name a few. I have even attempted innovation by introducing a

practiced method for this project that I encourage future critical scholars of television to consider in the *rhetorical recap*. The rhetorical recap helps scholars maintain a scholarly focus while navigating through televisual terrain. In addition, I've introduced the term *close watching* as a way to deviate and thus expand theoretical conversations of close reading and textual analysis. Close watching as a term helps legitimize ways scholars can discuss television studies while also distinguishing how we talk about it in relation to alternative ways of seeing, reading, etc. Ideally, these two terms offer communication scholars something tangible to imitate and hopefully innovate as the examination of television grows stronger in our field.

Along the way I've demonstrated how autoethnography can assist scholars in drawing together the otherwise tent-pole themes concerning programs, audiences, institutions, and contexts. To be sure reliance on autoethnography does not represent the end game for television studies scholars but instead an active form of reflexivity to help navigate the many densely layered texts and textual experiences that arise with researching televisual content. As I've hopefully demonstrated, autoethnography can be a strong motivational tool but works well when applied sparingly (with exception including for individual analysis as was the case in chapter 10). But autoethnography can also work as mixed methods, particularly ones from genre studies. In the case of this study, I've drawn heavily on the tenets of genre studies to inform and direct large and small critical observations and evaluations. At times it was convenient to tie observations to specific media genres like the Western. One reason the Western works so well is because it holds such a rich mediated history in American culture. The Western contains distinct archetypal, mythological, and ideological coding. This is one

reason the Western form resurrects into popular culture time after time. It can be instantly recognizable in one scene and ubiquitously indistinguishable the next.

In particular, ideological codes in the Western genre suggest often have a way of simplifying complex socio-cultural and political themes. When re-applied into contemporary televisual texts, these themes carry recognizable encoding in some instances while other instances of production/reception or encoding/decoding clearly introduce new forms that increasingly draw upon graphic and gratuitous content to mixed degrees. We have examined many of the markers of graphic content and introduced the term *rotten aesthetic* as a way to isolate and identify a new cross-genre tendency within dramatic programming. The rotten aesthetic pulls from the cliffhanger conventions of serialized literary history and innovates from traditional normative expectations concerning what is appropriate to "show and tell" on TV. The overt sexuality at times conjured as a rotten aesthetic brings to mind raunch culture; or, Levy's analysis of the apparent cultural shift in the early-to-mid 2000s' concerning depictions and everyday life performances of hyper-sexuality among ranging from young girls upward. Yet the rotten aesthetic is concerned with narrative convention (not as reality but as a reflection of reality) and deviates from exclusionary female emphasis to examine modalities of ultraviolence, dialogue, and the shifting normative values encoded and decoding along the cable TV spectrum. Future scholars and studies should embrace the terms and conversations offered here, and communication studies in particular offers the dynamic field for critical/cultural and rhetors scholars to imitate rhetorical investigations of close watching and rhetorical recapping in the interest of

innovating these techniques toward future incarnations of a critical television studies model.

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Appendix A: Notes

Chapter One Notes

[1] John Fiske (1989/1987) talks of TV's polysemic qualities, as does John Morley (1986), John Hartley (1984), Janice Radway (1984), and other cultural studies theorists that motivated a second wave of scholarly attention in the 1980s leading to the later advent of television studies in the early 1990s (Gray & Lotz, 2012). On one hand Fisk (1989) posits, "Polysemy works through textual devices which admit of a variety of readings" (118). On the other hand, rhetorician Celeste Condit (1999) recognizes, "The emphasis on the polysemous quality of texts thus may be overdrawn. The claim perhaps needs to be scaled back to indicate that responses and interpretations are generally polyvalent, and texts themselves are occasionally or partially polysemic" (p. 498). This project will answer that call in addition to the key emphases discussed in the opening chapters.

[2] Celeste Condit (1999) argues a case for critical and/or rhetorical readings as, "it is not the case that all human beings are equally skilled in responding to persuasive messages with countermessages. The masses may not be *cultural dupes* [Stuart Hall's term], but they are not necessarily skilled rhetors" (p. 501).

[3] In addition to Gray and Lotz (2012), see Thompson's *Media Franchizing* (2013) and Deuze's *Media Work*.

[4] *MarketingCharts.com* (2015) compares various conflicting reports detailing the last half-decade that best represents both TV's decline along traditional viewing practices but significant increases in Internet streaming habits. Meanwhile *BusinessInsider.com* (Edwards, 2014) declares, "TV is Over" as mobile ad revenue supplants television, a

clear shift in consumer attitudes and pratices. Yet this data does not suggest televisual content has declined, merely the geophysical and temporal place and time audiences consume content. In other words, the *context* has changed for millions of viewers.

[5] In *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, Jenkins, Sam Ford, & Joshua Green (New York: New York University Press, 2013) contend, "companies that will thrive over the long term in a "spreadable media" landscape are those that listen to, care about, and ultimately aim to speak to the needs and wants of their audiences as crucially as they do their own business goals." (xii)

[6] A gross exaggeration as most fields embrace a healthy combination of both, yet it remains a stereotype for good reason.

[7] Period/carnival includes numerous tropes revisited by *American Horror Story*'s fourth season.

[8] In 2014, *Game of Thrones* fourth season finale finally eclipsed *The Sopranos* peek audience "averaging over 18.4 million weekly viewers" with signs the show will continue to surge in its final seasons (O'Connell, 2014).

[9] FX developed a knack for losing sponsorship early on, only to gain cultural currency among viewers and critics as time passed.

[10] Eco (1979) argues, "To make his text communicative, the author has to assume that the ensemble of codes he relies upon is the same as that shared by his possible reader. The author has thus to foresee a model of the possible reader (hereafter Model Reader) supposedly able to deal interpretatively with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them" (p. 7). Eco complicates what many contemporary

scholars and even lay audiences take for granted, at least among those heavily integrated into media culture and the various meta-texts involved in our cultural coding.

[11] *Mad Men* plays with this divisive theme subtly over the course of the series, where Don and Betty relegate the den TV as babysitter during early seasons, only for Don to fall asleep in front of it avoiding his second wife Megan in later seasons.

Chapter Two Notes

[1] I theorize this process relating to *Game of Thrones* in chapter eight.

[2] Although *AHS*'s genre-mixing of horror with musicals since the second season has unsettled the show's chemistry into a third aesthetic dimension, *camp*.

[3] Cuse somehow has worked as showrunner for two simultaneous cable series in A&E's haunting *Psycho* prequel *Bates Motel* and FX's horror-hybrid *The Strain*. Lindelof haunts genre fans' nightmares after a trio of unwhelming blockbuster screenplays (*Cowboys & Aliens* (2011), *Prometheus* (2012), and *Star Trek Into Darkness* (2013)) that proved genre-mixing can muddle a film's narrative and meddle with audience/fan/critical reception.

[4] Frow also extends the rhetorical value of studying genres, when he notes, "The *rhetorical structure* of a genre has to do with the way textual relations between the senders and receivers of messages are organized in a structured situation of address" (p. 74) (original emphasis). Again this project remains interested in the multiple *rhetorical values* or polyvalence encoded and decoded through genre-mixing iconicity in dramatic televisual texts.

[5] It's no coincidence that our culture in the U.S. still honors this tradition in Forensics, with slight generic segregation in the *form* and *content-structure* of speech and debate oral interpretation of literature events.

[6] Lawrence and Jewett will become more useful in chapter seven, as will continued use of westerns as a popularized genre form and an iconic representation of symbolic persuasion.

[7] Regarding *inconography*, Frow (2008) theorizes that, "The *thematic content* of a genre can be thought of as the shaped human experience that a genre invests with significance and interest. In formal terms this shaping is expressed as a set of *topoi*, recurrent topics of discourse, or as a recurrent iconography, or as recurrent forms of argumentation" (p. 75) (original emphasis).

[8] An extended analysis of *Breaking Bad* and Hall's "Encoding/Decoding" essay appears in the *Communication Basics for Millennials* (New York: Peter Land, 2015 expected).

[9] Lawrence & Jewett (2002) draw upon for their key theorization of an *American monomyth*.

[10] See also how Barthes helped cross this intertextual/open-interpretation threshold with his seminal 1967 essay "The Death of the Author."

[11] Interestingly, Wright also triangulates his analysis by draw from three theorists's work in Kenneth Burke, Vladimir Propp, and Claude Levi-Strauss (p. 15), thus performing his own genre-mixing among leading theoretical perspectives of his work's era.

[12] Jenkins further innovates his theorizations in *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (New York: NYU Press, 2006).

[13] In this instance would fan-*dom* stand for *domination*?

[14] This is to suggest that playing with form is *pleasurable* for producers, consumers, and even scholars. Fiske (1989) concedes that, "Television participates in both these modes of power-pleasure" (p. 318) while Barthes (1975) reads slipperiness or escapability between texts and pleasure where, "Everyone can testify that the pleasure of the text is not certain: nothing says that this same text will please us a second time; it is a friable pleasure, split by mood, habit, circumstance, a precarious pleasure…whence the impossibility of speaking about this text from the point of view of positive science" (p. 52). Thus just as genre rules, conventions, and codes morph, so too does the modes of pleasurely reception among audiences.

[15] Gray expands his own paratextual terrain in *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, And Other Media Paratexts* (New York: NYU Press, 2010).

[16] "When it comes to spreadability, not all content is created equal" (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013, p. 198). For example, *The Walking Dead* may be more popular (and populist, strangely) but *Mad Men* is constructed with craftier layering. Both get mass circulation but perhaps for differing reasons among differing groups. An interesting qualifier for these AMC programs is *Breaking Bad*, a show that by the end of its run seemed to simultaneously attract that fervent critical attention while also getting mainstream hits from mass audiences.

Chapter Three Notes

[1] Williamson draws from Levi-Strauss to identify the *appellated* process of audience hailing, where "the appellation itself involves an exchange: between you as an individual, and the imaginary subject addressed by the ad" (p. 50). In *Decoding*

Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising (New York: Marion, Boyers, 1968).

[2] Fiske (1987) argues, "Mass-produced culture…offers subordinated people a dominant sense of their subordination, that is, a sense that serves the interests of the dominant" (109), just as he later assess in structuralist terms:

> The point is that "reality" is already encoded, or rather the only way we can perceive and make sense of reality is by the codes of our culture…What passes for reality in any culture is the product of that culture's codes, so "reality" is *always already* encoded, it is never "raw" (p. 4-5) (my emphasis).

[3] Rest in Peace Stephen, we miss you.

[4] In various discussions with publishers and editors, this is an increasing norm and professional preference as the publishing industry fights its own economic shifts.

[5] Due to the robust and often fragmented nature of rhetorical recapping, much of the raw materials produced in research phases may remain on the cutting room floor. As with the old director adage, be prepared to cut your favorite part(s).

Chapter Four Notes

[1] See Philip Marshall's *False Flag 911: How Bush, Cheney, and the Saudis Created the Post-911 World* (2008), which exhibits a pitifully researched critique of 9/11 that collapses his argument due to poor citation and blindsided subjective prose. Marshall utilizes little more than his first person accounts as a form special ops military "insider" in addition to the official *9/11 Commission Report* and some excerpts from a Time Inc. piece, "The Dirtiest Bank of All". Instead of risking such comparison, I utilize a decidedly more neutral and arguably more informed approach at reading mostly post-

9/11 TV texts, dramas in particular, in an examination of how they play with notions of time, "TV time", as potential reflectors of cultural anxieties indicative of American culture after September 11, 2001.

[2] Richard Schechner purports, "Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions" (Schechner, 2006, p. 66, & Turner, 1969, p. 95).

[3] Jeremy G. Butler (2007) continues to update the rigorous technical, logistical, and theoretical machinations of television production in his textbook series *Television: Critical Methods and Applications*. Butler surveys a who's who of industry terminology but streamlines technical jargon with academic insight and well-rounded evaluations where technical achievement crosses over with critical theory. The author presents a robust series that updates to meet both industry and technology changes for insiders, academics, and lay readers.

[4] Jonathan Crary participates in this conversation in *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (New York: Verso, 2014), recognizing social if not cognitive implications – machinations of post-modernity wield at a global level.

Chapter Five Notes

[1] Several collected volumes offer broader examples of cultural studies as well as the significance of visual media, including television programming (Barker, 2008, Ryan, 2008, & Newcomb, 2007). Newcomb's (2007) updated 7th edition of *Television: A Critical Review* reinforces the explosion of interest in television criticism, and his

volume offers examples that range in content focus and perspectival approach. Chris Barker (2008) surveys the near-entirety of cultural studies, with specific subsections devoted to foundational scholars and contending debates among cultural theorists and TV. Ryan (2008) compiles an archive-sized volume of foundational essays comprising media scholar and cultural theorists. These foundational works included complement the newer scholars and works I have surveyed.

[2] In *Running with the Devil: The True Story of the ATF's Infiltration of the Hell's Angels*, Kerrie Droban (2009) presents a softer academic approach through her expose on real-life sting operations into corrupt motorcycle gangs. While less methodological and theoretical, Droban's research efforts offer a plethora of relevant materials and rich terminology employed by club organizations and governmental law enforcement bodies. Droban (2011) recently published *Prodigal Father, Pagan Son*, co-authored by former Pagan Anthony "LT" Menginie. This work features a combination of historical overview of East Coast biker history and the biographical accounts of Menginie's private struggles between his rough public persona and a private concern for his lifestyle. William Queen (2005) offers his accounts as an FBI infiltrator into the Hell's Angels. His *no holds barred* accounts of lurid behaviors, moral sacrifice, and democratic pursuits of justice highlight the life-threatening tension between staying quiet or going public, and the dangers such public actions reek on private security. Cavazos accounts, along with Droban and others enable a cultivation of resources that provide material witness to the degree of factuality with which *SoA* roots its fictitious narrative.

[3] It is ironic, however, that these symbolic open roads representative of freedom and rebellion from authority [e.g. "The Man"] take place on non-symbolic and indeed state and federal roads afforded by the taxes and structures of control.

[4] The contrapposto is a style of pose or posture iconic in its affiliation with the nude model stance for Michaelangelo's David sculpture.

Chapter Six Notes

[1] Amanda Lotz (2007) designates this shift between traditional network TV supremacy and the paradigm shift to satellite and then cable television in *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* (New York: New York University).

[2] This trauma has more to do with the cultural context in which the show (and others like it) first appeared as opposed to a major concurrent through line by series end. In *Cable Guys*, Lotz's (2014) situates this critique of post-9/11 zeitgeist as a retired if not played out theme in television, while within the last five years, as noted previously, Mirzoeff still frames visual media through a post-9/11 lens.

[3] This is not to say that network TV plays every show safe or vice versa. Many examples exist of each company producing programming that attempts to breach the form of the established TV norms. Yet overwhelming evidence continues to suggest these trends remain segregated to an extent, with serialization on the network side and character-driven productions cultivated by cable programming.

[4] This scaled-down model clearly borrowed from BBC's successful shorter 6-episode and even limited season series, and as a result cable shows even more experimental grit with shifts to "anthology" formats and 6-8 episode seasons, as with HBO's *True*

Detective in 2014 and true crime documentary series *The Jinx* in 2015. ames visual media through a post-9/11 lens.

[5] *SoA* focuses on family, and the dynamics between Jax and Clay in particular share traits with McGee's critique of "mobility" versus "immobility" between Shane and Joe in the gunslinger Western *Shane* (McGee, 2007, p. 4). In this comparison Jax, the youthful and progressive-minded of the two, often butts heads against Clay's insistence that the club function through the same traditional methods. As well, like *Shane*, *SoA* bears a strong commentary on class, and just like Shane, Jax temporarily assumes a "nomad" status (p. 6) in season two as a way to negotiate his class standing against the club's hegemonic status quo.

[6] Season two's *Eureka* features a callback to the shift from Western cultural practice to symbolic Western materialism. Outside the smoke shop, new businessman Ethan Zobelle sets up a Wooden Indian statue outside his smoke shop, recalling the statues typically associated with smoking, smokes shops, tobacco, and the history between Indians and tobacco use, so regularly recurrent in Western cinema. Examples include Grandfather's habitual excuses to "smoke" in *Little Big Man*, Nobody's repetitive requests for "tobacco" in *Dead Man*, and Clint Eastwood's repetition of tobacco spitting in *The Outlaw Josie Wales* (Eastwood, 1976). Smoking and tobacco remain remnants of Western culture and Western cinema, a visual aesthetic that continually constitutes the biker world of SC. As a stand-in for the Western trading post, numerous key scenes throughout season two take place in Zobelle's cigar shop. And much like the snake oil salesmen of *Josey Wales*, *Little Big Man*, *Stagecoach*, capitalism spreads throughout the West, and every town faces the impending expansion of capitalism. And just like the

nature of the snake oil salesman, Zobelle's interests reflect duel intentions, as he is ultimately shown to be a greedy businessman whose only color of interest is "green". Thus, for most of season two, the outsider League of Nationalists pose the threat to Edenic paradise, forcing the outlaws to shift to a pseudo-moralist center.

[7] I note all quotes listed without citation are referenced with regularity within the show, and can be observed in numerous episodes. Larger quotations are otherwise pulled from the episodes they appear in.

[8] See *Fun Town* from season one.

[9] SPOILER ALERT: A moral lesson of this show often circulates that those who appose SC meet a fate worse than living under their domain, as each of these citizen examples face unrelated fatal consequences.

[10] Specifically, in season two episode *Balm* Jax calls Teller's journal a "Half angry manifesto, half love letter", signifying the manual's dual nature as a progressive political text and its reference to Shakespeare's poetics.

[11] SPOILER ALERT: In season three, as SC visits Ireland to settle their gunrunning problems with the Irish, the Hamlet metaphor of *SoA* foregoes any ambiguity in its attempt to pay homage to the show's initial source material.

[12] *Brownies*, of course, refers to the Mexican prostitutes that burned to death in a house fire.

[13] The corpses are the "two dead Brownies", to be specific.

[14] Thus, Tig's desire to transcend boundaries goes beyond the spatial to reject moral and even human borderlines.

[15] Then again, he may fall prey to the generic trappings of tragedy.

[16] Dancing outside the boundaries of Westerns, John Cassavetes plays an iconic loner-antihero "Cody" in Daniel Haller's American Pictures International biker B-movie *Devil's Angels* (1967).

Chapter Seven Notes

[1] Several Internet archives promote the *Heidi* literary legacy and offer full-manuscript digital copies in multiple formats for inquisitors. Perhaps the most easily accessible is located at the "Ye Olde Library" website yeoldelibrary.com or perhaps the Gutenberg.org website URL http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/1448/pg1448.html. I attribute all *Heidi*-related quotations and block quotes of text used in this chapter from the archive mentioned here.

[2] For viewers of HBO's *GoT*, parallels between sharp character focus and breathtaking outdoor widescreen European cinematography posits a similarity between the two texts.

[3] The website Hellium.com offers a complimentary biography of *Heidi* author Spyri's complex upbringing and literary successes.

[4] *Little House*, of course, functions as its own adaptation of the Laura Ingalls Wilder books series that serves as a novelistic adaptation of Wilder's own childhood.

[5] In *The Power of Myth*, Campbell (1988) expounds on how deliberative, circular, and repetitious narratives play a pivotal role in the formation of myths. Campbell notes these kinds of myths perform a "sociological" function, "supporting and validating a certain social order" (p. 39).

[6] These terms and phrases are mostly lifted from Lawrence and Jewett's chapter entitled "Heidi Visits the Little House on the Prairie," pp. 65-85 but reduced for simplicity and clear focus.

[7] As I noted in the previous chapters, interiority/exteriority denotes one of Cawelti's signature binary oppositions within the Western genre.

[8] What I might call an oppositional value to the traditional love triangle.

[9] For readers unclear of the dramatic tension at stake, perhaps imagine if Tywin were Hitler and Arya a Polish Jew disguised as German.

[10] In *Horizon's West*, Kitses (2008) calls this "a pattern of denial" in the Western revenger figure, a convention considered in greater detail later on.

[11] Providing a ray of hope, Joseph Campbell finds that, "One thing that comes out in myths is that at the bottom of the abyss comes the voice of salvation" (p. 45). Although Campbell (2008) insists in his earlier work that when the [heroine] does not return successfully, the myth moves from epic to tragedy.

[12] SPOILER ALERT: For readers not caught up to date through season three or book three of Benioff & Weiss/Martin's series, fare warning the content I explore is decidedly revealing.

[13] These two scenes can be observed for comparison, courtesy of YouTube, along with a shortened version of this analysis at *In Media Res* entry, "Creating Game of Thrones' Cross-Demographic Appeal through Genre-Mixing Iconicity," located at http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/imr/2014/09/23/creating-game-thrones-cross-demographic-appeal-through-genre-mixing-iconicity.

Chapter Eight Notes

[1] The frequent use of several long names and/or titles require heady use of shorthand abbreviations, which is customary for televisual media texts and appropriate considering the social media nature of the fan faction paratexts I explore.

[2] Amol Sharma (2014), Troy Dreier (2013), and Lisa Richwine (2012) collectively summarize HBO's contemporary foreign market expansion strategies. In effect, contemporary convergence markets offset costs where HBO arguably loses U. S. momentum while it sustains newfound profitability oversees. Retrieved from http://online.wsj.com/articles/hbo-weighs-more-web-tv-services-overseas-1407106582 and http://www.streamingmedia.com/Articles/Editorial/Featured-Articles/How-HBO-Go-Expanded-South-with-a-Latin-America-Rollout-88584.aspx.

[3] Henry Jenkins (2004), "The cultural logic of convergence culture." *International Journal of Cultural Studies 7*(1), 39, and "The new intertextual commodity, " (P. David Marshall, 2002) in *The New Media Book*. Dan Harries (Ed.). London: British Film Institute.

[4] I examine the *WIC* media buyout in greater detail during later analysis.

[5] Tom Gruber's shortened definition of *ontology* as a "specification of a conceptualization" suffices nicely for my brief use of the term (Gruber, Tom. (1992). "What is an Ontology?" Retrieved online from Stanford's listserve, http://www-ksl.stanford.edu/kst/what-is-an-ontology.html.

[6] Derek Johnson, (2007) "Fan-tagonism: Factions, institutions, and constituitive hegemonies of fandom." In *Fandom: Identities and communities in a mediated world*, 285-300. Gray, Jonathan, Cornel Sandvoss, & C. Lee Harrington (Eds.). New York: NYU Press, 287I address these interrelated terms in greater detail in subsequent sections.

[7] Sara Gwenllian Jones notes "online fan cultures are more symbiotic than they are antagonistic" in "Web Wars: Resistance, Online Fandom and Studio Censorship"

(London, British Film Institute, 2003), 171. Jenkins sees "new kinds of cultural power emerging as fans bond together within larger knowledge communities, pool their information, shape each other's opinions, and develop a greater self-consciousness about their shared agendas and common interests." (New York, NYU Press, 2007), 362-363.

[8] Ibid, See the political power that blogging offers convergence culture (Jenkins, 2004), 36-37.

[9] Lexi Hansen, *The clickbait phenomenon* (26, June, 2014).

[10] So many recappers fail uphold minimalist academic standards of the "DIET" model (*describe, interpret, evaluate, theorize*) that sorting through recaps becomes an exercise in grading but without the fear of teacher evaluations recourse. That said, prescribing academic grading qualities in recapping provides another quick and easy method for identifying which recapping/recapper paratexts offer the strongest research potential in their ability.

[11] Contrasting ideas of *originality*, many genre theorists and critical scholars prescribe that no wholly original concept or idea exists but instead generates through a combination of imitation and innovation. For expansions on these epistemologies, consult Jean Baudrillard *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michagan), Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit, MI: B&R, 1983), *Rick* Altman's *Film/Genre* (London: BFI, 1999), and Cawelti's *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1976).

[12] Kate Byron, "These three countries are winning the 'Game of Thrones.'" *CNBC* (5 April, 2013).

[13] Arlene Paredes, "Game of Thrones Spoilers: "We have the largest cast on television right now." – David Benioff, *International Business Times*, May 30, 2012. http://au.ibtimes.com/articles/346654/20120530/game-thrones-spoiler-video-valar-morghulis.htm#.U9wye1ZrrRo.

[14] Jessica Toomer, (*Huffington Post*, 2013), Jerry Mosemack (*USAToday*, 2014), Jace Lacob (*The Daily Beast*, 2011), Stuart Jeffries (*The Guardian*, 2013) offer a minor sampling of perhaps a hundred or more textual fluffers that function as intertextual eye candy while attempting to simplify *GoT* complexity for new audiences.

[15] The show falls in line with Lemke's theorizations of multimodal genres in transmedia storytelling (Jay Lemke. 2009). "Multimodal genres and transmedia traversals: Social semiotics and the political economy of the sign," *Semiotica*, 1(4), 283-297. Castleberry samples *GoT*'s genre elasticity, which helps proliferate cross-cultural identification with the text. "Creating Game of Thrones Cross-Demographic Appeal through Genre-Mixing Iconicity." *In Media Res* (Online) (Castleberry, 2014)

[16] Kristy Barkan, "Visual Effects: The True Magic of *Game of Thrones*," *ACMSIGGRAPH* (2014, online), Bob Bricken, "*Game of Thrones*' season 4 sets are so detailed they'll blow your mind," *io9* (2014, online).

[17] For inflammatory accusations against HBO executives, see Kyle Buchannon "This is why *Game of Thrones* has so much nudity," (2012, website) and Ali Plumb's *Empire* magazine podcast (2012, website).

[18] In Jonathan Gray. (2003). "New audiences, new textualities: anti-fans and non-fans," *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 6(1), 72.

[19] Ibid, Gray, 70.

[20] Johnson, (2007) "Fan-tagonism: Factions, institutions, and constituitive hegemonies of fandom." In *Fandom,* 287.

[21] Mark Harris discusses the broad shift in TV landscaping with special kudos for *GoT* complexity (*New York Magazine* online, 2014), while Gavin Polone boldly claims "All TV should be more like *Game of Thrones*" (*Vulture* online, 2012) and RogerEbert.com editor-in-chief Matthew Zoller Seitz notes even the most gratuitous production choices in "Season Two is Artful and Adult" (*Vulture* online, 2012).

[22] Twelve-month production cycles for 10-episode seasons based on interviews from Maureen Ryan, "Game of Thrones' Third Season: How Many Episodes Will There Be?" (*Huffpost TV*, 2012).

[23] Margaret Lyons surfaces this considerable TV problem in "*Game of Thrones*' Kid-Actor Problems" (*Vulture* online, 2012) and Jennifer Vineyard performs a follow-up report two years later, "*Game of Thrones*' Showrunner D.B. Weiss on How the Show Will Handle Its Aging Child Stars" (*Vulture* online, 2014).

[24] Would-be Westeros princess Daenerys Targaryen is bartered by her sexually abusive brother Visyris to become the ~~sex-slave~~ "Queen" to ~~barbarian~~ Dothraki King Khal Drogo. In Martin's book Dany is in her middle teens while sexually active and abused but the show vaguely updates her to appear somewhat of-age. On the TV show, the Stark sons encounter consensual sexual relationships at ages increased from the books, while the Stark daughters face habitual threats of rape while underage in both the books and TV series.

[25] Gray, Jonathan, Cornel Sandvoss, & C. Lee Harrington. (Eds.). "Introduction: Why study fans?" 1-18. In *Fandom: Identities and communities in a mediated world*. (New York: NYU Press., 2007), 5.

[26] Sandra Sobieraj Westfall, "President Obama Talks Facebook and TV Habits." *People,* December 11, 2012. http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20553487,00.html.

[27] David Carr and Ravi Somaiya. "Punching above its weight, upstart Netflix Pokes at HBO." *The New York Times*, February 16, 2014. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/17/business/media/punching-above-its-weight-upstart-netflix-pokes-at-hbo.html?_r=2.

[28] David Bloom, "Power Lifters: 5 Brands that got a big social media lift from Comic Con" *Deadline,* July 30, 2014. http://www.deadline.com/2014/07/comic-con-social-media-brands-game-of-thrones-the-walking-dead-mad-max-fury-road-wwe/, "The women of Game of Thrones dominated Comic Con", *StyleList*, July 28, 2014. http://www.stylelist.com/view/the-women-of-game-of-thrones-dominated-comic-con/.

[29] "A *Game of Thrones* Actress May be Giving Away Huge Spoilers on Instagram," (Frank Pallotta, *Business Insider* [Website], 2014), "Game of Thrones season four: Lena Headey sparks calls of 'Spoiler!' with Instagram post," (Jess Denham, *The Independent UK* [Website], 2014), "*Game of Thrones* actress Lena Headey Cheekily Refuses to Apologize for Instagram "Spoilers"," (Joanna Robinson, *Vanity Fair* [Website], 2014).

[30] In Jenkins, *Fandom*, 2007, 362.

[31] Mandi Bierly, "'Game of Thrones' retains crown as most pirated TV show," *EW*, December 27, 2013. http://www.cnn.com/2013/12/27/showbiz/tv/game-of-thrones-

most-pirated-show-ew/, Jay McGregor, "Game of Thrones Season Finale becomes most pirated show in history," *Forbes.com*, June 17, 2014. http://www.forbes.com/sites/jaymcgregor/2014/06/17/game-of-thrones-season-finale-becomes-most-pirated-show-in-history/.

[32] AAP. "Game of Thrones director says 'cultural buzz' more important than ratings for survival," *Sidney Morning Herald*, February 26, 2013. http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/tv-and-radio/downloads-dont-matter-20130226-2f36r.html#ixzz2LywE7AZ2.

[33] Ibid, Buchannon, 2012, and Plumb (2012).

[34] The term "sexposition" arose from hybrid TV critic/academic Myles McNutt on his TV criticism blog *Cultural Learnings* (McNutt, 2011). Device-naming practices thus initiate hyperlinked streams of online consciousness, in this case relating to *GoT* discourse. In "HBO, You're Busted," Mary McNamara notoriously criticized HBO and *GoT*'s incessant penchant for gratuity (*L.A. Times*, 2011), which led to Matthew Zoller Seitz's cautious defense rebuttle "In defense of HBO's "unnecessary" nudity" (*Salon*, 2011), and then spilled into the blogosphere with contributions like "Game of Tits" from Lady T. of *funnyfeminist.com* (online, 2011). As a potent idiom, sexposition now inhabits the Internet lexicon with mainstream regularity among TV critics and fans alike—a testimony to the political virility blogs still possess—and even boasts its own detailed Wikipedia history to boot.

[35] "A Frank Discussion of *Game of Thrones*' Rape Scene and Its Epidemic of Sexual Violence." (Jill Pantozzi, Rebecca Pahle, & Victoria McNally, *The Mary Sue* [Website], 2014), "George R.R. Martin defends sexual violence in Game of Thrones (Daisy Wyatt,

The Independent [Website], 2014), "For 'Game of Thrones,' Rising Unease Over Rape's Recurring Role," (Davd Itzkoff, *New York Times* [Website], 2014).

[36] See Pam Wilson, *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*. New York: New York University Press. (2008, 337).

[37] Ibid, Johnson (2007) richly synthesizes Wilson's use of *narrative activism* in a case study of fan reaction against incumbent showrunner Marti Noxon during *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s sixth season.

[38] From Henry Jenkins, *Textual poachers: Television fans & participatory culture*. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 73.

[39] There is much to say on the notion of *liminal discourse* and the role of professional recappers later given their *betwixt and between* status, as Victor Turner would say.

[40] Theorists and industry insiders alike tackle the potencies that convergence technologies enable. For an introductory sampling, see Berger (2012) *Media and Society: A Critical Perspective* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield), Jenkins (2006) *Convergence Culture* (New York: NYU Press) and Jenkins, Ford, and Green's (2013) *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York: NYU Press.), as well as industry perspectives like Frank Rose's (2012) *The Art of Immersion* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co.) and legal ramifications as detailed in Lawrence Lessig's (2004) *Free Culture: The Nature and Future of Creativity* (New York: Penguin Books.).

[41] Johnson, "Fan-tagonism", In *Fandom*, 291.

[42] Sharon Zukin and Maguire (2004) on the significant role that the Institutional field plays in creating and maintaining consumer culture, where "Consumer culture is

produced, as well, by agents who work directly in the corporate economy as managers, marketers, and advertising "creatives"; by independent "brokers" who analyze and criticize consumer products; and by dissidents who initiate alternative responses to the mass consumption system. This broad framework allows us to consider consumption as *an institutional field*, i.e., a set of interconnected economic and cultural institutions centered on the production of commodities for individual demand" (Sharon Zukin and Jennifer Maguire, (2004). "Consumers and consumption," *Annual review of sociology*, 30, 175.

[43] See Kaufman's [SEK] habitual favor for drawing "laser eyes" on screen caps to analyze the eye lines in *Game of Thrones* production style: (Scott Erik Kaufman, "I see that you've seen that I saw you: miscommunication in 'Second Sons' (Game of Thrones)," *Lawyers, Guns & Money*, May 25, 2013. http://www.lawyersgunsmoneyblog.com/2013/05/i-see-that-youve-seen-that-i-saw-you-miscommunication-in-second-sons-game-of-thrones.

[44] Compare the former example to the straightforwardness of a *The Raw Story* recap from season four (Scott Kaufman, "Recap: Game of Thrones: Season 4, Episode 7, 'Mockingbird', *The Raw Story,* May 19, 2014. *http://www.rawstory.com/rs/2014/05/19/recap-game-of-thrones-season-four-episode-seven-mockingbird/*.

[45] Johnson, "Fan-tagonism" In *Fandom*, 2007, 291.

[46] "Matthew Weiner Talks About Mad Men's Mid-Season Finale, *2001*, and Why Joan Is So Mad at Don," (Denise Martin, *Vulture* [Website], 2014).

[47] Jason Mittell, "Serial Characterization and Inferred Interiority," *In Media Res*, December 14, 2011. http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/imr/2011/12/14/serial-characterization-and-inferred-interiority.

[48] Henry Jenkins, "Afterword: The future of fandom." In *Fandom*, 2007, 363.

[49] "Winter is Coming: About Us," *Winteriscoming.net* [Website] Retrieved from http://winteriscoming.net/about/.

[50] "Fansided: About Us," *Fansided.com* [Website]. Retrieved from http://fansided.com/about/.

Chapter Nine Notes

[1] FX President John Landgraf notes his intent with the drama Sons of Anarchy functions to "ensure the continuation of FX"s brand of edgy risk-taking" (Bianculli, 2008). Landgraf's comments add to the show's overemphasis on appearance and thus make reading the text or related products too intentional. After all, they are designed for passive viewing audiences, consumers. But reading against the text, or in this case ignoring its significance, allows for the potential goal of identifying what Jules David Prown (2000) identifies, in his Preface to *American Artifacts,* as, "the patterns of mind underlying fabrication of the artifact".

[2] Numerous news comparisons have been made between these texts, but blogger Lucia adds ethos to her textual analysis in the blogpost "SONS OF ANARCHY: Something is rotten in the town of Charming" (Lucia, 2011).

[3] Haltman, a former student of Prown, serves as co-editor and author to *American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture* (2000).

[4] I can personally attest to too many instances where I read an academic essay based on its title, only to experience emotional letdown when the research seems to diverge from its initial suggestion. Thus, to clarify, this essay pays particular attention to the *Sons of Anarchy* lamp as a product of material culture, and the lamp's intrinsic evocations. The cable series of the same name is of secondary interest not particular to this essay, with respect to the Prownian analytic technique in play.

[5] Feeling is of course linked with pleasure, and Barthes (1975) reminds readers that, "The text is a fetish object, and *this fetish desires me*. The text chooses me, by a whole disposition of invisible screens, selective baffles: vocabulary, references, readability, etc.; and, lost in the midst of a text…there is always the other, the author" (p. 27). I attempt to hold "the author" at bay, in this case the producers of the text or its institutional inspirations that lead to its manifestation. By chapter's end, I may not be able to resist including this context, but for now it remains a chief goal that Prown stresses.

[6] A small square print mold underneath the base has been inscribed with manufacturing information as follows:

> RT RabbitTanaka Entertainment Lighting TM – Home Décor
>
> Sons of Anarchy TM & copyright 2011
>
> Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation
>
> All rights reserved
>
> 0911
>
> 73670-SOA Made in China

Yet as depicted in the opening auto-ethnographic prose, this author rejects specific commercial and-or product information as indicative of the clear tie-in relationship to the *Sons of Anarchy* drama. Thus, such information is therefore deemed irrelevant for analysis unless aiding in one's production of a counter-reading of the artifact toward the proposed argument.

[7] Connecting the base to the remainder of the lamp, the majority of the lamp stand comprises a mock though entirely recognizable M-16, a miniaturized reproduction of a militant symbol. Vertical, as if standing at attention and alert, the assault rifle portion of the lamp stand measures exactly one foot in vertical length and up to four inches in diameter from the handle above the gun to the bottom of the ammunition clip. Where lamp stand and base conjoin, the bottom back edge of the shoulder rest remains slightly suspended, only partially touching the lamp base. Moving up the left side or bottom of the gun, its handle, then trigger, then ammunition clip appear in upward succession. However, no "gun" parts, not serving in the function of the lamp, unhook or move. I shift these M-16 descriptions to the margins as they support the Prownian component of *description* and aid one's understanding of the artifact's complexity and simulacrum (Note Jean Baudrillard's (1994) meditation on this subject in *Simulacra and Simulation*). Yet the M-16, for all its loaded symbolism [pun intended], detracts from the master narrative posited, I argue, by the most human-esque component of the lamp, the lampshade's dual images of the Grim Reaper. Situating my historical argument around the Reaper and its tauntingly mixed messages for consumers, I relegate and simplify secondary descriptions to the footnotes.

[8] As a recap reminder, binary oppositions have played an overarching role in the ways in which I close reading (and close watch) texts for polyvalent critical and rhetorical persuasions.

[9] As Arthur Cottrell and Rachel Storm (1999) recount in *The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Mythology*, Prometheus stole fire from the gods of Olympus and brought it down to man on earth. As consequence for his thievery, Zeus bound Prometheus to a stone where the eagle ate his liver, at infinitum, due to his immortal nature. As myth, this tale warns of the threatening consequences that lay with technology and progress once possessed by humankind. Specifically, the advent of fire, and thus artificial light, represents a perennial threshold of technological innovation in human history, but read from the Western perspective of binary oppositions, any great progress must hold a negative value or threat.

[10] Taken from Psalm 109:105, Old Testament, *The Bible: New King James Version*.

[11] Of course, this can be read as a framing device by which certain segments *caused* Dark Ages through attempts to eradicate literacy beyond sacred texts. This speaks to the critique that thinking in binary terms represents a dominant-hegemonic mode of intellect in the Aristotelian tradition.

[12] Logic as constructed by Aristotle in *Aristotle– On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*.

[13] Emilie Amt's (2001) *Medieval England 1000-1500* fashions a dry yet authentic look into everyday life through transcribed archives of recorded English history. Meanwhile a more updated view in Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* theorizes that, "During the decline of the Middle Ages, the irreversible time which invades society is

experienced by the consciousness attached to the ancient order in the form of an obsession with death" (p. 138). Thus as the Church grew in power, the subject of death became a fixture of public politics and private ponderings. This crisis of Christianity coincides with emerging technologies, philosophies, and eventually the rise of a new labor class.

[14] For a somewhat updated perspective on rural labor reflections in early twentieth century, an essay from *The Lotus Magazine*, entitled "The Harvest", highlights the relationship between the sickle, labor, and Western obsessions with Death:

> And now a dark and grim reaper goes over the fields and gathers a harvest of young and hopeful lives. But though we mourn bitterly all this glorious promise of Youth stricken down on the harvest-field of Death, yet we hope and believe, as Mankind has hoped and believed in all ages and under all stars, that out of Death will come Life, larger and more bountiful in ultimate good to the race. (p. 5).

[15] To break the rules of this exercise and return to the show of the same name, each episode closes with the "bleeding in" of the Reaper symbol, the stock depiction of Death garnishing an AK-47 with a sickle over the head and hood. While this picture is, like the lamp, black and white, the drops edging off the sickle, the lone point of color produced, is dark red. Thus, this clearly suggests the sickle's droplets are blood.

[16] The lamp composition is of such a delicate condition that penetrating to review the internal workings runs a high risk of damaging the lamp and thus complicating what might be its most pertinent aesthetic value, the glowing hue of the Reaper figure. Thus remaining focus attends to the penetrating presence of the Reaper.

[17] The skeleton extends its left hand outward palm up in the direction of the observer, holding a white crystal ball, with black lettering in the form of an "A" with a circle around it (See Figure 5). The ghastly figure seems to hover eternally over the lamp, haunting it with loaded symbolism. Once illuminated, the ghoulish pale skeleton comes to life with an almost skin-toned pinkish hue. The light thus brings life to Death, enacting a mixture of visual metaphor. Printed on both sides of the shade, the Reaper image projects outward in two opposing directions. These dual projections again induce binary qualities in the lamp.

[18] Emily Gray notes, "Foxes appear as trickster-figures in mythology and literature the world over. In medieval and early modern Europe, Reynard the Fox appears as a devious figure who uses his wits to puncture the aristocracy and clergy." Whereas, the Irish folk tale of Jack O'Lantern evolved from the many Jack legends, myths of trickster Jacks with Jack serving as a stand-in name for Jester or Joker (Libranchylde, 2012). In addition, one might note the Jack O'Lantern's evolution to become the pumpkin-headed fiend that frightens children on All Hallow's Eve. This form evolved for American tastes to a more homogenous pumpkin-carving ritual and the equally potent ritual iteration turned commercial custom in the phrase "Trick or Treat." Thus, a mini-cultural evolution of a specific trickster might be carved out in anticipation for the larger unfolding argument in process.

[20] James L. Golden et al. (2007) respond to the Western philosophical tradition as a historical lineage for understanding how modern communication works in *The Rhetoric of Western Thought: From the Mediterranean World to the Global Setting*.

[21] As a binary contrast to Gunn, Carlo Ginzburg's (1983) *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* recounts the Italian Inquisition's attempt to make sense of agrarian sects claiming they engaged "Night Battles" as supernatural beings in defense of the countryside farmlands. These accounts re-present the Occult as a literal supernatural phenomenon of this era, while Gunn works logically to promote an education on the transformative power of words (e.g., their *rhetorical* power). Barry Brummett (1991) similarly offers a modern deconstruction of supposed supernatural language in his critique of millennialism entitled *Contemporary Apocalyptic Rhetoric*.

[22] Marshall T. Poe (2011) weaves a tangled history of the evolutionary expansion of communication technology in *A History of Communications: Media and Society form the Evolution of Speech to the Internet*. His works complements James Burke's *Connections* in charting the relationships between communication, the market, and the rise of capitalism from feudal practice to global norm.

[23] In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas (1989) points to the emergence of a public sphere among European societies, as the rise of a critical-rational bourgeois middle class developed in the late sixteen- and early seventeenth-century England, France, and Germany. The bourgeois, Habermas argues, signified a political shift that de-centralized power oligarchies in Europe, triggering shifts in power from royalty to market trade. Yet while Habermas's argument situates around highlighting the bourgeois democratic values, he argument contends a historical *trick* in that a clear case for *capitalism*, not democracy, flourished as a result. Also see Michael

Warner's (2002) theoretical trick as he blurs distinctions between public, private and counterpublic in *Public and Counterpublics*.

[24] See Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar's (1968) *Reading Capital* for a denser critique of capitalism, or Jodi Dean's updated critique of capitalism as a closed-circuit in her 2005 essay "Communicative capitalism: Circulation and the foreclosure of politics".

[25] In 2015, Fox launched the latest superhero TV prequel series *Gotham*. Because *Gotham* situates its timeline with Bruce Wayne as a young boy, it cannot fully realize the binary qualities the character plays into as an adult Batman. Thus I might call reach back to one of the more well-received Batman texts in an effort to extend a side anecdote looking to a recent cinematic example of the binary tensions between capitalism and the promised ideology of the crystal ball, anarchy. This example can be read by observing the binary tensions between Batman and the Joker in Christopher Nolan's 2008 Academy Award-Winning global box office titan *The Dark Knight*. In *The Dark Knight*, Batman, superhero savior of urban sprawl, (e.g. Gotham), holds the secret identity of Billionaire Capitalist Bruce Wayne. As Batman, Wayne must protect the status quo of capitalism from his arch nemesis and inverted-reverse Other, the Joker. Joker exists in a state of perpetual anarchy, repeated in dialogue numerous times and depicted in the scene where Joker burns a mountain of money immediately after receiving it as payment for his crimes. Batman, the capitalist, and Joker, the anarchist, compose a mythic binary between two opposing spectrums. Their actions portray an ideological struggle between two oppositional codes. In effect, the movie demonstrates

how according to Western philosophy, binary oppositions exist in tension with one another.

Thus, returning to the lamp, the idea of purchasing an item (a capitalist endeavor) in an effort to achieve some state of anarchistic expression (motivated by methods of chaos) is *comical*. In simpler terms, following the Joker's logic, the only way the lamp signifies anarchy is if one obtains it only to burn it. Yet the act of burning conjures the origin of fire from which the lamp evolved. Ironically, this return to a primal form satisfies anarchistic desire, not the consumption of material goods.

Chapter Ten Notes

[1] Most contemporary serial dramas operate under a singular or at least limited vision of the creator-showrunner who oversees numerous elements of a show's production. *Hell on Wheels* has the unfortunate history of transitioning through three (four if you count two brothers at once) showrunners in four short seasons, including co-creators Joe and Tony Gayton, John Shiban, and currently John Wirth. Thus, it becomes difficult to assign a particular auteur ownership from among this Western's rotating producers. Thus for consistency, I look almost exclusively within the narrative world of the show and not its industrial, production or audience reception.

[2] Adhering to ethnographic tradition while admitting researcher bias, I redress my hometown name in a way that shields friends, family, and associates, privileges privacy to a relative extent, and also encourages readers access to their own potential associations and experiences living in/around/away from small "Western" towns.

[3] For a stronger insight into the theoretical use of *functions* in studying literature, see Vladimir Propp's (1968/2011) *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin, TX: University of

Texas Press.). Likewise, Will Wright (1975) draws heavily from Propp's work to specifically explore the functions of the Western in *Sixguns & Society: A Structural Study of the Western* (Los Angeles: University of California Press).

[4] Durant's serial corruption characteristics are heavily stressed in the *Pilot* and continue to grow wilier through subsequent episodes and seasons.

[5] In 2013, *Nowhere* was redressed as a utopic and distinctively "Western" community rich in pastoral lands, low in affordability, and high in employment for former-NFL quarterback and TV personality Terry Bradshaw's YouTube propaganda series *Today in America TV* (a title that ironically mis-communicates that the series airs exclusively online).

[6] I am incredibly grateful for the charity and community that a few families showed me. I may never have the economic means to return their favor, but good-hearted folks do exist in rarity, and the town prospers when denizens maximize communal giving.

[7] Was it because my father quit attending church when I was eight and my sister was an infant? Was it because my mom and I likely smelled of smoke during the childhood years my dad still smoked? Was it because the public appearance of a fractured "Christian" home life made my family less "idyllic" in the church's eyes? I never mustered the courage to ask the preacher in the years before he was unceremoniously "encouraged" to resign by the wealthy deacons who privately ran the church and town. There may never be closure there for me, but I aim to make the lesson learned an active part of my reflexive pedagogy, particularly among isolated students whose lifestyles and backgrounds ostracize them from society's normative Bell Curve.

[8] The Western archetype of the wilderness man that lives outside civilization but can successfully return if not for his wounded soul. Cawelti (1976) traces this archetype back to James Fenimore Cooper's robust literary canon and speculates the potential auto-ethnographic influences that personalize many of Cooper's most famous *Leatherstocking* works that include *The Pioneers*, *The Prairie*, and *The Last of the Mohicans*.

[9] Elam Ferguson, a Black former slave and short-tempered opportunist, may have the second-most agency on *HoW* behind Cullen. One could argue Elam's agency offers him liminal status due to his bi-racial heritage, as he, like Cullen, frequently navigates between alternating race and class lines. Yet bi-racial liminality also posits a binary double bind for Elam (see season one's *Bread and Circuses*) and instead results in a kind of *twice othered* status, particularly when Elam courts (and later marries) a white prostitute Eva, herself othered by facial tattoos and sex worker status. Their sexual liaison results in a near lynching during season one's *Revelations* and the difficulties of bi-racial courtship motivate Eva to marry a white Irishman she doesn't love in season three. Toward season three's end, fear of a social stigma legacy influences Eva to give away her and Elam's bastard child to be raised back East amidst civilization.

[10] Tom Noonan's performance as Reverand Cole distills the creepy tension of a PTSD war vet nearing the edge of complete and violent psychological breakdown, as seen in *Timshel* and with climactic tragedy in season two's *Purged Away with Blood*.

[11] See season three's *Get Behind the Mule* as well as the season four premier *The Elusive Eden*.

[12] Ruth's Native American lover Joseph is a newly baptized Christian and pastoral understudy to her father no less.

[13] The Swede's embarks on an anarchistic subterfuge throughout season two that ultimately places him in binary opposition against Cullen's reformist-constructivist ideology. The Swede's culminating acts in season two's *Blood Moon* and *Blood Moon Rising* function narratively as a kind of anti-Western condemnation against pseudo-religious rhetoric of Western capitalism and Manifest Destiny ideology.

[14] In another unsolved mystery, I do not know if or how many charges were filed or even threatened. Yet the purpose of this story is not to *scapegoat* one single individual for fatal flaws in their human character. As the community cliché "everyone in town has a secret" coincides with the Christian dictum, "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone," (New King James Version, John 8:7) I do not count myself as a perfected social ethics practitioner. I am (im)moral. I transgress. But I do offer this cautionary tale to stress how perceived cultural, racial, and religious privilege can cause great social imbalance when not carefully held accountable; hence the ideological value of community.

[15] Season three's *Big Bad Wolf* reboots story arcs for each of the main characters—and Cullen in transcendently mythic fashion—despite crimes/sins/evils committed and those still to come. Season four's *The Elusive Eden* reboots character positioning that mirrors the railroad's geographic repositioning from "Injun" troubles in Nebraska to "range war" and "carpetbagger" tensions in Wyoming.

[16] The small cabal/powerful elite plot convention turns tables on Durant in season four's *Escape From the Garden* and *Chicken Hill* when General Ulysses S. Grant sends a

violent pack of carpetbagger political enforcers that threaten the "frontier" livlihood of Cheyenne, WY under the fascist guise of bringing "civilization."

[17] Displacement narratives in the Western genre include: displacement of individual settlers from large cattle barons in Anthony Mann's (1950) *Devil's Doorway* and George Stevens (1953) *Shane*, displacement of Native American tribes throughout the American West in Penn's (1970) *Little Big Man* and Kevin Costner's (1990) *Dances with Wolves*, displacement of Mexican representation until re-appropriated (albeit with Spanish/Italian actors) in Sergio Leone's spaghetti Westerns, displacement of identity in Jim Jarmusch's (1995) *Dead Man*, and even the displacement of past in John Ford's (1962) *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. *HoW* narrativizes cyclical displacement that ranges from the Cheyenne, Sioux, and other nations to railroad workers and the lost souls among its core characters. Arguably the drama's displacement emphasis holds rich semiotic value when considering contemporary changes in migratory patterns, ideological belief changes, economic socio-cultural shifts, and even trans-global conflicts over "progress."

Chapter Eleven Notes

[1] *Frontline*'s Sarah Childress (2014) assesses the ways in which increased voter ID laws are less about "fraud" than discouraging lower class voters from participative social action, while Ruth Rosen (2012) reports long-term Republican efforts to suppress female minority voters. Caitlin Bowling (2013) also notes increased legislation in place to discourage college students in North Carolina from casting votes in their respective towns, just as Ari Berman (2013) elevates NC's voter dilemmas beyond just college students. Jonathan Chait (2014) reports how Republicans frame such legislative action

as a "necessary deterrent to in-person voter impersonation" in states like Texas, because "impediments to voting disproportionately ward off Democratic-leaning constituencies."

[1] To a lesser extent, I find interesting Squires' immediate choice of subaltern for exchange. While marginalization comprises a dense theoretical history of usage, perhaps Squires views subaltern as a sticky term, too associated with Gramscian Euro-theoretical conversations of power [i.e., too entrenched in the theoretical past?], less domestic to the concerns of race specifically, which ties closer to marginalization and Squires emphasis in the domestic Black Public Sphere.

[2] *SoA* recalls the genre of the psychological novel (Habermas, 1989) through the source of influence in its premise, William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. As "Hamlet on Bikes," the show resonates numerous themes that recall and revise perhaps Shakespeare's most notorious tragedy. In the show, the central psychological tensions lie between Jax, his mother Gemma, his stepfather Clay, and his Old Lady Tara. Jax, often referred to as "the Prince," with his golden locks and boyish charm, situates an ideal Hamlet. An ideological wedge forms between club Vice President Jax [the VP position marking his "heir apparent" birthright to the "throne" of club President], and club President, Clay. Jax's late father and founding member, John Teller, left behind a secret manifesto, the contents of which "haunt" Jax through the voiceover narratives of Teller. Specifically, in season two episode *Balm* Jax calls Teller's journal a "Half angry manifesto, half love letter", signifying the manual's dual nature as a progressive political text and its reference to Shakespeare's poetics. This revelation of secret thoughts leads Jax to believe in a new direction for the club. Jax demonstrates a kind of [Shakespearean-

Freudian-psychological] Oedipal relationship with his mother Gemma, the club "Matriarch". Gemma, regularly referred to as the "Queen" to Clay's "King", often reinforces a manipulative Oedipal nature through ambiguous open-mouth kisses with Jax, his ex-wife Wendy, Tara, and other club members. Her protection of Jax creates narrative tensions with Tara, and the slowly unraveling truth about John Teller's death leads to greater tensions of family throughout the show's run. Thus by updating the narrative to a modern outlaw tragedy, the show mines new terrain in the spirit of the psychological novel, through the lens of counterculture biker drama. By positing Jax's insistence of a bourgeois critical-rational thought against Clay's patriarchal oligarchy replays Habermas's (1989) exploration of political change during seventeenth century Europe, *SoA* mines this terrain through the slow-grinding and always complicated transformation of Jax.

[3] This statistic factors in second airings and DVR playback, but does not consider later sales on Neflix, DVD/Bluray, etc., which have contributed to the show's steady growth in viewership each season.

Chapter Twelve Notes

[1] When members and associates address the club in conversation, they usually refer to SAMCRO in the third person. They address the club as an organization as often as they address it as an ideal or entity. Thus the term serves as an integral part of the show's dialogue.

[2] A "patch-over" or patching-in denotes a process when one motorcycle club absorbs another by a vote and the exchanging of club logos or patches.

[3] "Half Sack's name is a vulgar or perhaps *raunchy* nickname indicating the Prospect's loss of a testicle due to a bomb explosion while serving a tour of duty in Iraq.

[4] Although in later seasons of the show, her educational and vocational supremacy over Jax serves as a place where he publicly submits to her.

[5] Although as the show veers toward showrunner Sutter's emphasis on "characters that had very big feelings and made really bad choices as a result of those big feelings", the edenic bliss is never permanent (Grossman, 2010). Thus, a large scale critique against the show, which must reinforce tension in an effort to satisfy its function to produce drama.

[6] See episodes *Patch Over*, *The Revelator*, and *Small Tears* for further examples of Jax's more dialogic or femininized approach to problem solving.

[7] In Season two's *Smite*, Gemma witnesses an attempt by Jax to use nonviolence to settle a skirmish. As a result, she begins reading John Teller's lost journal, which Gemma previously uncovered. Teller philosophizes about his epistemological struggles within the club, and his voiceover confesses, "I realize that in my downward spiral of hopelessness, I was actually falling into the huge hole created by the absence of my human graces. The most obvious was forgiveness. If I was wronged by anyone, in or out of the club, I had to be compensated: money or blood. There was no turning the other cheek. When relationships become a ledger of profit and loss, you have no friends, no loved ones, just pluses and minuses. You are absolutely alone."

[8] Albeit Gemma's "mercy" comes with a fair amount of counterculture sass.

[9] *Contrition* is a Catholic term for acts of repentance, acknowledging shame over past sins.

[10] This comment is a direct reference to Gemma's initial retaliation to Cherry for sleeping with Clay when she shows up in Charming in *AK-51*.

[11] I would like to thank the blind reviewers of the *Southern Journal of Communication* in particular for the most robust, thoughtful, and supportive feedback I have received toward this theme.

Chapter Thirteen Notes

[1] I note increased ratings for both of these shows, and *Walking Dead* in particular, results in multiple reports of cable shows regularly eclipsing network programs in key demographics and total viewers. Statistics like these demonstrate the shifting landscape of the television medium, as well as shifting aesthetic tastes that scholars like McLuhan and Zizek connect to societal anxieties amidst changes in socio-political climates (Zizek, 2008, & McLuhan, 1967).

[2] McQuail (2010) combines influences from film theory and media studies to re-present genre with the following four characteristics that I unpack in the following section. As I interpret, McQuail highlights genre's flexible boundaries while still illustrating conceptual flaws. Thus conversations concerning genre remain a murky territory underlining needs for continuing investigation.

[3] As noted in chapter two, genre theory conversations could extend back to Aristotle's differentiation between *tragedy*, *comedy*, and *epic* (Corrigan et al., 2011). Even the Greeks designated a formal system that separates prose, poetry, and performance, respectively. Yet these classical theorizations depart from current conversations both in definitions of key terms and the evolution of forms, conventions, and cultural

implications. Thus, I maintain a tighter control on discussions of genre for the sake of space and argument.

[4] In his *Television: The Critical View* (2007), Horace Newcomb's details in his essay "This is Not Al Dente" how HBO markets themselves as "premium" brand for consumers with the promise of "distinguished" award-winning fare. Newcomb deconstructs their marketing slogans and analyzes how the pay channel achieves this considerable effect.

[5] This is precisely the pattern of behavior Levy underscores as a motivating factor for why recent generations of women embrace raunch culture. Ariel (2006) theorizes, "part of the answer is that nobody wants to be the frump at the back of the room anymore, the ghost of women past. Its just not cool. What *is* cool is for women to take a guy's-eye view of pop culture in general and live, nude girls in particular" (p. 92).

[5] Combining topics of *Synergy* and societal ails in the age of technocratic convergence, the authoritarian power of cultural convergence and capitalism includes monopolizing entertainment brands and redistributing these supposedly separate cultural forms in efforts that maximize capital gain. For example, Disney buys ABC, ESPN, Marvel, Lucas Film, and possibly Hasbro. A synergistic example of these corporate mergers include Marvel movie franchises including billion-dollar generator *The Avengers* further spun-off into a *S.H.I.E.L.D.* TV drama series for ABC, Avengers cartoon series for Disney Channel, absorption of theme park attractions from Universal Studios, and continued brand extension and "legitimization" of Disney to patronize formerly absent young male consumers.

[6] See Jax in *Sons of Anarchy*, Raylan in *Justified*, Vic Mackey in *The Shield*, Walter White in *Breaking Bad*, Tyrion and/or John Snow in *Game of Thrones*, Al Swearengen on *Deadwood*, Tony Soprano, Erick's increased popularity over Bill on *True Blood*, and Rick in his struggle to abandon his humanity on *The Walking Dead*.

[7] American Horror Story chastises organized religion throughout season two. The episode "Unholy Night" demonstrates the secular Left's pronounced "War on Christmas" with extreme prejudice. 1962, a Santa Claus rings his bell in a grocery store parking lot. When an aged man approaches him, he confesses the gig merely, "Keeps me out of the house til my wife falls asleep." The older man then shoots Santa in the chest at point blank range, the red blood contrasting against his white jacket collar. Cut to a scene inside a suburban middle class home. "We wish you a Merry Christmas" rings softly as a toy train rounds the bend at the bottom of a Christmas tree. A young girl peeks down the stairs and finds "Santa" sitting beneath the tree. The asks Santa what he's doing here "six days early", but Santa—played by Ian McShane and wearing the blood-soaked coat he took from the man he killed—replies with sarcastic ferocity toward the child's questioning of him.

The girl senses no harm, and McShane coldly asks where her parents are. In the next shot, she rouses her sleeping father, who then turns to find McShane shoving his gun into the back of his wife's head. Downstairs, McShane binds the parents with Christmas lights and vindictively tells the father he chose their house because of the expressive Christmas lights. The father asks, "What's wrong with a little *Christmas spirit*?" McShane agrees that, "Tonight needs a little more *jingle bells*" before bludgeoning the dad with his bell.

At this point, McShane transitions into what hipster bloggers might identify as *batshit crazy*. He screams into the faces of mom and dad: "I'm Santee Claus, I'm here to bestow a little Christmas spirit because what is Christmas about if its now about families being together!? Do you appreciate that right now? Don't you feel wonderful about being with your family right now!? …So, I'm gonna tell you what Santa's gonna leave under your tree tonight. He's gonna leave a little *terror*, a little *rape*, …You know the difference between that Santa Claus and me? He only comes once a year." As the wife/mother begs for mercy, Santa clammers, "I have to finish my list, huh?! It wouldn't be Christmas without one *Big Ticket* item from *Santa's sack*!" Indeed, this Santa's diatribe employs yuletide puns as a methodological tool for the spoiled inversion of Christmas.

In a later scene, Sister Jude pleads her newfound sense of purpose before a superior Nun. In an interesting parallel assault on Christmas that divides both secular and sacred through the contextual lens of 1960s America, Jude rants that, "Did you know the *National Broadcasting Company* is showing *Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer*, this very week? NOTHING about Christ, nothing about the Nativity story, this country's turn toward unadulterated blasphemy frightens me. It worries me deeply, but that's how the devil works. Bit by bit, he turns our eyes away from God." On one hand, Jude's speech convicts the course of Christmas in the American landscape and American culture's moral decline. On the other hand, in a meta-commentary of *AHS*, Jude's speech condemns the very type of sacrilegious storytelling *AHS* revels in, and thus performs a double task of preaching and confessing. However, since the majority of scenes in *AHS* work to de-legitimize Christmas, Sister Jude's singular speech stands

in as a minority voice of the Religious Right in modern American culture, and *AHS* proper, in its secular deviance and emphatic malevolence, posits the dominant cultural norm, one that openly rejects and chastises traditional modes of "moral authority". A third layer might even be recognized as *AHS* symbolizes the progression of graphic content on TV and cable in particular. The mention of *Rudolph* playing on Network NBC clearly reads as dated and uncontroversial, yet this example also demonstrates how far left of center content continues to shift. Thus, *AHS*, in its televisual sensory assault on Christmas, performs in "Unholy Night" a trinity of metaphorical commentaries that eschew Christmas in American culture, the median moral shift from conservative to progressive, and the unmistakable [devil]lution of content on TV.

Chapter Fourteen Notes

[1] "Event series" resurrections from fatigued genre properties include *24: Live Another Day*, *Heroes: Reborn*, *The X-Files*.

[2] Critics now find *American Horror Story* suffers *different season, same tropes* issues indicative of co-creator Ryan Murphy.

[3] *Slate* contributor Will Paskin (2014) critiques how HBO's nihilist noir *True Detective* "does have a woman problem" but also "that's partly why people love it."

[4] Season five press releases answer series-long speculation as to whether the TV series will eclipse the book series and GRRM's long-gestating book series.

[5] Indeed, cultural currency and paratextual discourse now seems to harvest the gestational power to resurrect both film and TV property no matter how dormant, if producers and creators are game for a return. This was the case with Netflix's relaunch of *Arrested Development* and in 2015 a series run of the cult film comedy *Wet Hot*

American Summer. At the risk of seeming outdated by cable's new standard, Fox resurrected their own played out drama *24*, a text that itself already worked through genre's four stages before ending in 2010. Fox rebranded the shortened season as an "event series," which signifies a name change merely meant to arouse audience and industry interest. Fox also announced an even larger "event series" return in *The X-Files*, a televisual text rich in cultural currency that petered out in both TV and film series form. Showtime announced it would bring back the one of the most covetous and controversial series in TV history, *Twin Peaks*.

[6] Beginning with season three in 2013, *Hell on Wheels* moved to Saturdays where it stabilized a day-long "14-hour lead-in" of westerns (TV series like *The Rifleman* and *Rawhide* as well as numerous films) all building up to premiere episodes of *HoW* (Carter, 2013). In a lesser discussed instance of institutional savvy, AMC strengthened their western weekend block while also extending to a new night of "original" programming.

[7] Barthes might compare it to another cable TV phenomenon, *wrestling*. In this case the wrestler/gimmick combination (e.g. artifact/method) does not "go over" with the audience, thus calling for a retool and/or dismissal in an effort to locate and execute the "ideal" genre formula. Yet as contemporary wrestling fan ethnography would show, even the worst gimmicks have a way of fashioning themselves into cultural conversation (Gennis, 2015, Mocella, 2014, Vreeland, 2011, & Tait, 2010), celebrated for their lack of chemistry, thus recycling the mode of decoding and consumption with new meaning.

[8] Somewhere in between the form and void Neil Postman is nodding his head and waiving his finger, vindicated.

[9] In an interview with *BuzzFeed*, Martin confesses, "I enjoy rewriting much more than I do first drafts. Rewriting, at least you have something to work with. I find writing first drafts extremely difficult" (Dalton, 2014).

Appendix B: Chapter Nine Figures

Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

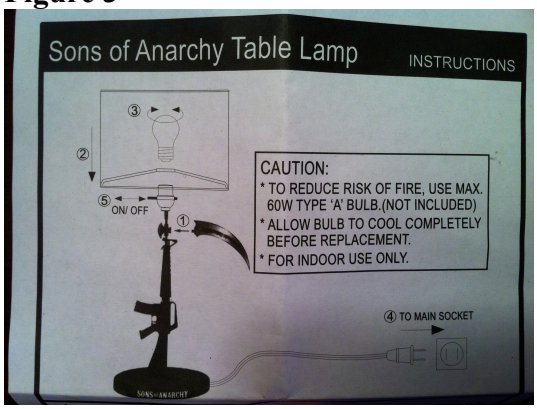

Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

