"Man of Science, Man of Faith:"

Lost, Consumer Agency and the Fate/Free Will Binary in the Post-9/11 Context

Susan Tkachuk

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for Intersdisciplinary Master of Arts in Popular Culture

Brock University

Abstract

In 2004, Lost debuted on ABC and quickly became a cultural phenomenon. Its postmodern take on the classic Robinson Crusoe desert island scenario gestures to a variety of different issues circulating within the post-9/11 cultural consciousness, such as terrorism, leadership, anxieties involving air travel, torture, and globalization. Lost's complex interwoven flashback and flash-forward narrative structure encourages spectators to creatively hypothesize solutions to the central mysteries of the narrative, while also thematically addressing archetypal questions of freedom of choice versus fate. Through an examination of the narrative structure, the significance of technological shifts in television, and fan cultures in Lost, this thesis discusses the tenuous notion of consumer agency within the current cultural context. Furthermore, I also explore these issues in relation to the wider historical post-9/11 context.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I offer my thanks to my supervisor, Scott Henderson, whose guidance and sense of humour were invaluable throughout work on this project. When I began work on this thesis, I found its scope intimidating and difficult to distill into a cohesive, properly structured thesis, and Scott was irreplaceable in helping me achieve this. He was an endless source of ideas, and our meetings were so light-hearted and entertaining, I never felt like we were even doing work.

I also thank my parents, Bruce and Kathy, for their enthusiastic support of my education. I would never have come this far without their continued assistance. My partner Mike has also been endlessly patient and encouraging. He has endured many stress-induced bouts of insanity, and still helped me with my work in a million different ways and always with a smile. I am grateful to my best friend and partner in crime Lesley for her invaluable friendship, and for constantly renewing the sense of adventure and mischief that drives me. Lastly, I thank my cat Max, whose frequent visits during marathon writing sessions always provided a welcome distraction.

Table of Contents

Introduction

"Do you think we crashed on this place by coincidence - especially, this place? We were brought here for a purpose, for a reason, all of us. Each one of us was brought here for a reason... The island brought us here. This is no ordinary place, you've seen that, I know you have. But the island chose you, too, Jack. It's destiny."[1] – John Locke (Terry O'Quinn)

The philosophical question of fate versus free will is an age-old dilemma. This question of fate and free will is an issue that has circulated through philosophical discourse for centuries. Philosophers such as Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and so on, have endlessly pontificated these questions. Are humans tied to an inexorable fate? Is the future already written? Or are occurrences and outcomes determined only by choices made by individuals? Are humans free agents, capable of exacting their will on the universe? Or the reverse? This debate, as it is articulated not through philosophical discourses, but through the mechanism of popular culture in response to Western culture in an age of mass communications, provides the thematic core around which the content of this thesis revolves. The question of fate versus free will remains universal and intrinsically linked to human experience. However, within the current historical context of terrorism, globalization, global warming and impending economic strife, it ultimately is useful in suggesting new insights into the ways that the individual subject negotiates his or her agency while caught up in the influences of

---

[1] Lost, By J.J. Abrams and Damon Lindelof, Perf. Matthew Fox, Josh Holloway, Evangeline Lilly, Naveen Andrews. ABC, (United States: Bad Robot), 2004 – 2008.

seemingly monolithic institutions of power, such as government and media, in the contemporary era.

The defining events of this time period which have continued to shape the recent historical landscape are the attacks of September 11, 2001 (9/11). The attack, the first on American soil since Pearl Harbour, is so ubiquitous and mythologized that it almost does not require description. Two planes flew into the World Trade Center towers in Manhattan, New York, and a third into the Pentagon. Over 3,000 people died, making it the single most catastrophic attack on American soil. In response George W. Bush announced the formation of a new government cabinet, the Department of Homeland Security, and declared that they would strive to fight terrorist activity at home and abroad in their new War on Terror. The events of 9/11, as tragic as they were, became even more important symbolically as they designated the beginning of a new historical epoch in the United States. This turning point is significant not only in terms of domestic politics and foreign policy in the post-Cold War age, but also in terms of the ways that the United States both understands and imagines itself on a more mythic level.

The struggle between individual subjects and omnipotent global power structures remains an ongoing process of history, and popular culture provides a forum where this process is worked through. Through an analysis of a popular culture artifact, this thesis will examine how the fate/free will dilemma is articulated in contemporary culture. On September 22, 2004, the ABC prime time drama Lost, created by J.J. Abrams, Jeffrey Lieber and Damon Lindelof aired its pilot episode. This episode's dizzying opening sequence features the crashing of a commercial jet plane

onto a remote island somewhere in the South Pacific, thus gesturing towards the anxieties involving air travel which resulted from the events of 9/11. A mixture of drama, action, suspense, science fiction and horror, Lost updates the classic Robinson Crusoe desert island scenario for the post-9-11 era. The survivors of the plane crash, a mix of different races and nationalities, are not only confronted with their survival, but also with the mysterious island. Lost, particularly in its first two seasons, seems to echo the post-9/11 period, as it includes themes of terrorism, air travel disaster, torture, estrangement, and power. Lost suggests the ways in which metanarratives and established American myths have shifted in response to 9/11 and the events that followed in its wake.

Lost consciously engages the fate/free will dilemma in its narrative. From the moment in its pilot episode when Charlie (Dominic Monaghan) writes the word "fate" on his bandaged fingers, fate and free will have been a significant theme interwoven throughout Lost's narrative. The characters continually question whether it is by fate or happenstance that they have arrived on the island. The show nods towards the philosophical history of this debate, in particular by the fact that many of its characters are named after key thinkers. For example, John Locke, Mikhail Bakunin, Danielle Rousseau (Mira Furlan) named after Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Desmond Hume (Henry Ian Cusick) named after David Hume, and so on. However, the centrality of fate/free will is perhaps best embodied by the dynamic between Jack (Matthew Fox), the "man of science," and John Locke, the "man of faith." Locke resolutely believes that Oceanic flight 815 was destined to crash on the island, whereas Jack disagrees. As a result, these two characters are continually locked in a power struggle with each other. Lost

essentially reactivates what is perhaps an archaic debate and engages it within the post-9/11 context.

Culturally, the United States has valued heroism, both in terms of the romantic individual in its narratives, as well as on the broader scale of history. The myth of the individual hero echoes the ideologies of independence, freedom and social mobility which inspired the formation of the United States in the first place. In order for such heroism to exist, there must also exist its antithesis. Historically speaking, there has always been a constructed enemy Other whom the United States has looked towards to validate their own position as "good guys" or world heroes. In order to cultivate a popular imagination which perceives the national self as inherently moral, there must be an exception which proves the rule. During World War II, American culture propagandistically vilified the Germans and Japanese. Throughout the Cold War, communists offered Americans an enemy whose ideology was antithetical to their own, thus thrusting the Soviets into the seat of enemy Other for over forty years. During his presidency, Ronald Reagan connected his conservative politics to myths of American individualism and masculine authority. He was able to construct a narrative of the individual hero as a counterpoint to this homogenous malevolent Other, the Soviet communists. American understanding of its geo-political position in the world, at least in the popular imagination, was largely organized around this good/evil binary.

But in the post-9/11 world, the administration of George W. Bush has been largely unable to forge such an effective adaptation of American cultural myths in support of the War on Terror. Bush's rhetoric largely emphasized that patriotism, as Henry A. Giroux describes, "becomes synonymous with an uncritical acceptance of

governmental authority and discourse."[2] Giroux argues, "Most important, Bush's 'war against terrorism' camouflages how democracy is being undermined through its relentless attempt to depoliticize itself."[3] The "either with us or against us" mentality, juxtaposed next to poor approval ratings, dissent, and as Giroux points out, the suppression of dissent, further suggests the problematic nature of this narrative constructed by the Bush administration. Furthermore, the Other of the post-9/11 era is not a singular group of people that can be easily singled out. Terrorism as a concept is broad and difficult to define. The source of this terrorism is Islamic fundamentalism, a fringe religious movement with its base of power scattered across the Middle East. It presents an unquantifiable and unseen enemy who lurks both underground in caves in faraway places, and hidden amongst the domestic population, masquerading as Americans. It is significantly more challenging to place this ambiguously defined terrorist as the evil enemy Other to America's valiant individualist hero. By proxy, the religion of Islam in general has been targeted by some Americans, but for the most part, terrorism does not operate on the same absolutist mythological notions of good and evil that have previously given impetus to American foreign policies. The erosion of the good/evil binary is particularly significant for a discussion of Lost, since its narrative constantly calls into question which of its characters are villains, and which are heroes.

Terrorism becomes internalized into Lost's narrative. The crashing of the plane in the first episode resonates with the fears of air travel which circulated immediately in the wake of the attacks. Its supposed villains, the Others, are an unseen enemy who

---

[2] Henry A. Giroux, "Democracy and the Politics of Terrorism: Community, Fear the Suppression of Dissent," 9/11 in American Culture, Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, (ed.), (Walnut Creek: Altamira Presss, 2003), 247.
[3] Giroux, 248.

lurk in the jungle around the survivors, snatching children and striking without warning. Terrorism is also dealt with more literally in Sayid's (Naveen Andrews) back story. For Lost, as well as American culture itself, terrorism presents an unprecedented challenge to these mythologized narratives of American supremacy and heroism. Terrorism itself offers a new kind of threat to Western ways of thinking precisely because it presents an enemy who does not care whether they live or die. Despite America's multi-billion dollar military budget, they were unable to stop three planes on 9/11. The threat of terrorism does not only stem from its functioning on a much more subterranean level than previous threats to American security, but it is symbolic as well. In Jean Baudrillard's essay "The Spirit of Terrorism," he states, "The antagonism is everywhere, and in every one of us. So, it is terror against terror. But asymmetric terror. And it is this asymmetry which leaves global omnipotence entirely disarmed."[4] Leo Braudy, in his study of the historical relationship between war and masculinity, points out that "Terrorist tactics in general try to imply that all the high technology in the world cannot stop a determined enemy, even one armed only with primitive weapons, especially if psychologically bent on self-sacrifice."[5] If terrorism offers such a severe threat to the western world, then the solutions which have been used as a weapon against terrorism have required certain concessions which the American government has never before had to make.

On November 25, 2002 the United States Congress passed the Homeland Security Act. Not only did this create the Department of Homeland Security, but it also

---

[4] Jean Baudrillard, "The Spirit of Terrorism," The Spirit of Terrorism and Other Essays, Chris Turner (trans.), London: Verso, 2003, 24.
[5] Leo Braudy, From Chivalry to Terrorism: War and the Changing Nature of Masculinity, (NewYork: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 544.

granted the government broad powers in order to pursue terrorism at home and abroad. This act received criticism, as some perceived it as sacrificing civil liberties. American myths of freedom and individualism were undermined. This resonates with Lost's interrogation of the role of the subject in response to these historical shifts. Lost's predominant themes of fate and free will suggest the ways that burgeoning overarching structures of government might erode individual agency. Immediately after the attacks, Bush was able to draw upon American myths to great effect. President Bush's invasion of Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban, the supporters of Al-Qaeda, the terrorist network who took responsibility for the attacks, was widely accepted as necessary. However, his attempt to extend the War on Terror to include the invasion of Iraq beginning March 19, 2003, received a significantly more mixed reaction. This has been an unpopular war, both domestically and abroad, further suggesting that Americans as individual social actors are ultimately subsumed by the organizational powers of their government. While this may always have been true, the post-9/11 era has forced a confrontation with the tenuous nature of freedom and individuality, and Lost can be read as responding to this context. The Bush administration's attempt to implicate Saddam Hussein's Iraq in the already tenuously defined terrorist threat was by no means a complete success. It is this failure to properly establish a mythic narrative around terrorism, as Reagan had done with communism in the 1980s, that suggests the erosion of the enemy Other. In fact, since some Americans voiced their dislike for both the war and the government's policies of torture, this undercurrent of self-questioning perhaps suggests that subconsciously America had begun to wonder how like its enemy Other it had become. Lost speaks to this context, since the viewers are constantly

encouraged to question whether the Others, the villains of the program, are as malevolent as the spectator has been led to believe.

There is a distinct relationship between terrorism and globalization. Terrorism, as Braudy indicates, is largely a response to the seemingly invincible global economic and geo-political structures. It offers a means of violent resistance in a world where individual voices have become absorbed completely by both multinational corporations and international governments. Even 9/11 itself offers a symbolic opposition to these global structures precisely because the World Trade Center functions as the perfect icon for this global hegemony. As Baudrillard describes, "Allergy to any definitive order, to any definitive power, is – happily – universal, and the two towers of the World Trade Center were the perfect embodiments of that definitive order."[6] Terrorism, then, becomes a violent struggle of the individual to regain their agency, or their free will, in order to circumvent a fate pre-determined by the global powers-that-be.

Lost's at times cryptic narrative speaks to these issues of terrorism and the good/evil binary. It draws upon a broad range of issues directly from the post-9/11 cultural consciousness and engages them within a post-modern primetime serial television drama narrative. Lost's navigation of these issues is particularly interesting given the way in which the producers have chosen to structure its narrative. Lost's enigmatic flashback/flashforward structure and serialized narrative easily elicits comparisons to similar ground-breaking television programs such as Twin Peaks (1990 – 1991) and The X-Files (1993 – 2002). Lost's discussion of post-9/11 era concerns, such as terrorism and torture, is in fact immersed within the larger issue of globalization that is present within the diegesis as well, particularly with the increasing focus on the

[6] Baudrillard, 4.

power of large international corporation Widmore Labs in the later seasons. While Lost continues to gesture towards the contemporary historical climate, its treatment of these issues continually circulates around its most central and iconic theme, fate and free will.

This thesis will examine a number of Lost's different facets utilizing this notion of fate versus free will as its central guiding focus. Lost, both in terms of its narrative as well as the way it has been marketed and received within the wider context of popular culture, provides a basis for the discussion of a variety of issues relating to questions of free choice, in the age of globalization. I use this theme of fate/free will as a way of discussing agency. Agency as a concept refers to the ability of individuals to make or impose their choices on the world. Lost uses fate and free will as a means of looking at how organizing forces, such as global corporations, constrain freedom of choice. Throughout the different chapters contained within, I will address these questions about individual subjectivities in the post-9/11 age as they pertain to a range of topics including television technology, Lost's narrative structure and fan cultures. By utilizing an approach which accounts for the different ways which a television program circulates through culture and charting these links in order to uncover the underlying power dynamics, I show how Lost's hyperdiegesis reflects the internal themes of fate and free will contained in the program.

The first chapter draws together a range of different academic sources in order to construct a framework with which to conduct a more in-depth analysis. This thesis examines Lost not just as a singular text, but also how that text circulates through mass culture. This includes systems of distribution, the internal workings of the text itself, as well as fan reception. I draw upon a number of different sources, such as narrative,

cultural and television theory, as well as the vast field of academic writings concerned with participatory cultures and writings concerned with post-9/11 culture.

The second chapter discusses Lost within the current age of television technology which has been called TVIII. Television is an unstable medium which, through the introduction of technologies such as DVR, DVD, mobile viewing technologies, the internet, and so forth, is increasingly moving away from the notion of television as flow. Consumers have increasing power over patterns of television viewing, as when and how television is watched is no longer dictated solely by the television programmer. DVD and DVR technology not only allow spectators to view television without commercials, but also to stop and re-view a scene again. This is particularly relevant to Lost, since its mystery narrative often involves the inclusion of visual hints which can be easily missed upon first viewing. Lost essentially provides an example of not only the ways that these television technologies affect the marketing of a television program, but how these technologies affect the construction of the cultural artifact itself. Lost thoroughly takes advantage of the possibilities of TVIII with both the visual and narrative construction of the text, as well as the cross-marketing strategies used by the network and producers. Through a discussion of these issues, this chapter will address the questions of agency for television viewers. Additionally, examining Lost from a broader cultural, technological and economic perspective, chapter two will provide a context for the remaining chapters.

Chapter three is specifically concerned with Lost's polysemic narrative structure. Lost's narrative is built around the unraveling of its mysteries, and through the utilization of clues and hints, it takes on an almost puzzle-like quality which

encourages the viewer to become actively involved with interpreting and interrogating the text. In light of the way Lost speaks to the post-9/11 age, it is this ambiguous structure which makes it an interesting object of academic consideration, precisely because of the broad spectrum of multi-layered meanings which are made possible both within and surrounding the text. Each Lost episode is structured around flashbacks and later flash-forwards. This forms a polysemic narrative makeup which unites the spectator's perspective with the characters. Viewers, like the castaways, are given clues and hints to the program's greater overarching mysteries, and are thus invited to participate in their unraveling. Lost's narrative structure is thus fundamentally linked to its internal themes, such as its repeated engagement with the free will/fate debate. Ultimately, this chapter will examine how Lost's structure allows the program to engage thematic issues of agency within its historical context both in terms of structure and theme.

Chapter four follows through the ideas presented in chapter three by expanding them into a discussion of the ways that Lost circulates in the wider context of popular culture. Lost's fervent fanbase and cult following have been paramount to its success, and it is integral to consider the implications of this type of consumption. Discussions of fandom in cultural studies have often linked this type of consumption to issues surrounding individual agency. Fandom has traditionally been seen as a sort of deviant form of viewing that possesses a connotation of psychological instability. This is suggested, in part, by the word "fanatic" from which the term fan is derived. Scholars such as Henry Jenkins have shown how "The fan's claims for a favored text stand as the

most direct and vocal affront to the legitimacy of traditional cultural hierarchies."[7] Lost's fan cultures arguably mark a clear departure from this type of resistance because unlike many other previous examples of cult television, Lost was constructed with such a following in mind. The use of viral marketing campaigns and ARGs (Alternate Reality Games) to promote Lost further suggests how producers cater to consumers who have a heightened engagement with the program. This is true for the narrative as well, since Lost's status as an open text invites a specific type of engagement when viewing. Most cult television fan cultures are formed around radical interpretation and re-interpretation of the text through fan fiction, as well as the supporting of both existing and non-existent inter-character romantic connections, called "relationshipping," or more commonly, "shipping." While this is true for Lost fandom, what is perhaps more significant is how Lost fans engage in in-depth analyses of the program, often involving the construction of theories which seek answers to the mysteries of the show. This chapter investigates the idea that whatever resistance or possibilities for agency that may have been previously possible through fan culture are becoming increasingly overwhelmed by the ways that fan consumption has become a marketing strategy unto itself. Fan culture has been at times associated with social resistance, and as these possibilities for resistance become subverted as they are incorporated into hegemony, agency, or free will, is again subverted by fate, or societal institutions of power.

Through an exploration of the constellation of meanings contained within Lost and its peripheral texts, I will probe these wider issues of agency and how they speak to the post-9/11 context. The events that have transpired since 9/11 have challenged

---

[7] Henry Jenkins, Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture, (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 18.

American mythic narratives, such as the individual hero and the good/evil binary. The ultimate goal of this thesis is to use Lost as a testing ground for these universal questions of how agency may or may not be possible in a world where individual subjectivity is increasingly superseded by larger institutional forces. Television provides a mechanism through which culture works through historical events. Lost, through its open text narrative structure as well as its peripheral texts and how it has been received, offers an example where the cracks in these metanarratives show themselves in a number of ways. Lost's navigation of the fate/free will dilemma ultimately reveals that the significance lies not so much in whether the characters have either fate or free will, but with the fact that there is a created illusion of these choices at the hands of larger overarching forces. Throughout the different chapters of this thesis, while using the theme of fate versus free will, I will examine how issues such as post-9/11 anxieties, globalization, the role of the media, the shifting nature of television as a medium, the internet and consumers intersect within the text of Lost.

Chapter One – Literature Review

By utilizing the notion of fate versus free will as a central guiding focus, this thesis will examine the various facets of Lost's primary and secondary texts. Lost, both in terms of its narrative as well as the way it has been marketed and received within the wider context of popular culture, provides a basis for the discussion of a variety of different issues relating to questions of individual agency, or free choice, in the age of globalization. Throughout the different chapters contained within, I will address these questions about individual subjectivities in the post-9/11 age as they pertain to a range of topics including television technology, Lost's narrative structure and fan culture. Through an exploration of the relationship between Lost's form and its content, this thesis will raise issues pertaining to how subjectivity is constituted in society, and whether or not individual social actors possess agency. I will draw upon a number of different sources which discuss the television form, narrative, the current phase of television's technological evolution (TVIII), fan culture, and lastly, issues of agency. By summarizing and drawing together these different sources, I will construct the necessary framework from which to conduct my analysis of Lost.

As a television program, Lost is affected by the innate characteristics of this form of media. Television is a significantly unstable medium, subject to both changes in broadcasting methods as well as alternative home entertainment technologies, and this creates a range of possible fluctuations of meaning both in terms of distribution and reception of the text. By investigating the implications of the television form, it is possible to generate insights into how Lost functions as a text. Perhaps one of the most significant pieces of literature in the television studies canon, Raymond Williams'

"Programming, Distribution and Flow" in Television: Technology and Cultural Form has greatly impacted contemporary thought on the cultural institution of television. A substantial amount of published work in television studies concentrates on the concept of flow, often applying it to ample chunks of televised material, rather than individual programs or episodes. Williams wrote this book in 1975, so obviously there are parts of his theory that are no longer relevant. However, it provides a foundation for generating an understanding of the ramifications that television as a form has for Lost. According to Williams, television is not merely composed of different television programs or commercials. Rather, it consists of a succession of all televised segments, including television programs, as well as commercials and transitionary segments. This is called "flow." Its sequence of units supersedes television programs' individual units and it perpetuates infinitely on numerous channels. This raises questions about how the television format filters through meanings for a narratively complex program such as Lost. Williams states, "This phenomenon, of planned flow, is then perhaps the defining characteristic of broadcasting, simultaneously as a technology and a culture form."[8] Williams sees television programs and commercials as distinct units that are both homogenously absorbed into flow. As I will discuss in great detail in chapter two, the effect of flow on Lost as a text is problematized by the widespread availability of new viewing technology, but the concept of flow remains significant for viewers who do watch it with commercials when it is broadcast on Thursday nights. Flow also works its way into television in other ways, such as its influence over narrative structures. When comparing television to cinema, films are typically associated with a more

---

[8] Raymond Williams, "Programming: Distribution and Flow," Television: Technology and Cultural Form, (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), 86.

intimate mode of viewing, since they are mostly consumed in their entirety uninterrupted. The cinematic viewing experience is simply not possible when watching is constrained by flow as it continually breaks spectators' attention and then recaptures it. Williams mentions, for example, the disruptive impact of commercials on viewing films broadcast on television. However, films, unlike television programming, were not constructed to sustain flow. Commercial television programming is specifically constructed to accommodate flow. Because flow continually breaks up broadcasting into smaller units, it also must account for this potentially disruptive force, while also simultaneously competing with the distractions of the domestic sphere. This is accomplished through the use of commercials and previews of programs to be aired later in the day in order to keep viewers watching the same station. Williams explains, "This was intensified in conditions of competition, when it became important to broadcasting planners to retain viewers – or as they put it, to 'capture' them – for a whole evening's sequence."[9] The concept of flow highlights how the television format exposes the spectator to an endless barrage of information when they are viewing television programming as it is broadcast. For Williams, the fact that flow is ceaseless and infinite suggests that this overarching structure is perhaps more significant than what programming is contained within the structure. Williams states, "To break this experience back into units, and to write about the units for which there are readily available procedures, is understandable but often misleading, even when we defend it by the gesture that we are discriminating and experienced viewers don't just sit there hour after hour goggling at the box."[10] A flow-based analysis tends to allow the

[9] Williams, 91.
[10] Williams, 95.

particular individual nuances and details of individual texts, in other words, content, to become assimilated into this all-inclusive concept of flow. Williams seems to be suggesting that a close analysis of a text like Lost may be misleading because it disregards the impact of flow on these structures. Since my methodology is based primarily in textual analysis, I will not be using a flow-based model. However, flow should be taken into account when looking at television programs as texts, since this structure does ultimately shape Lost's narrative.

In John Ellis' book, Visible Fictions, he points out some of the inconsistencies in Williams' original arguments. While Ellis agrees that flow places dissimilar items into sequence without producing any significant overall meaning, he believes that Williams' view of these units is partially flawed because Williams sees them as separate and distinct. Ellis states, "For Williams, flow is a feature of TV that severely compromises and alters the separate texts that TV has manufactured. His model is of cinema-style texts which appear in a context that reduces their separation one from another. In doing so, he underestimates the complexity of broadcast TV's particular commodity form, which has very little to do with the single text."[11] This highlights that television as an institution is not geared towards generating various kinds of narrative, but rather selling commercial time. Programs like Lost are designed to draw in viewers who will also view the commercials interspersed throughout. By pointing out the commercial forces which underscore television programming such as the prime time serial, Ellis avoids viewing flow as an invasion upon the "pure" text of the television program. He states, "Any single programme taken as an example of segmentation reveals only the way in which this characteristic procedure has invaded what is

[11] John Ellis, Visible Fictions, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 112.

characteristically taken to be an independent textual entity: the programme."[12] Flow is thus internalized into the program. Even with shifts in technology such as DVR and DVD, television writers still must account for commercial breaks.

Kristin Thompson is critical of more traditional flow-based studies of television programming. She states, "Williams and many other analysts seem to presuppose that viewers mentally meld commercials and other interpretations into a seamless whole with programs, creating new meanings by the juxtapositions, deliberate or unintentional, between ads and narratives."[13] Thompson argues that while flow is an extremely prevalent concept within television studies, it is possible to discuss individual television programs separately from how and when they are inserted into flow. Yet, the concept of flow discussed by Williams and Ellis does have a direct bearing on how Lost's narrative is presented to viewers. It can be problematic to re-assemble groups of individual units, such as television programs, and myopically viewing them out of this context, without giving consideration to the influence of flow. It is possible to explore Lost from a middle ground between these two positions by discussing the links between narrative content and the various ways in which the program is consumed. Because television writers must allow for commercial breaks, flow helps to provide narrative structure by dictating crucial junctures in the story, such as cliffhangers.

The arguments of both Williams and Ellis, however dated, still are significant to an analysis of Lost. As I have mentioned, these arguments are in part obsolete because of technological changes; television has expanded beyond flow. In "Television's Next

---

[12] Ellis, 122.
[13] Kristin Thompson, Storytelling in Film and Television, (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2003), 15.

Generation: Technology/Interface Culture/Flow," William Uricchio effectively incorporates Williams' original arguments into contemporary debates concerning the evolution of television. Since Uricchio wrote this article in 2004, the same year Lost commenced airing on ABC, he much more adequately addresses the transformations in television technology which affect Lost. Uricchio explains, "The concept [of flow] has gone on to support very different arguments, and in the process it has helped both to chart shifts in the identity of television as a cultural practice and to map various undulations in the terrain of television studies."[14] Uricchio thus emphasizes that flow is still a relevant model for television studies, but that it also necessitates a consideration of the relative instability of television as a medium and the various changes which have transpired. Urrichio also mentions the effect of the remote control on television viewing. When Williams first wrote his essay, channels would have been changed by hand. Remote control devices thus presented a more disruptive force on the already potentially interruptive nature of television's flow. Flow as Williams saw it is no longer appropriate because television has evolved from network created flow to a set actions and choices made by the consumer. Not only does this have textual implications for television drama, but as Uricchio points out, "Viewers could subvert the programming strategies to which Williams had called attention."[15] This continual shift from flow into a new format which is increasingly dictated by viewers continues with the introduction of technologies such as the VCR. While tapes and VCRs can prove to be cumbersome and time consuming, it is important not to neglect the significance of VCRs in terms of its implications for the shifting power relations by allowing consumers to record and

[14] William Uricchio, "Television's Next Generation: Technology/Interface Culture/Flow," Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition, (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2004), 164.
[15] Uricchio, 170.

playback their favourite programs. Derek Kompare points out, "Timeshifting, recording programs for later playback, destabilizes the relationship between advertiser, broadcaster, and viewer, because advertisements are likely to be skipped on the eventual viewing of the program."[16] While the VCR, formerly the predominant means through which consumers recorded television programming, has largely been usurped by DVR, they do remain in use in homes, and present another way in which consumers have been able to destabilize the producer/consumer power dynamics. The continuing use of VCRs resonates with Henry Jenkins assertion that "Old media are not being displaced. Rather, their functions and status are shifted by the introduction of new technologies."[17] While the control that viewers have over what they watch and when seems to suggest a shift in power to the viewer, Lisa Parks points out, "The industry discourse of personal television has less to do with the viewer's personhood and more to do with new industrial structures of individuation geared towards profit making."[18] This indicates that for Lost, a consideration of the ways these different technologies affect the way the narrative is filtered through to the spectator becomes increasingly involved, especially given that any viewer may be consuming Lost in a variety of different ways. The implications of timeshifting have further evolved with the introductions of newer technology. As pointed out by Derek Kompare, "DVD technology has re-energized this process of continual expansion and adoption. Accordingly, it is not only a 'spin-off' or upgrade from VHS but rather the first significant media format of the twenty-first

---

[16] Derek Kompare, "Publishing Flow: DVD Box Sets and the Reconception of Television," Television & New Media, Volume 7, Issue 4, (November 2006): 340.
[17] Henry Jenkins, Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide, (New York and London: New York University Press, 2006), 14.
[18] Lisa Parks, "Flexible Microcasting: Gender, Generation and Television-Internet Convergence," Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition, (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2004), 135.

century."[19] The introduction of DVD, along with DVR, iPods, and a number of other widely available home entertainment technologies, marks a significant development for television. These different technologies not only create a number of fluctuations in terms of how Lost is received by its audience, but they have also affected the construction of the program itself.

The current age of television has been labeled TVIII. Glen Creeber and Matt Hills state, "TVIII therefore labels television's present state and beyond; a time of increased fragmentation, consumer interactivity and global market economies."[20] This viewer interactivity is significant, because it is reflected both within Lost's polysemic narrative, as well as the ways in which viewers consume Lost. Technologies such as DVR and DVD allow the viewer to either skip commercials, or the commercials are entirely absent. Hills states, "DVD culture encourages an audience-text 'closeness'"[21] This suggests exactly the relationship between the way Lost is filtered through these technologies and the way the program, which is in itself quite intricate in terms of narrative, has been received by audiences more widely. Christopher Anderson points out, "Like all television series produced for the broadcast networks, Lost has a narrative structure designed for the conditions of commercial television – to allow for commercial interruptions, to accommodate viewers who may not have seen previous episodes, to establish a narrative framework capable of sustaining the central dilemma

---

[19] Kompare, 344.

[20] Matt Hills and Glen Creeber, "Editorial –TVIII: Into or Towards a New Television Age?" New Review of Film and Television Studies, Volume 5, Issue 1, (April 2007): 1.

[21] Matt Hills, "From the box in the corner to the box on the shelf: 'TVIII and the cultural/textual valorizations of DVD." New Review of Film and Television Studies. Volume 5, Issue 1. (April 2007): 49.

and generating new conflicts for years to come."[22] This notion indicates the need to understand Lost's narrative not just theoretically, but in its industrial and technological context. It also resonates with Hills' concept of hyperdiegesis. As Hills describes, hyperdiegesis is "The creation of vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered in the text, but which nevertheless appears to operate according to principles of internal logic and extension."[23] Hills argues that hyperdiegesis is a frequent characteristic of television programs with cult followings. Lost's writers take advantage of its hyperdiegesis by expanding the narrative into secondary texts such as The Lost Experience. Thus, TVIII has been particularly conducive to Lost's expansion beyond the borders of its primary text, and these peripheral texts must also be taken into account.

In Jenkins' book, Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide, he discusses at length how these different transformations of media have created a new form of mass culture, convergence culture. He describes, "By convergence, I mean the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the co-operation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kind of entertainment experiences they want."[24] Since patterns of consumption are becoming increasingly fragmented with the arrival of new media and technology that exist alongside older technologies, producers of culture have integrated trans-media consumption into the marketing of television programs. Derek Johnson points out the new trend of multiplatforming, wherein television narratives

---

[22] Christopher Anderson, "Television Networks and the Uses of Drama," Thinking Outside the Box: A Contemporary Genre Reader, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 74.
[23] Hills, Fan Cultures, (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 137.
[24] Jenkins, 2.

expand beyond the boundaries of the text itself and into other forms of media. He says, "Audiences are not just cultivated as fans, but also *invited in*, asked to participate in both the world of the television text and the processes of its production."[25] Lost's hyperdiegetic world has found its way into internet tie-ins, such as the official site of the fictional organizations Hanso Foundation and Oceanic Airlines, and The Lost Experience. The Lost Experience was an internet based reality game which contained clues to the back story of the Hanso Foundation. These sources help generate an understanding of how Lost should be understood in the context of larger trends relating to both marketing, and the evolution of television technology. Moreover, it also underlines that it is imperative not only to consider the pure narrative of the aired episodes as comprising the text of Lost, but also that a thorough understanding of the program requires an examination of the way in which its narrative straddles these different forms of media.

Part of why Lost is so interesting to discuss in relation to TVIII and its text is the particular role that its fan base has played in both the popularity and interpretation of the program. Lost qualifies as an example of cult television in the truest sense because its fan culture is largely organized around the construction of theories which seek to unravel or solve the mysteries of the narrative. These fans have many blogs, websites and discussion boards where they pick apart every last detail of the program. In Jenkins' book Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture, he examines how fan cultures function as a form of resistance to dominant hierarchies. Jenkins says "The fans' transgression of bourgeois taste and disruption of dominant

---

[25] Derek Johnson, "Inviting Audiences In: The Spatial Re-organization of production and consumption in TVIII," New Review of Film and Television Studies. Volume 5, Issue 1. (April 2007): 63.

cultural hierarchies insures that their preferences are seen as abnormal and threatening standards."[26] Hills echoes Jenkins, stating, "Fans organize TV programs into an 'intertextual network' that is not recognizable as an industry-led, generic grouping."[27] In "Cult TV, Quality and the Role of the Episode/Programme Guide," Hills discusses the role of fan cultures in constructing television programs as the text. While Jenkins and Hills seem to gesture towards the counter-hegemonic potential of participatory fan cultures, as with many previous examples of sub-cultural phenomena, such forms of resistance eventually become re-appropriated by dominant culture. Sara Gwenllian Jones states, "The political framework into which so many scholarly accounts have organized fandom and fan practices is essentially binaric. It assumes mutual exclusivity of the culture industry and fan culture, constructing an antithetical relationship in which the former is constituted as unequivocally exploitative and the latter as a species of resistant folk culture."[28] Gwenllian Jones is critical of this view. She says, "Fandom, I argue, is a mode of interactivity as well as a mode of consumption, and the fictions it dedicates itself to are modeled accordingly."[29] The producers of Lost market directly to this particular type of consumer through viral marketing, podcasts, and even within the text of the show itself. The producers are aware of how fans pick apart every detail of the program, down to individual frames, and they place visual clues, such as the Dharma logo on the fin of a shark in the first season finale, for viewers to find. Furthermore, the participation of fans in the unraveling of the program is influenced by

---

[26] Henry Jenkins, Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture, (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 17.
[27] Matt Hills, "Defining Cult TV: Texts, Inter-texts and Fan Audiences," The Television Studies Reader, (Robert C. Allen and Annette Hill. London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 511.
[28] Sara Gwenllian Jones, "Web Wars: Resistance, Online Fandom and Studio Censorship," Quality Popular Television: Cult TV, the Industry and Fan, Mark Jancovich and James Lyons (ed.), (London: BFI Publishing, 2003), 163.
[29] Jones, 165.

the context of TVIII, and this resonates with the concept of multiplatforming, as described by Johnson. It also highlights the relationship between form, in this case a television program which thoroughly embodies the possibilities of TVIII, and its narrative content, which in Lost's case exists across a variety of different media.

While I have addressed both TVIII and Lost's fan following, a discussion of these issues must be anchored into a consideration of the text of the program itself. Since Lost possesses a clear-cut narrative structure which alternates between flashbacks, flash-forwards and present events, narrative theory will play an essential role in the examination of how thematic meanings are articulated, as well the way narrative interacts with the technological fragmentation associated with TVIII. Edward Branigan states, "If narrative is to be considered as a way of perceiving, one still needs to specify the way."[30] Similarly, Michael J. Porter, Deborah L. Larson, Allison Hartchcock and Kell Berg Nellis state, "By examining structure, one can begin to identify the rules and patterns of a particular genre of television narrative that help create meaning."[31] The flashback structure gradually reveals the characters' back stories and how their pasts motivate their actions on the island. It also succeeds in creating a sense of estrangement and mystery. The characters and their motivations are never clearly drawn for the viewer, as the program instead functions as an open or polysemic text, which Bernadette Casey describes as "One in which the reader or audience is encouraged or able to construct a wide range of meanings."[32] Its narrative structure not only results in a certain level of ambiguity, but it also demands that

---

[30] Edward Branigan, Narrative Comprehension and Film, (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 3.
[31] Michael Porter et. Al, "Re(de)fining Narrative Events: Examining Television Narrative Structure," Journal of Popular Film and Television, Volume 30, Issue 1, (Spring 2002): 23.
[32] Bernadette Casey et al, Television Studies: The Key Concepts, (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 167.

viewers engage in interpreting that ambiguity. Casey also points out, "The 'closed' text – which applies to most television programmes – will be structured to limit the occurrence of polysemy, to restrict the number of meanings and prevent the possibility of ambiguity."[33] While television's tendency towards closed texts may seem to suggest an incompatibility between open texts and television's underlying commercial interests, dramatic narratives present one means through which such textual instabilities are made possible. Lost is by no means the first example of such an "open" text. Its predecessors, Twin Peaks and The X Files, both presented different takes on the primetime dramatic serial narrative format. Thompson examines the connection between art cinema and Twin Peaks. She points out, "One of the most characteristic traits of the art cinema is ambiguity. If the classical cinema values a clear cause/effect chain, then an uncertainty surrounding how the chain fits together or concludes provides an alternative approach to narrative."[34] Lost is one of the few television programs which use this alternative narrative approach. Such approaches when used on television are not completely open-ended, although they do tend to work towards conclusions, and this in itself has commercial motivations. Because television is in the end a commodity, it is still "closed" in some sense because it must work towards closure. Twin Peaks works towards the revealing of who killed Laura Palmer, and The X-Files gradually unravels its government conspiracies. While Lost's narrative contains many gaps of information, and as such is an open-text, its openness is highly constructed.

The arguments put forth by Branigan are particularly relevant since they seem to reflect the thematic questions of fate and free will which define much of Lost's

---

[33] Casey, 167.
[34] Thompson, 112.

narrative. While Branigan writes explicitly about film, his arguments are pertinent to a discussion of a television text as well. He states, "As a spectator engages the procedures which yield a story world, something extraordinary occurs: his or her memory of the actual images, words and sounds *is erased* by the acts of comprehension that they require. Comprehension proceeds by cancelling and discarding data actually present, by revising and remaking what was given."[35] Branigan suggests that the spectator is not merely an automaton acted upon by the narrative in a top-down fashion, but rather that they are an actively engaged participant in its unfolding. The narrative does not simply unfurl in front of the spectator. The spectator is playing an important role in meaning creation between text and audience. This further suggests how narrative structure is intrinsically linked to the fate/free will theme, since it suggests that spectators are not all universally propelled forward to the same fate by the narrative. Instead, this suggests that in this role of text interpretation, it is possible for spectators to possess some freedom in how they perceive the text. This notion of the viewer's role in the assembling of the text is particularly valuable to a discussion of Lost because the program is an open text. The spectator is encouraged to participate, at times quite literally, in solving the puzzle that is Lost. This is achieved through the continuing parade of clues both contained in the program, and also in some of the viral marketing campaigns.

The central thread which runs through each chapter as it relates to the diverse body of issues which I have discussed here is the thematic question of the fate/free will binary. While this question is internalized into both Lost's themes and narrative structure, it provides a way of thinking about the role that cultural structures play in

[35] Branigan, 83

how the individual is constructed. This question of the self is ultimately at the core of my examination of what Lost is addressing. John Storey states, "We make history and we are made by history; we make culture and are made by culture. Culture (like language) both enables and constrains."[36] The role of culture is of central importance in post-modern understandings of the subject. The writings of Michel Foucault are heavily concerned with how the subject is constructed within cultural discourses. For Foucault, the notion of agency for the subject is problematic because all subjects are inextricably caught inside discourse; not only can they never escape it, but in fact the subject itself is produced by discourse. Discourse is closely linked to questions of power. As Michel Foucault states, "Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but it also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it."[37] These discourses result from cultural practice and knowledge. As Stuart Hall explains, "For [Foucault], it is discourse, not the subject, which produces knowledge. Discourse is enmeshed with power, but it is not necessary to find 'a subject' – the king, the ruling class, the bourgeoisie, the state, etc. for *power/knowledge* to operate."[38] Ultimately, Foucault does not see agency as a possibility, since it is impossible to ever escape discourse. As Raymond Martin and John Barresi explain, "Freud's successfully analyzed subject was his ideal of human freedom. Foucault said that this idea is illusory – the search for meaning is not liberating, but enslaving."[39]

---

[36] John Storey, Inventing Popular Culture: From Folklore to Globalization, (Cornwall: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 60.
[37] Michel Foucault, 1978 quoted in Mills, Sara, "Discourse," Michel Foucault, (New York and London: Routledge, 1997).
[38] Stuart Hall, "Foucault: Power, Knowledge and Discourse," Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader, Margaret Whetherelle et. Al. (ed), (London: Sage Publications, 2001), 79.
[39] Raymond Martin and John Barresi, "Paradise Lost," The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self: An Intellectual History of Personal Identity, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 261.

Foucault seems to suggest that all subjects become engulfed by the discourses that they encounter, and this is reflected in the ways that Lost has been transmitted to and received by mass audiences. Lost's fan culture, for example, seems to suggest possibilities for resistance, yet this fan-following is a valuable market demographic that is actively sought out by the program's producers. Within Lost's narrative, the survivors of the plane crash think that they have at least some control of their situation, when they are in fact being surveilled and manipulated by Ben and the Others. Furthermore, TVIII is characterized by television viewing that is increasingly dictated by the choices of the spectator. While viewers no longer have to watch commercials, this does not equate to viewer agency, since broadcasters incorporate new technologies into their marketing strategies. Foucault, it would appear, sees subjects as tied to their fate as dictated by discourse.

Like Foucault, Christopher Lasch views the self as being acted upon by a myriad of outside forces. He says, "Commodity production and consumerism alter perceptions not just of the self, but of the world outside of the self."[40] The self is thus constructed in response to society, particularly through choices of consumerism. For Lasch, there is no monolithic sense of the self or sense of individuality. He states, "Identity has become uncertain and problematical not because people no longer occupy fixed social stations – a commonplace explanation that unthinkingly incorporates the modern equation of identity and social role – but because they no longer inhabit a world that exists independently of themselves."[41] The concept of autonomy is tenuous, since there exists "a tendency to confuse self-determination with the exercise of consumer

---

[40] Christopher Lasch, "Introduction: Consumption, Narcissism, Mass Culture," The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times, (New York: Norton, 1984), 30

[41] Lasch, 32.

choices."[42] This resonates, in particular, with discussions of how the television consumer has been "freed" from the constraints of schedule through TVIII, and also with the notion of participatory cultures as resistance. According to Lasch, the consumer feels an overwhelming lack of control in a culture ruled by sophisticated and bureaucratic systems of power. This idea, as I will discuss in chapter three, is of profound importance to the issues addressed within the text of Lost. Lasch's arguments are underlined by a Marxist impulse, and this is evidenced in his repeated implications that consumerism, particularly the way it affects working classes, is inherently negative. He seems to be speaking to a more "traditional" conceptualization of the self while reconciling it with more postmodern understandings. He concludes that, while true agency is possible, it is difficult to attain in a social context wherein selfhood is determined by environmental factors, such as culture.

While Lost's narrative continually opens up questions about the position of the subject, these questions achieve a particular resonance within this particular historical context of the post-9/11 era. The program speaks to a number of issues that have circulated in relation to the post-9/11 era, such as terrorism, torture, Iraq, fears of air travel, and particularly in the program's fourth season, the increasing importance of the company of Charles Widmore (Alan Dale), the power and corruption of large corporations. The question of fate and free will, in conjunction with the way Lost's narrative reflects its historical context, works to explore questions of how it may be possible for individual subjects to gain or possess any type of agency in a world increasingly dominated by bureaucratic systems of power, as discussed by Lasch. In Frederic Jameson's book The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic

[42] Lasch, 42.

Act, he describes how literature is ultimately shaped by the historical contexts in which it was created. He states,

> To imagine that, sheltered from the omnipresence of history and the implacable influence of the social, there already exists a realm of freedom – whether that be of the microscopic experience of words in a text or the ecstasies and intensities of the various private religions – is only to strengthen the grip of Necessity over all such blind zones in which the individual subject seeks refuge, in pursuit of a purely individual, a merely psychological, project of salvation. The only effective liberation from such constraint begins with the recognition that there is nothing that is not social and historical – indeed, that everything is 'in the last analysis' political.[43]

Jameson is fundamentally a Marxist thinker. His perceives the individual subject as completely inseparable from history. This is connected to the Marxist notion that human nature is not static and absolute, as suggested by modernism, but constructed by ideology. Individuals cannot separate themselves from the larger frameworks in which they exist. To return to the fate/free will binary, Jameson makes his case for the former. Mass cultural texts, since they are according to Marxism acting to produce false consciousness, plays a vital role in constructing this framework. In analyzing an artifact of popular culture, it stands to reason that there are more complex processes at work than just artistic or aesthetic considerations. Culture is filtered through the lens of history because the systems which create it inevitably dictate and influence what can be created by writers as individuals. While Jameson is writing explicitly about literature, the concept that such texts are socially symbolic by their very creation can be extended to Lost.

An analysis of Lost as a post-9/11 phenomenon should draw upon sources which help relate the significance of its historical period to the broader cultural context. The

---

[43] Frederic Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act, (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, New York, 1981), 20.

centrality of terrorism to American foreign and domestic policy has certainly affected the types of representations present in the media and the way that narrative television deals with these discourses. In his article "Television as Working Through," Ellis states "[television] can be seen as a vast mechanism for processing raw data of news reality into more narrativized, explained forms."[44] That is not to suggest that programs like Lost are offering easy solutions, but rather that the way television "works through" is "a far more multifaceted and leaky process than that."[45] In other words, television functions as a complex dialectical process where historical anxieties are engaged.

When examining historical anxieties, it is necessary to develop an understanding of the cultural climate in which an artifact is produced. LeRoy Ashby states, "A bloody war in Iraq, which the United States had invaded nineteen months earlier in the name of fighting terrorism, fractured the initial post-9/11 consensus. Exacerbating the fears of terrorism were anxieties about a perceived moral breakdown, which Janet Jackson's naked breast seemingly symbolized."[46] Indeed, the term "terrorism" itself is an ambiguous one. Susan L. Carruthers states, "Definitions of terrorism abound, and no consensus has emerged – neither is one likely – over this 'essentially contested term.'"[47] Carruthers goes on to show how what is defined as terrorism has often been driven by politics. This notion that terrorism, which is in the current climate synonymous with absolute evil, is in fact an arbitrary category, helps generate an understanding of how these circulating discourses are reflected in the numerous moral ambiguities of Lost's

---

[44] John Ellis, "Television as Working-Through," Television and Common Knowledge, J. Gripsund (ed.), (New York: Routledge, 1999), 55.
[45] Ellis, 55.
[46] LeRoy Ashby, "Epilogue: Pop Culture in a Post-9/11 World," With Amusement For All: A History of American Popular Culture Since 1930, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 495-496.
[47] Susan L. Carruthers, "Media and Terrorism," The Media at War: Communication and Conflict in the Twentieth Century, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 164-165.

narrative. Christian W. Erickson analyzes several texts from the post-9/11 period, such as 24, Battlestar Galactica and Alias; all of these narratives engage the dilemmas of terrorism and counter-terrorism. He points out, "[these texts] occupy a position in US culture that lies at the nexus of a profound ambivalence about the forces of order, the forces of rebellion, and the utilization of methods of terror by both to impose and legitimize their respective political projects."[48] Erickson concludes, "at a deeper level, the works reflect more general themes relating to the policing of boundaries between the self and the enemy/other that apply not only to the 'global war on terror.'"[49] This indicates a fundamental blurring of the good/evil binary associated with this particular time period, another central theme of Lost, which continually influences the spectator to question who the villains are. In the first two seasons, the spectator is asked to identify with the survivors of Oceanic flight 815. They are encouraged to view the Others as violent, savage villains, and this binary is further destabilized in seasons three and four when this distinction between the two groups is questioned. This erosion of a Manichean sense of good and evil is further echoed by Christopher Gair, who states, "American television's traditional desire for isolation – or else simplistic narratives of American supremacy – has been overwhelmed by the post-9/11 realisation of the impossibility of avoiding the negative as well as the positive (in hegemonic US terms) ramifications of the post-cold war world order."[50]

The works of Jean Baudrillard are particularly useful in shedding light on post-9/11 culture because much of his work deals with the linkage between culture and

---

[48] Christian W. Erickson, "Counter-Terror Culture: Subversion or Legitimization?" Security Dialogue, Volume 28, Issue 2, (June 2007): 202.
[49] Erickson, 209.
[50] Christopher Gair, "24 and Post-National American Identities," Reading 24: TV Against the Clock, Steven Peacock (ed.), (London and New York: I.B. Taurus, 2007), 201.

politics. Baudrillard can help make sense of the moral ambiguousness of the post-9/11 era marked by a lack of absolute distinctions between good and evil. In his works, he discusses how American military actions in the post-Cold War era have operated under the specter of Islamic fundamentalism. The disruptive forces of terrorism and fundamentalism are proliferated in response to capitalist globalizing forces. In "The Gulf War Did Not Take Place," he argues, "the more the hegemony of the global consensus is reinforced, the greater the risk, or the chances, of its collapse."[51] In Baudrillard's essay "The Spirit of Terrorism," he states, "Here, then, it is all about death, not only about the violent irruption of death in real time – 'live', so to speak – but the irruption of death which is far more than real: a death which is symbolic and sacrificial – that is to say, the absolute irrevocable event."[52] Baudrillard describes how terrorist acts are monolithically symbolic, and in that powerful symbolism they manage to disarm global control.

The Other is a particularly relevant concept which helps to bring into the focus the fragmented sense of good and evil which permeates the narrative. Robin Wood defines the concept as, "That which bourgeois ideology cannot recognize or accept but must deal with."[53] Shi-xu states, "one of the useful ways to confront cultural power and prejudice is to reflect on a culture's discourse about other cultures, or the discourse of cultural 'otherness' or Other."[54] Terrorists have been situated as the United State's enemy Other. Yet this historical period has also been marked by massive dissent and

---

[51] Jean Baudrillard, "The Gulf War Did Not Take Place," Hollywood and War: The Film Reader, J. David Slocum, (ed.), (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 314.
[52] Jean Baudrillard, "The Spirit of Terrorism," The Spirit of Terrorism and Other Essays, trans. Chris Turner. London: Verso, 2003), 16–17.
[53] Robin Wood, "An introduction to the American Horror Film," American Nightmare: Essays on Horror Film. Gregory A. Waller, (ed.), (Toronto: Festival of Festivals, 1979), 9.
[54] Shi-xu, A Cultural Approach to Discourse, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 105.

confusion over the "War on Terror." Terrorists, like the mysterious enemies on the Lost island, appropriately named the Others, have been presented as an enemy which cannot be seen, heard or measured by any means. Fundamentalist terrorists are portrayed as lurking in the shadows of the Muslim world and waiting to strike at the United States, similar to the Others of Lost. As in the United States, the main cast or the "castaways" of Lost are caught in a constant discourse of what constitutes good and evil, as the television program, particularly in the second and third seasons, continues to question whether the Others or the castaways are the villains.

In Stuart Hall's article "The Spectacle of the Other," he discusses the reasons that representations of Otherness are so prevalent in the media. This article helps illustrate discourses through which Otherness is understood and can provide a valuable model of how to construct such an analytical framework. Hall examines why popular representations so frequently adopt discourses of the Other and aid in the reinforcement of difference, particularly in terms of race. He states that "Difference matters because it is essential to meaning; without it, meaning could not exist."[55] He also states, "Culture depends on giving things meaning by assigning them to different positions within a classificatory system. The marking of 'difference' is thus the basis of that symbolic order which we call culture."[56] Hall emphasizes the significance of the Other in racial discourses, although his analysis focuses on the visual representations of sports in the media. Hall states, "Racialized discourse is structured by a set of binary oppositions. There is the powerful opposition between 'civilization' (white) and

---

[55] Stuart Hall, "The Spectacle of the 'Other,'" Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader, Margaret Whetherelle et. Al. (ed.), (London: Sage Publications, 2001), 328.
[56] Hall, 330.

'savagery' (black)."[57] The binary opposition between "civilization" and "savagery" which Hall utilizes in his analysis helps establish a framework that can be used for analyzing Lost. This distinction of "society" and "savage" adheres well to the discourses taken up in the narrative of Lost precisely because it is the disruption of these two distinct categories where subversive interpretations are possible. The castaways are attempting to maintain a semblance of civilization on a deserted island where they have been stripped of modern amenities. Jack Sheppard and John Locke act as de facto leaders who make decisions for the group. The castaways organize systems of water distribution and Sun (Yunjin Kim) plants a communal garden to benefit the group. The Others are, at least on the surface, represented as savages, as evidenced by many incidents in the narrative. For example, the Others kidnap all of the children from both the tail and fuselage sections of the plane. In the beginning of season three, they kidnap Sawyer (Josh Holloway) and Kate Austen (Evangeline Lily), imprison them outside in animal cages and force them to perform manual labour, such as breaking rocks. Yet the castaways are also prone to acts of extreme violence and aggression, such as Sayid Jarrah's brutal beating of Ben (Michael Emerson). The Others live in a residential community that resembles north American suburbia where they engage in "civilized" activities such as weekly book clubs. The question of who is "savage" or who is "civilized" is a matter of perspective, as it is clear that both sides believe that the other groups are the villains. By drawing upon such culturally engrained binaries as good/evil and savage/civilized, Lost is able to question these metanarratives within a television format.

---

[57] Hall, 334.

The methodological approach of this thesis will rely for the most part on textual analysis, but at the same time informed by historical context. While I am relying on textual analysis, the aim is not to perform close readings of specific episodes. Rather, the analysis will encompass the entirety of Lost's hyperdiegesis by examining textual, extratextual and intertextual elements. Lost straddles a number of different forms of media, such as The Lost Experience, official websites, and fan culture, such as discussion boards and Lost blogs, and the linkages between these elements will all be considered. In terms of the textual analysis of the program itself, in order to produce a more rigorous analysis, I will be selecting a number of appropriate episodes to focus on. I will focus on episodes like "Solitary," "The Greater Good" and "Enter 77." These episodes focus on Sayid, thus are useful in looking at issues of race and ethnicity. "The Pilot," "Exodus," "One of Them" all contain storylines and imagery, such as plane crashes, biological warfare and torture, which allude to news images and discourses of the post-9/11 era. "Maternity Leave," "The Other 48 Days," and "Through the Looking Glass" are useful for discussion of narrative structures, because all three examples break the character-focused flashback structure which the show typically follows. While I will be focusing on some specific episodes, because of the grand scale of Lost's narrative, it is necessary to make reference to other episodes in order to establish a narrative context.

Lost ultimately functions as an intentionally constructed open-text television narrative which facilitates questions of how agency may or may not be possible in a world where individual subjectivity is increasingly superseded by larger institutional forces through its central theme of fate and free will. This is how Lost effectively

updates this debate into the contemporary era. The different chapters of this thesis will ultimately examine how issues such as post-9/11 anxieties, globalization, the role of the media, the shifting nature of television as a medium, the internet, consumers, intersect within the primary and secondary texts of Lost. This thesis will function largely as an in depth case study which will mobilize theories which have sought to account for recent changes in the television medium. These new ideas, in combination with previous scholarship dealing with issues such as narrative and discourse, provide the research framework from which I will conduct my analysis of Lost.

Chapter Two: Lost and Consumer Agency in the context of TVIII

While cinema has been a fairly stable medium for many decades, television as a form experiences a continual process of change and fragmentation. There are three different distinctions which describe television's different eras. TVI refers to the first age of television when spectators had a narrow range of consumer choices in terms of programming. TVII refers to an era of change which transpired in the 1980s with deregulation and the introduction of cable. The current stage of television's development is TVIII. TVIII is characterized by an increasing amount of choices for the consumer, both in terms of programming as well as different television technologies, and this has created a climate where television viewing has become increasingly de-centralized and fragmented. With the introduction of new technologies such as DVR, DVD, iPods and the internet, television viewing is increasingly dictated not by the television networks, but by consumers, giving them unprecedented freedom of viewing choices. This is the technological context in which Lost has found its commercial success. Not only do Lost's specific marketing and narrative strategies directly reflect and take advantage of this technological context, but the diverse modes of viewing that are widely available to television viewers suggest different possibilities for narrative meaning. In the context of TVIII, it is problematic to discuss a television drama strictly within its textual boundaries, since it is inextricably caught up in multi-layered processes of meaning making and interpretation, resulting from the various ways in which the program is consumed. Within this context, it is also increasingly difficult to view the dissemination of television content as a monolithically top-down process. This nexus of meanings resulting from the ways that Lost is consumed and

distributed in this context suggests the shifting nature of viewer agency. This echoes the central questions of fate versus free will thematically posed by the narrative of the program itself.

In this chapter, I will draw on a range of television studies literature which deals with how television as a form has shifted in the age of TVIII in order to make sense of Lost within this broader context. Through an investigation of a number of new technologies, such as DVD, DVR, mobile viewing, and the internet, this chapter will highlight how this context informs the complex processes which work to shape how Lost creates meanings, and how those meanings are interpreted by the viewer. TVIII presents a complex dual process of both defragmentation and fragmentation. On the one hand, Lost functions as a cinematic televisual text, which allows a significantly more heightened mode of viewing than previous conceptualizations of television consumption, which perceived the medium as fragmented by the constant interruption of commercials. Meanwhile, Lost is simultaneously expanding beyond the pure text of the program itself through both the producers' utilization of consumer culture and the increasing availability of newer types of viewing technologies. Thus, Lost produces a significantly more intimate type of television viewing, while at the same time it experiences increasing fragmentation through its dispersal across so many different technological forms. This ultimately suggests a cultural environment wherein power dynamics between producer/consumer are constantly shifting, and furthermore, that narrative meanings that are filtered through these various channels also enter into a state of flux. While television is increasingly dictated by viewer choices, the television industry has worked with this trend, incorporating it into their marketing strategies.

Through navigating through the different aspects of TVIII and their implications for Lost, I will address the problematic notion of viewer agency in TVIII.

While the introduction of newer technologies such as DVD and DVR has resulted in the eradication of commercials for many viewers, flow is still a relevant consideration for Lost. The multiplicity of technologies which may counter the effects of flow do not negate that Lost is continually aired on Wednesday nights on ABC with commercial breaks. The way in which Lost is structured around commercial breaks indicates exactly that flow is still a compelling force in television production. TVIII can be differentiated from other periods of television history because the new technologies that are introduced do not replace old technologies, but rather they exist alongside them. Jason Mittell explains, "Television programmers have established narrative norms that use commercial breaks to structure plots, providing markers for suspenseful moments and signaling act breaks in the story. Thus television's institutional constraints structure how stories are narrated."[1] For Lost, commercial breaks often end on cliffhanger moments which create anticipation in the audience, encouraging them to watch through the commercials.

The now widespread availability of the television box set also marks a substantial shift in the landscape of television. Television programs have always been archived and collected, in the past often through fan communities, piracy, and online trading. DVD fully transfers this longtime practice into the control of the cultural producers. Kompare argues, "The success of the DVD box set has brought television's home video practices much more in line with those of film and indicates how new

---

[1] Jason Mittell, "Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television," The Velvet Light Trap, Volume 58, Issue 2, (2006): 29.

technologies can prompt new uses and new practices while preserving old goals."[2] Kompare highlights the television series box set as an extension of programs which are televised. For example, the Lost DVD box sets not only contains all episodes of each season uninterrupted by commercials, but also contains a number of special features which serve to augment the text, such as commentaries, deleted scenes and featurettes. But most significantly, Kompare argues, "Indeed, while advertising is the very core of the flow model and the raison d'être for the institution of commercial television, it is precisely what is excised for a video release to 'transcend' television."[3] This notion of transcending flow is particularly relevant for Lost. Matt Hills states, "DVD culture works, partly, on television to re-position many of its texts as symbolically bounded and isolatable 'objects' of value, then as machinery of valorization stressing the 'total system' of TV serials and series, it works to popularise 'close reading' and the artistic recontextualisation of some TV content."[4] Television DVD sets present not only the program itself in its 'pure' form, but that content is presented as part of an assemblage of textual data which viewers can sift through as they please. Furthermore, this inclusion of extra features not only fulfills a commercial need by attracting buyers, but it also works to construct a wider narrative that transcends the boundaries of the text. Hills argues that DVD special features play a significant role in the construction of television producers as auteurs through DVD commentaries such as those found on the Lost DVDs. He says, "By representing TV producers and performers watching 'their'

---

[2] Derek Kompare, "Publishing Flow: DVD Box Sets and the Reconception of Television," Television & New Media, Volume 7, Issue 4, (November 2006): 338.
[3] Kompare, 349.
[4] Matt Hills, "From the box in the corner to the box on the shelf: 'TVIII and the cultural/textual valorizations of DVD." New Review of Film and Television Studies. Volume 5, Issue 1. (April 2007): 49.

show, DVD commentaries partly work to reinforce discourses of auteurism and cultural authority: they enable producers to discuss their 'intentions' and offer up their favoured interpretations."[5] DVD commentaries on the various box sets typically feature the program's co-creators, J.J. Abrams, Carlton Cuse and in particular Damon Lindelof, and occasionally also performers. The information contained within Lost DVD sets, such as deleted scenes, essentially reconfigures and complicates the meanings within the program itself. Spectators are increasingly encouraged to read the program in relation to extra clues, behind the scenes stories and bits of narrative information, thus subscribing to TVIII's processes of fragmentation. On the season two DVD set, there is a feature called "Mysteries, Theories and Conspiracies," which discusses the detailed construction of theories which is constantly engaged in by Lost's fan base. It even includes clips of the various actors and actresses, such as Jorge Garcia (Hurley) and Evangeline Lily (Kate) discussing their favourite fan theories. Not only does this connect an official Lost text to its fandom, but it also serves to expose viewers not involved in such fan communities to these different readings. It is through these supplemental texts, as well as the commercial-less DVD quality copies of entire seasons, which work to further contribute to the fragmentation/defragmentation processes of TVIII.

With the introduction and widespread popularity of DVR technologies such as TiVo, as William Uricchio explains, "Control – which was once seen as the domain of the television programmer and, following the wide spread use of the RCD [remote control device], as the domain of the viewer – is now shifting to an independent sector

[5] Hills, 53.

composed of metadata programmers and filtering technology."[6] Digital technologies allow viewers to record their favourite programs with relative ease, as opposed to the possibly confusing task of VCR programming. What is important about Uricchio's arguments is the way in which he traces a gradual shift of agency from programmer to viewer. This shift does not indicate a depolarization of power structures, but rather a continuing oscillation between producer and consumer. As each trend is appropriated, it becomes a marketing strategy unto itself, echoing Ellis' assertion that in television, commercial interests ultimately reign. Nonetheless, television viewers still have greater control of their consumption than ever before.

In Williams' original arguments, he discusses the problems of writing, for example, television reviews of a specific program because it disconnects these broadcast units from flow without giving any mind to the consequences of flow. TVIII, then, provides an interesting way of thinking about Lost because technologies such as DVD and DVR provide a means for viewers to not only isolate the television program from flow, but to also eradicate commercials. This subsequently also alters their relationship to the narrative, since it also allows viewers to pause and rewind. While television was previously available for sale in VCR cassette format, this trend never found success in the way that DVD and DVR technology have. VCR tapes take up a considerable amount of space, and it is more difficult to locate a specific episode by searching through tapes and using fast forward and rewind than it is to locate a single episode on DVD. Similarly, DVR makes it possible to record programs for later playback, a practice called timeshifting. Timeshifting, as Derek Kompare points out,

---

[6] William Uricchio, "Television's Next Generation: Technology/Interface Culture/Flow," Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition, Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (ed.), (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2004), 164.

"Destabilizes the relationship between advertiser, broadcaster and viewer because advertisements are likely to be skipped."[7] Some statistics have shown that DVR users watch only 41% of aired advertisements. When viewers record the newest Lost episode for viewing, their viewing schedule is no longer dictated by television programmers, since they are able to watch whenever they choose, and without commercials. Most DVR technologies are able to record more than one program at once, further allowing consumers to escape the television schedule. It is also possible to fast forward through commercials of a program as it is being broadcast if the viewer tunes in late.

Another way in which cultural producers have been able to reassert flow is through free internet streaming of Lost episodes. ABC offers free video streaming of Lost episodes on their website for those who are located in the United States. CTV's website has also offered online viewing of episodes for Canadians. These episodes are in a lower resolution and as such, the picture quality is not on par with watching Lost on an actual television screen, thus modifying the viewing experience. However, this is one way in which Lost's producers have been able to recoup some of the money lost through reduced watching of advertisements on regular television. Even as Lost is a useful vehicle for selling advertising time on the internet as well as television, internet watchers are still not subject to the time constraints of flow, since online videos may be watched at any time. While internet viewing enables consumers to watch Lost at any time, they are nonetheless not able to break free from the advertising strategies which are ubiquitous on the internet. The internet example illustrates exactly how these mutations in viewing patterns have been integrated into marketing strategies, thus suggesting how the abundant availability of choice for the consumer does not

[7] Kompare, 340.

necessarily result in any type of legitimate liberation from these systems. Free internet streaming of episodes also allows the network to gain advertising profits from internet users who would have otherwise illegally downloaded. The practice of downloading episodes from sites like BitTorrent, a legal grey area that is heavily looked down upon by the entertainment industry, has limited possibilities for breaking free of the commercial system. For example, a downloaded version of season four episode "Confirmed Dead," has the CTV logo superimposed over the lower right-hand corner for the duration of the episode. While the commercials are removed, there are some remaining advertisements for other programs, such as a brief spot for Nip/Tuck. Even through downloading, Lost's viewers are still not able to fully escape flow.

As I will discuss more thoroughly in the next chapter, Lost has a highly complex and detailed narrative structure and story universe. Most examples of prime time serials (PTS) contain two levels of storytelling. The micro level involves storylines which are contained within the structure of a single episode, while the macro level entails larger arcs which span across many episodes or seasons. Lost, in particular, is dominated by macro level storytelling, and this is a particular point of relevance to a discussion of how TVIII affects narrative. While there is some episode-to-episode exposition to help make sense of the narrative for viewers who have perhaps missed an episode, unlike previous examples of PTS which alternate between myth-arc episodes and stand alones, Lost's narrative is epic and spans many seasons. A connection can be made between the popularity and success it has received and this technological context wherein it is possible to view the program without the constraints of flow. For the first time, television viewers are able to experience PTS as pure drama, contributing to a

significantly more cinematic experience when viewing the episodes without commercials and in proper order. In a sense, spectators are able to achieve a closeness to the text that was not possible previously. This ultimately constitutes the defragmentation which I have described. Christopher Anderson points out, "Your experience of Lost has achieved an almost cinematic purity. Ensconced in your own private theatre, freed from network schedule and commercial interruptions, you are able to lose yourself in the narrative world fashioned by J.J. Abrams and his collaborators. You have almost forgotten that this is television."[8] While for the most part Lost's aesthetics consists largely of close-ups since the program features mainly dialogue scenes, occasionally the cinematic nature of Lost extends beyond its epic narrative and into the visual realm as well. Lost achieves this cinematic effect not only because it is shot entirely on film, but also through the framing and settings selected by the producers. Lost is shot almost entirely on the Hawaiian island of Oahu, and the mise-en-scène makes use of the expansive vistas of jungle and mountains. In what are sometimes seemingly mundane scenes, such as the golfing scenes in season one episode "Solitary," as the survivors engage in dialogue, their backdrop of lush Hawaiian mountains, along with the widescreen aspect ratio, contribute to a more cinematic viewing experience. Lost is able to fully exploit the visual possibilities presented by high definition without having to sacrifice television's aesthetics.

Viewing multiple episodes in order fosters a completely different type of viewing experience. By changing the context of viewing and removing flow, and then

---

[8] Christopher Anderson, "Television Networks and the Uses of Drama," Thinking Outside the Box: A Contemporary Genre Reader, Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (ed.), (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 70-71.

engaging in marathon episode watching, the television structures begin to liquefy. As I will discuss chapter three, PTS narratives are often constructed with television structure in mind. For Lost, this means the constant cutting back and forth between past, present, and future decreases the abruptness of commercial breaks. This type of television watching encourages a more engaged form of viewing which is much more conducive to, as Mittell suggests in his article "Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television," the highly active cognitive energies required in to comprehend the nuances of Lost's narrative. This extends into the visual realm as well, since Lost often places hidden pieces of information into the mise-en-scène. Without the introduction of technologies such as DVD and DVR which allow viewers to manipulate the program through rewind, pause and fast-forward, these details may be lost. In "Little Players, Big Shows: Format, Narration and Style on Television's New Smaller Screens," Matt Dawson argues that contemporary television style is not only a reaction to the introduction of new media technologies, but that contemporary television series readily internalize these technologies into their aesthetics and storytelling. In his introduction, he makes reference to a scene in "Exodus: Part Two," the season one finale, where Michael and Sawyer are floating in the ocean amongst the wreckage of the boat Michael built. As the two characters cling to pieces of floating bamboo, a shark briefly surfaces. Max Dawson states, "By slowing down recordings of this episode, viewers determined that the shark's tail bore the insignia of the Hanso Foundation, the shadowy organization believed to be behind Lost's many mysteries."[9] Almost immediately after the airing of this episode, still screenshots of this particular scene appeared on the

[9] Max Dawson, "Little Players, Big Shows: Format, Narration, and Style on Television's New Smaller Screens," Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies, Volume 13, Issue, (2007): 231.

internet where fans proceeded to analyze the image in terms of its implications for the show's overarching mysteries. Not only does Dawson's argument suggest that such minute details may consciously be placed there by cultural producers who are aware that these images may be found, but that many of Lost's viewers are participating in a highly engaged type of television watching. The intense level of audience involvement encouraged by Lost, then, certainly gravitates away from the type of distracted viewer theorized by earlier scholars such as Williams and Ellis. Both distinguish the television viewer as in a continuous state of distraction, and this is why flow must constantly recapture their attention. Ellis states, "TV viewing is typically a casual experience rather than an intensive one."[10] While a number of arguments have been made by different scholars which attempt to provide more nuanced understandings of the television viewer in reception theory, as Uricchio argues, reaching back to the notion of flow is useful precisely because it is helpful in pinpointing the changes which have materialized in television since. Lost in particular serves as a case study for these changes not only because of its complex narrative and the type of viewing the narrative has encouraged, but also because of the way that it has been marketed.

The impact of DVR and DVD technology expands beyond merely television viewing itself, as it stands to reason that these also play an important role in the academic consideration of television texts. Indeed, the rise of DVD's widespread availability, largely due to its compact size and ease of portability, also parallels the increasing academic interest in television aesthetics, precisely because scholars are able to much more easily acquire television programs for study. Hills states, "The function of DVD as an 'isolator' of more intensely symbolically bound texts therefore resonates

[10] Ellis, 161-162.

not only with academics' critical interest in (valorised) close and repeated viewing, but also with producers' commercial interest in (valorised) audience responses."[11] He also points out, "The reproducibility of TV (and near-perfect freezing of its frames) which makes it texts more akin to those of written rather than oral culture certainly supports a level of aesthetic interrogation which would have been less readily possible in the past, even with the lower image quality and degraded freeze-frame facilities of videotape."[12] Thus, the ramifications of TVIII not only affect how television is consumed and discussed by the masses, but without overstating its impact, it does partially factor into the types of criticism produced in academia.

While Lost's partial liberation from flow seems to suggest that new technologies provide spectators with a greater possibility to possess agency, such a perspective is flawed when examining Lost within the increasingly fragmentary context of convergence culture. This also adheres to Ellis' assertion that television is overwhelmingly driven by commercial interest; the practices of convergence culture are intrinsically linked to these commercial interests. Convergence culture is discussed thoroughly by Henry Jenkins in his book Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide. For Jenkins, convergence culture involves the increasing blurring of boundaries between different media, as texts span across a number of different delivery systems. This is a process which is embraced by producers of culture, although it is also a cultural movement, rather than simply a diversification of technology. This is echoed by Lisa Parks, who states, "Convergence is not just about the coming together of technical systems; it involves the shifting meanings of converging technologies as

---

[11] Hills, 47.
[12] Hills, 48.

well."[13] Jenkins further points out, "Convergence, as we can see, is both a top-down corporate driven process and a bottom up consumer driven process."[14] By examining television texts through the lens of convergence culture, it becomes increasingly difficult to look at Lost only as an isolated, cinematic pure televisual text. While the purging of flow marks a significant shift in terms of how narratives are read and perceived, that shift is but one facet of TVIII. Lost can also be viewed within this context of convergence culture, since its narrative exists beyond the boundaries of the television program and spans across a number of multimedia tie-ins. For example, The Lost Experience was an ARG (Alternate Reality Game) that ran online until the beginning of season three. It was developed by Lost's producers and writers in order to expand the storyline of the program. The Lost Experience also had a promotional function, since ARGs are a form of viral marketing. To play the game, Lost fans had to search for clues on various websites such as one for the Hanso Foundation. It was also connected to the marketing of a tie-in novel, Bad Twin, read by Hurley in "The Long Con." Derek Johnson describes this marketing strategy as multiplatforming. He states, "Audiences are not just cultivated as fans, but also *invited in*, asked to participate in both the world of the television text and the processes of its production."[15] Thus, Lost effectively functions as a sort of supertext or hyperdiegesis which straddles these different forms of media and invites its viewers to explore the diversity of textual data available to them. Furthermore, this also demonstrates the need to consider Lost in

---

[13] Lisa Parks, "Flexible Microcasting: Gender, Generation and Television-Internet Convergence," Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition, Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (ed.), (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2004), 134.
[14] J Henry Jenkins, Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide, (New York and London: New York University Press, 2006), 18.
[15] Derek Johnson, "Inviting Audiences In: The Spatial Re-organization of production and consumption in TVIII," New Review of Film and Television Studies, Volume 5, Issue 1, (April 2007): 63.

relation to these larger marketing trends. While many of Lost's viewers are able to avoid watching commercials, the producers have been able to seek out other ways of gaining revenue.

The popularity of mobile viewing technologies such as iPods and portable DVD players is directly tied to the rise of this convergence culture, since ABC made Lost episodes available for purchase and download on iTunes. When viewing Lost on iPods or other mobile viewing devices, the text of the program itself remains free from the constraints of flow. However, the impact of Lost's occasional use of grand visuals, and perhaps more importantly the intricacies of its mise-en-scène, are significantly diminished when viewed on the substantially more limited resolutions available on such small screens. Dawson states, "As I learned from my experience watching Lost on my iPod, the forms of engaged reception practiced by Klinger's contemporary cinephiles may sometimes appear off limits to the viewer of a scaled-down or unbundled version of this series."[16] By viewing Lost on mobile devices, it also stands to reason that a chronological viewing of the season will not only take place over multiple viewing sessions, but also quite possibly in a number of different physical contexts. Dawson argues that the style of contemporary television programs is designed specifically to respond to the needs and demands of media convergence. Some programs, such as 24, have released a number of serialized spin-off mobisodes available for download and viewing on these devices. The producers of Lost in 2007 and 2008 released a thirteen episode series of mobisodes available to Verizon mobile phone customers called Lost: Missing Pieces. These episodes, a combination of deleted scenes and new material, featured new storyline content that fills in narrative gaps and provide background

[16] Dawson, 244.

information. The fifth mobisode, "Operation: Sleeper," shows the conversation where Juliet explains to Jack that she is supposed to be working undercover for Ben. On the program, this conversation is not shown and the audience is left to question Juliet's motives. These mobisodes were released in high quality on the fourth season DVD set. The producers have released a series of podcasts which feature interviews with creators Lindelof and Cuse, as well as cast interviews and behind-the-scenes information. During these podcasts, the writers will occasionally drop clues and hints about future episodes or past mysteries, further contributing to the construction of theories which has characterized Lost's fandom. The role which mobile devices play in terms of Lost's narrative embodies exactly the processes of fragmentation which are intrinsic to TVIII because it reveals the way in which different modes of viewing can trigger a range of variations or inflections on narrative meaning.

DVR technologies such as TiVo, in particular, are one way in which the self has been partially re-inserted into the actual viewing of television. Viewers can use the technology to record their favourite programs, essentially constructing a completely personalized television schedule that caters to their taste and sense of personal identity. Different DVR services are also able to examine a consumer's watched programs and recommend new ones. While DVR enables the skipping of commercials, it also offers a commodification of personal preferences. Parks notes, "Industry discourse of personal television has less to do with the viewer's personhood and more to do with industrial structures of individualization geared towards profit-making."[17] This indicates that Lost's viewers are inescapably tied to the commercial system, which is true, but this is perhaps an oversimplification, because it does not take into account the way in which

[17] Parks, 135.

Lost's viewers have been engaged by the vast array of technological fluctuations associated with TVIII. Indeed, TVIII is just as much about technology as it is about the shifting position of the viewer, and thus should be seen not just as a commercial movement, but also in cultural terms. Jenkins points out, "Convergence occurs within the brains of individual consumers and through their social interactions with each other. Each of us constructs our own personal mythology from bits and fragments of information extracted from the media flow and transformed into resources through which we make sense of our everyday lives."[18] While commercial motivations reign, Jenkins points out how the individual subject still fits into this dual top-down and bottom-up process. There is no question that consumers can never escape, in other words gain agency, while working within the system. They can create their own television schedule, but the fact remains that they are still consuming. Nonetheless, such modes of viewing do have a profound effect on how narrative meanings are perceived by viewers, which is of particular importance given Lost's open text structure.

Lost's most iconic central theme, the question of fate or free will, seems to echo the position of the individual consumer within the context of TVIII. As my analysis of viral marketing in chapter four will discuss, there are certainly more abundant opportunities for consumers to participate in a process of co-creation with the writers and producers of Lost. Jenkins seems to run on the assumption that the increasing variety of new media is empowering consumers and creating an increasingly media-savvy mass audience. Conversely, Mark Deuze points out "Regarding media production processes, we will continue to witness an increasing variety of dumbed-

[18] Jenkins, 3-4.

down content made for invisible 'mass' audiences next to (and infused by) rich forms of transmedia franchises that include elements of user control and 'prosumer'-type agency."[19] This suggests exactly the difficulty in pinpointing how consumer agency might be possible in a context where commercial forces are so dramatically multidirectional. There are a myriad of technological forces which affect how and where Lost is viewed by its fans, as well as their role in Lost's secondary texts such as The Lost Experience. As Lost's ongoing consideration of whether humans are tied to a singular fate or whether they are able to decide for themselves might suggest, the choices that consumers are given are an illusion created by larger systems of control.

The context provided for Lost by the fragmentation and defragmentation of TVIII indicates an atmosphere where narrative meanings experience fluctuations according to how and when the program is viewed. The cross-marketing strategies that Lost has employed, such as its use of viral marketing techniques, making episodes available for downloading on iTunes, podcasts, internet streaming, and so on, ultimately epitomize the possibilities of TVIII. All of these different modes of viewing are driven by commercial motivations and the need to market Lost as commodity. However, Lost has internalized the potential of TVIII into the program's narrative itself. The instability of meaning as it shifts slightly depending on how it is viewed is further amplified by the polysemic structure of the program. The ambiguous narrative of Lost itself seem to further address the questions of agency brought forth by TVIII's top-down and bottom-up power dynamics. Indeed, as it has become increasingly difficult to trace where the power lies for both consumers and producers of culture, this fluctuating

---

[19] Mark Deuze, "Collaboration, participation and the media," New Media & Society, Volume 8, Issue 4, (2006): 697.

agency echoes the central and most iconic of Lost's themes, the dichotomy between fate and free will. In the next chapter, I will discuss how these themes are articulated within the text of the show.

Chapter Three: Flashbacks and Flash-forwards: Lost and Narrative Structure

Television drama directly reflects the social and historical context in which it is created. John Ellis argues that television offers a system through which contentious issues are "worked through." According to Ellis, television programming "can be seen as a vast mechanism for processing raw data of news reality into more narrativized, explained forms."[1] Since different types of programming vary in how they handle news reality, Ellis acknowledges that this is a multi-layered process which does not always end in straight forward conclusions. What television offers its viewers is a complex ongoing dialectical process of consideration and reconsideration, and this can be seen operating within the text of Lost. Lost first aired in September, 2004, over one year after the American invasion of Iraq, and almost three full years into the American War on Terrorism, and it has resonated with this historical context throughout its four seasons. While Lost gestures towards post-9/11 anxieties concerning air travel, torture, terrorism, Islam, and the Other, its engagement with these issues extends into the very structure of the program itself.

In this chapter, I am concerned with the role that Lost's particular narrative structure plays in both conveying these meanings and engaging the spectator. An analysis of the influences on Lost's narrative will show how it has adopted and modified structural elements taken from other genres and modes, such as art cinema, soap opera, and the prime time serial. Furthermore, Lost also draws upon video game narrative structures. Next, I will show Lost has taken some of these elements, most

---

[1] John Ellis, "Television as Working-Through," Television and Common Knowledge. J. Gripsund (ed.), (New York: Routledge, 1999), 55.

notably the flashback, and essentially constructed a non-linear narrative structure entirely unique to the program. This narrative structure mirrors that of video games, and this is particularly significant given Lost's fanbase and viral marketing campaigns. This analysis of narrative structure is concerned with how the narrative is organized, rather than the specifics of representation. This chapter will show how Lost is constructed as a program not only of considerable narrative complexity, but that the inherent polysemic nature of the text reflects one of its core themes, fate versus free will.

In examining Lost, it is necessary to draw together a range of issues pertaining to the specifics of technology and how those technologies influence both spectatorship and the form itself, as well as trends in broadcasting. In terms of narrative, it is possible for different generic or stylistic strategies to seamlessly flow into each other. While Lost can be grouped under the category of the prime time serial (PTS), this category itself presents a diverse group of television shows which span across a countless number of genres. The classification of PTS refers to any dramatic fictional program with over-arching plotlines which extend across many episodes or even seasons. PTS are usually designed to fit into an hour long timeslot. Unlike programs such as soap operas which are aired daily, these programs are shown on a weekly basis. They usually require a commitment from the viewer because episodes not only should be viewed in context of each other, but in chronological sequence, in order for the viewer to accurately understand the story being told. There are many examples of PTS to be found in a varied number of genres and modes, such as horror/fantasy in Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1997 – 2003), the family melodrama of Six Feet Under (2001 – 2005),

neo-noir in Angel (1999 – 2004), detective and teenage drama in Veronica Mars (2004 – 2007), the action/suspense genre in 24 (2001 – present), and so on. Such serial narratives stand in opposition to another popular narrative format, the series. Series, such as situation comedies, present a much more episodic narrative that can be watched casually and out of sequence. Although some series, often procedurals such as CSI: Crime Scene Investigation (2000 – present) contain serialized character development similar to Lost, single episodes of such programs can also be appreciated out of sequence. For series, each episode functions as an independent narrative unit. As Graeme Burton explains, "Series are closed to the extent that each episode is complete in itself, even though the genre and the characters remain the same from one episode to another." [2] In Lost's pilot episode, the audience is confronted with the central dilemmas of the program: how will the Oceanic 815 survivors escape the island? Is the island a supernatural place? Are there other people on the island? While some episodes deviate from this predicament in order to focus on individual characters or smaller-scale conflicts, for the most part it makes up the core narrative that flows from episode to episode. Interestingly, Lost's desert island scenario seems to set up a definitive clear ending goal, which is escape from the island. Yet Lost disrupts that end goal when the Oceanic Six escape at the end of season four, effectively rewriting the end goal of the program, thus challenging conventional serial structure.

Lost's approach to seriality differs significantly when compared to other popular examples of PTS which have found popularity in recent years because of its specific focus on long-term story arcs. A number of narratively complex television programs

---

[2] Graeme Burton, "Television, Narrative and Form," Talking Television: An introduction to the study of television, (London: Oxford University Press, 2000), 109.

such as Buffy the Vampire Slayer and The X-Files (1993 – 2003) garnered success through a balance of mythology heavy episodes alternating and interspersed with episodic "monster of the day" episodes. This allows both loyal and casual audiences to experience viewing pleasure. Michael Z. Newman points out, "Episodic closure is thus a product of an industrial context in which serials are under increasing pressure to offer episodic pleasures to casual viewers at the same time that they offer additional serialized pleasures to their faithful regulars."[3] Newman separates the narrative workings of PTS into micro level, or the singular episode, and macro level, which involves more epic and complicated storytelling. While the aforementioned central dilemmas of Lost which drive the narrative are accompanied by crises which can be solved within a singular episode, for the most part, solid conclusions to the central mysteries are rare events. Jason Mittell explains, "One of the many innovations of Buffy the Vampire Slayer was its use of singular arcs for each of its seven seasons, structured around a specific villain threatening the town of Sunnydale."[4] Like Buffy, Lost does feature storylines which dominate each season, although they do not center around a specific villain. For example, the second season is concerned with the finding of the tail section of the plane and the mysteries of the Swan station, also called the hatch, and the third season is principally devoted to the group of people on the island referred to as the Others. Even when looking at Lost's seasons as distinct narrative units, it becomes very clear that season arcs are subsumed by larger questions, rather than existing as stand alone arcs. As singular units, many episodes do contain specific

---

[3] Michael Z. Newman, "From Beats to Arcs: Toward a Poetics of Television Narrative," The Velvet Light Trap, Volume 58, Issue 2, (2006): 20.

[4] Jason Mittell, "Film and Television Narrative," The Cambridge Companion to Narrative. David Herman (ed.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 165.

storylines. Often these storylines cannot be isolated from the central mythology, as with episodes of The X-Files, for example. In the case of Buffy the Vampire Slayer, major conflicts are typically solved at the end of a season, where in Lost, it may take many seasons. For example, in first season episode "Solitary" Sayid finds a mysterious cable leading off into the ocean, the purpose of which and where it leads is ultimately not revealed until the end of season three. Only then is it finally revealed that the cable provides power to an underwater Dharma Intiative station called the Looking Glass. This is just one example among many which emphasize that for Lost, the macro level dominates, rendering the program as potentially challenging to appreciate for viewers not well-versed in the esoteric details of the text.

Since the category of PTS encompasses a myriad of television programs which differ from each other considerably, it is difficult to sketch out a narrative model based on the characteristics of PTS alone. Lost presents a mosaic of different genre elements, such as horror, suspense and science fiction. These elements are suspended within a narrative structure which is stylistically dominated by melodrama, a key trait of the soap opera. There is an innate linkage between characteristics of PTS and soap opera. Soap operas have had a direct influence on how seriality has been wielded within the broad category of PTS, and this works in a number of ways. Daytime soap operas were originally created in order to fit into the feminized domestic space. They represent perhaps the most extreme version of seriality, as their narratives are ever-expanding and perpetually open-ended. Lost is not the first and certainly not the last PTS to draw from soap opera. In fact, primetime soaps are a subgenre of the soap opera. Prominent examples include Dynasty (1981 – 1989) and Melrose Place (1992 – 1999). While soap

operas were originally intended as a woman's genre, Lost's emphasis on so-called masculine genres such as action defies such a gendered typification. While Lost employs generic traits and iconography which are seemingly contradictory to soap opera, soap narrative strategies remain highly influential. Horace Newcomb says, "I suggest that the turn to soap narrative in prime time television confirmed the value of soap opera as a narrative strategy."[5] He also points out that, "The use of segmented, regularized time, no matter the economic underpinning, fosters this narrative mode."[6] There is an internal logic of soap opera narratives that has carried over into PTS precisely because these strategies provide a useful means of sustaining drama.

One of the key traits of the soap opera is repetition, particularly with daytime soaps. Many soap operas air one hour episodes five days a week, which can be problematic in terms of viewing because few spectators will actually watch every single episode. Thus, not only are storylines drawn out over many episodes, but redundancy becomes an integral generic trait. Repetition works to make sense of the narrative for viewers who are watching intermittently. Certain facts or plot points are constantly reiterated by characters so that those who have just tuned in know exactly where the characters are in the story. The relationships between characters are also emphasized and re-emphasized, and this can be partially attributed to the sheer number of characters present, both primary and secondary. Louise Spence explains, "The repetition of sequences or the repetition of information are opportunities for some viewers to

---

[5] Horace Newcomb, "Reflections on TV: The Most Popular Art," Thinking Outside the Box: A Contemporary Genre Reader, Edgerton, Gary R. and Brian G. Rose (ed.), (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 30-31.
[6] Newcomb, 31.

remember along with the character, signs of commonality, shared memories."[7] Soap operas make a habit of emphasizing not only who characters are, but the nature of familial or romantic relationships between them, through dialogue. Newman states, "Television's redundancy has its causes in making narratives intelligible, but it turns out that it can also allow even regular viewers to be gratified by being reminded constantly of who the characters are, what they do, why they do it, and what is at stake in their story."[8] In Lost's case, the reiteration of information relevant to viewers' understanding of plot is significant, but of course done in a much less exaggerated manner than the at times overwrought melodrama of daytime soap. Due to Lost's detailed narrative, repetition works to help casual viewers better comprehend what it is going on. For example, during season one, familial relationships are often illustrated through Michael's (Harold Perrineau) occasional reminders to the audience that Walt (Malcolm David Kelley) is his son, or Boone's (Ian Somerhalder) propensity for referring to Shannon (Maggie Grace) as his sister. In the first episode of season three, "Man of Science, Man of Faith," Jack asks Hurley (Jorge Garcia) why he said the numbers on the hatch were "bad." Hurley responds,

> A while ago I was in this kind of psych ward, and there was this guy, Leonard and all the time I knew him all he ever said were these numbers 4, 8, 15, 16, 23, 42 over and over and over again. And they kind of got stuck in my head. So, when I got out, well, actually a couple of months after I got out, I was buying a frozen burrito and I thought, hey, I should play the lottery. And I guess those numbers were still stuck in my head so I played them. And I won 114 million dollars. That's when it started happening. My grandpa died, my house caught on fire, the chicken joint that I worked at got hit by a meteor, well, actually meteorite. Okay, so tonight I see the same freaking numbers on the hatch thing just written on the side and that's why I tried to stop it. Because

---

[7] Louise Spence, "Narrative Discourses of Soap Operas; or, How to Watch Soaps," Watching Daytime Soap Operas: The Power of Pleasure, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 75.
[8] Newman, 19-20.

that thing is cursed, man.

Basically, in a few moments Hurley manages to summarize the entire first season episode "Numbers," consequently providing narrative context for his actions. This scene has a humorous tone because of Hurley's rapid-fire delivery of lines. Hurley frequently operates as Lost's comic relief, rather than as tedious plot exposition. Another strategy of redundancy used by many examples of PTS, such as Buffy the Vampire Slayer or Battlestar Galactica (2003 – 2008), is the use of a short series of clips at the beginning of episodes in order to refresh spectators on past events relevant to that episode. This not only serves to fill in the gaps for viewers who have missed previous episodes, but it also reinforces the narrative for those who have not. The quick montage of clips which precedes most episodes is further expanded upon by the inclusion of recap episodes which are aired during Lost's usual time slot. There have been eight such episodes throughout Lost's four seasons, and they are usually aired before significant episodes, such as season premieres or season finales, so that viewers who have missed episodes can play catch-up. The recap episodes also work to summarize important plot points, thus offering clarification to those viewers lost in the convoluted plotlines. Such strategies of redundancy provide a narrative logic and cohesiveness necessary for part-time viewers particularly given that Lost's numerous plots and subplots can be quite intricate.

Lost's interweaving of plot strands is further complicated by the many temporal shifts which take place in its structure. Temporality is another component of soap opera narrative, as frequent use of flashbacks functions as another way in which the genre implements redundant storytelling tactics. Lost's narrative is tightly structured around

weekly flashbacks or flash-forwards, and furthermore, temporality is also significant to the motif of time travel which is increasingly becoming a central focus. In soap opera, flashbacks work to inform viewers of past events that they may have already seen on screen. For Lost, the only flashbacks that serve this purpose are the ones aired at the beginning of the episode. Spence states, "If we think of these flashbacks as syntagmatic redundancies, they always exist in time, but they are also always undoing time, confounding any idea of linearity and subverting the very notion of beginning or end."[9] While Spence is referring specifically to soap opera, the idea that flashbacks have an eroding effect on linearity of narrative opens up a broad range of questions concerning the role of these flashbacks in Lost. In soap opera, flashbacks perform a number of functions, one of those being narrative redundancy, Lost pushes this narrative device to an entirely new level. While soap opera narrative structures can provide valuable insights into the practical workings of Lost, its temporal structure is both unique and complicated, driving it beyond the scope of most existing scholarship which discusses soaps. This ties into the work of Mittell, who states "In trying to understand the storytelling practices of conventional American television, we might consider narrative complexity as a distinct narrational mode."[10] Where the different aspects of both PTS and soap opera converge in Lost, it is through its frequent use of flashbacks that the show participates in this narrative mode as defined by Mittell. While Lost's flashback structure clearly borrows certain soap opera and PTS elements in order to provide narrative cohesion, it is the way in which these elements are utilized by the temporal

---

[9] Spence, 76.
[10] Jason Mittell, "Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television," The Velvet Light Trap, Volume 58, Issue 2, (2006): 29.

structure that aids in constructing Lost as an open text. This ambiguity is achieved in part because the flashback and flash-forward structure works towards the destruction of what is seemingly the end goal of the narrative, escape from the island.

In order to closely scrutinize the use of flashbacks, I will first highlight the workings of a typical Lost episode. "Homecoming," the fifteenth episode of the first season offers a typical example of a character study, in this case Charlie, amidst the gradual buildup of Lost's mythology. The episode begins with a few clips from previous episodes, which explain the kidnapping of Claire (Emilie de Ravin) into the jungle by Ethan Rom (William Mapother). On the island, Charlie has grown attached to Claire and feels responsible for her kidnapping. At the beginning of the episode, she returns to camp with no memory of any events since the plane crash. Ethan appears out of the jungle threatening Charlie that Claire must be returned to him, or he will start killing survivors. Charlie, Jack, Sawyer, Locke and Kate decide to set up a trap to catch Ethan. Since the episode focuses on Charlie, for the most part, the audience is given his perspective of these events. In Charlie's flashbacks, while battling heroin addiction, he begins a relationship with a girl named Lucy (Sally Strecker). She attempts to help him escape his drug-addled ex-rock star lifestyle by getting him a job at her father's company selling photo-copiers. When Charlie fails at the job, and is also caught stealing an expensive antique from Lucy's father, Lucy ends their relationship by telling him that he will never in his life be able to take care of anyone. As with all Lost character-centered episodes, the flashbacks echo the experiences of that character on the island and provide insights into the motivations for their actions and responses. In this instance, while Charlie desperately wants to protect Claire from Ethan who has vowed

he will kidnap her again, the audience is given a privileged view into a time of Charlie's life when he was unable to be there for someone despite his best intentions. At the climax of the episode, Charlie shoots Ethan four times in the chest, killing him and deflecting the threat on her life. While the audience is satisfied that Claire is safe, at least temporarily, they, like the characters themselves, are still left to wonder who exactly Ethan was, why he was after Claire, and if there are indeed other people living on the island. The episode thus utilizes the flashback structure to interweave the personal dilemmas and backstories of the characters with the unfolding mysteries of the show.

There are some practical reasons for this type of flashback structure. With all of its cutting back and forth between different timelines, it does provide a logical flow with commercials. Writing television narrative by its very nature involves rigid segmentation of story in order to accommodate flow. Television writers will use critical junctures in the story to aid in structuring programs around commercial breaks. Spectators are not only forced to follow the constant shifts in temporality spanning commercial breaks, but the producers of the show are also able to use cliffhangers to keep viewers watching. Burton points out how television is driven by a sense of temporal movement or screentime, which itself "moves in and out of real time."[11] Viewers are able to comprehend narrative as television programs cut back and forth between different characters in different situations, as well as between commercials, because they have an understanding that these events are not happening in real-time. The narrative pace generated by these flashbacks presents a useful way of not only

---

[11] Burton, 105.

lessening the interruptive impact of commercials, but using them to aid in story structure.

Lost's flashbacks are of such central importance that they form what Mittell defines as an intrinsic norm. Intrinsic norms, as he describes them, are "storytelling practices that get established as typical within that narrative."[12] The example that Mittell uses is the death-of-the-week scenarios which precede every episode of Six Feet Under. Another example would be the ticking digital clocks, split screens and time accuracy of 24. Mittell also discusses how Six Feet Under in particular is able to manipulate its own intrinsic norms later on in order to produce misdirection and unpredictability. Like Six Feet Under, Lost is able to modify its intrinsic norms to prevent its structure from becoming repetitive. Part of the way Lost establishes this is through its repeated visual cues, such as the many episodes which begin with the close up of an eye. These modifications are significant because they temporally change the entire scope of the program, often re-writing and re-defining all that viewers have come to understand about Lost's diegetic world.

Lost first begins to experiment with its flashbacks with two episodes in the second season. The seventh episode "The Other 48 Days," unlike all previous episodes, does not focus on the pre-crash life of a specific character, but rather an entire group of characters post-crash. These are the tail section survivors, or the tailies to utilize Lost's vernacular, led by Ana Lucia (Michelle Rodriguez) and Mr. Eko (Addewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje). When the plane first crashed, it broke into two sections, the fuselage and the tail section, which landed on opposite sides of the island. While the

---

[12] Mittell, "Film and Television Narrative," The Cambridge Companion to Narrative, David Herman (ed.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 166.

events detailed throughout the first season of Lost are told completely from the perspective of the fuselage survivors, "The Other 48 Days" rewrites that entire timespan from the viewpoint of the tailies. The audience learns that Rose's (L. Scott Caldwell) husband Bernard (Sam Anderson) was the mysterious voice that spoke back to Boone through the Nigerian drug plane's radio in "Hearts and Minds" and that the tailies, like the other group of survivors with Ethan, had a mole in their midst after the crash. "Maternity Leave," the fifteenth episode of season two, like "The Other 48 Days," also retroactively fills in missing narrative gaps. As Claire goes on a mission through the jungle to save her sick baby, she begins to recall memories of the time she spent being held prisoner by Ethan during season one. The episode flashbacks focus not on her pre-island life, but on these events. The audience learns that it was the mysterious Frenchwoman, Rousseau, who helped Claire escape from Ethan and carried her, while unconscious, back to camp. In the finale of season one, "Exodus," Claire experiences a vague memory of scratching Rousseau, which is finally explained. Claire also learns that Ethan took her to another abandoned Dharma station called the Staff, and that he had been given instructions and information by Tom (M.C. Gainey). This episode, like "The Other 48 Days," simultaneously fills in a missing gap of narrative, as well as giving more information about the Others. These episodes manipulate the intrinsic norm of the flashback to not only challenge viewers knowledge of those norms, but to give those viewers more nuggets of information that may help them in untangling Lost's complex mosaic.

While "The Other 48 Days" and "Maternity Leave" offer experimentation with intrinsic norms, their deviations from Lost's formula pale in comparison to the dramatic

structural shift which transpired in the later seasons. In the finale of the third season, "Through the Looking Glass," flashback scenes show a bearded Jack working as a spinal surgeon while spiraling into a prescription drug addiction. It is not apparent until the very final scene where Jack meets up with Kate that the episode's supposed flashbacks are not revealing Jack's hidden past, but rather his future after he and Kate have escaped the island. From this point forward through the fourth season, Lost alternates between flash-forwards and flashbacks. Even flashback episodes, such as the sixth episode of the season "The Other Woman" do not follow the typical model of pre-crash/post-crash flashbacks readily established throughout the first two seasons. "The Other Woman" fills in the gaps of post-crash experiences of Juliet (Elizabeth Mitchell), who is in fact one of the mysterious Others of the third season. In this episode, Ben, the leader of the Others, takes her to the body of Goodwin (Bret Cullen), who was killed by Ana Lucia in "The Other 48 Days." While "The Other Woman" is similar to "Maternity Leave" and "The Other 48 Days" in that they fill in missing pieces of narrative, they are not the most radical mutations of this formula.

All of the flash-forwards center on the group referred to as the "Oceanic Six." These are the six survivors that manage to escape from the island at the end of season four: Jack, Kate, Sayid, Sun, Hurley and Claire's baby, Aaron. These episodes are particularly challenging for viewers because they do not necessarily reveal the future with any type of linear temporal logic. Rather, they provide snapshots into the future with many narrative gaps. The central event that the narrative surges towards is the escape of the Oceanic Six from the island in "There's No Place Like Home, Parts 2 & 3." The exact circumstances of their escape remain somewhat of a mystery throughout

season four's flash-forwards which follow the Oceanic Six after their rescue. In the third episode "The Economist" Sayid is working for the leader of the Others, Ben (Michael Emerson), as an assassin, although the reasons for this arrangement are left relatively unclear. In the season premiere, "The Beginning of the End," Hurley is back in a mental hospital and seeing visions of Charlie, who presumedly died at the end of season three. Charlie tells Hurley that he must go back to the island. In all of these episodes, it is clear that the relationships between the Oceanic Six are strained because they are keeping something secret.

Even as Lost completely revises its original formula, it still refuses to define itself as rigidly in terms of structure, as in the first three seasons, by modifying the temporal structure in a few different ways. The seventh episode of the fourth season, "Ji Yeon," simultaneously shows Sun rushed to the hospital in labour, and Jin (Daniel Dae Kim) rushing to buy a stuffed panda toy as a gift on his way to the hospital. At the end of the episode, it is revealed that Jin's scenes are a flashback, and Sun's are flashforwards, and that Jin never escapes the island. As with the manipulations of intrinsic norms in Six Feet Under that Mittell describes, by modifying the flashback structure and testing viewers knowledge of that norm, the writers of Lost are able to misdirect the audience to dramatic effect. This also has a wider ideological function, since the narrative purposely keeps its audience "lost" in order to allow questioning of the good/evil binary. "The Constant," which focuses on Desmond (Henry Ian Cusick), features flashbacks in a very literal sense. Apparently, due to the unusual effects of the island and his prior exposure to a large amount of electromagnetic energy, Desmond continues to ricochet backwards and forwards in time. He is even able communicate

this to research scientist Daniel Faraday (Jeremy Davies) who instructs Desmond to find him in the past, allowing the present to change the past through Desmond's inadvertent time travel. In all of these examples, narrative information is not only communicated in a markedly non-linear fashion, but the manner in which plot is advanced is much more akin to the placement of puzzle pieces.

In "Re(de)fining Narrative Events: Examining Television Narrative Structure," Michael Porter (et al) discusses a means for television analysis called the scene function model. This model is intended to isolate the functions of specific scenes as units within their larger narrative contexts. While the majority of this article addresses a qualitative content analysis testing the scene function model, it also contains some valuable theoretical concepts which can provide useful insights regarding Lost. Porter identifies two types of narrative units: satellites and kernels. Kernels are, simply explained, "A critical juncture in the story. When a critical juncture in the story would change the very nature of the story depending on the choice made at that juncture, the event is a kernel."[13] For example, from "Homecoming," Charlie's choice to shoot Ethan would qualify as a narrative kernel. More obviously, in the pilot episode, the plane crash itself is a catastrophic event with an immeasurable number of different ramifications for the survivors. The concept of the satellite, on the other hand, refers to contextual information. The authors explain, "The satellites focus on character, setting, or incidental actions that do not move the storyline along its causal trajectory. When a satellite is removed, the basic storyline remains intact, but when a kernel is removed,

[13] Michael Porter et. Al, "Re(de)fining Narrative Events: Examining Television Narrative Structure," Journal of Popular Film and Television, Volume 30, Issue 1, (Spring 2002): 25.

the basic storyline changes dramatically."[14] Furthermore, the authors explain "Satellites focus on character relationships or provide background information on a character, and help create the texture of the narrative by providing depth and richness to the story."[15] The way in which satellites and kernels are wielded within Lost contributes to the complexity of its narrative puzzles. Its use of these devices also suggests the way that Lost draws upon video game structures, which I will also discuss in more detail.

Lost is a program which selectively withholds certain pieces of narrative information including both kernels and satellites. The holding back of certain pieces of information also allows the program to mislead spectators, particularly regarding temporality. The withholding of information pertaining to the characters works to establish a theme of estrangement. The survivors from the fuselage and tail sections are strangers from each other, as well as from the audience. The spectators are left to wonder about their pasts and motivations for actions taken on the island, and this is where the flashbacks serve to fill some of the satellite information. Even then, there are numerous gaps contained in these flashbacks as well, for example it was not until part-way through season three in "The Man From Tallahassee" that it is finally revealed why Locke was in a wheelchair before he arrived on the island. Of all the castaways, Locke is distinctly the most enigmatic, despite the nine episodes which focus on him and his back story. He appears to be spiritually connected to both Ben, Mr. Eko and the island itself, although the true nature of his role, malevolent or benevolent, remains unclear. Despite his numerous flashback episodes, there is simply not enough satellite information available to determine what his motivations are. In "The Moth" he sneaks

---

[14] Porter et al, 25.
[15] Porter et al, 25.

up behind Sayid and knocks him out with a stick before Sayid can turn on a triangulation device to find the source of a radio signal. For some reason, Locke is convinced that fate has determined that the survivors must remain on the island. In the fourth season episode "Cabin Fever," it is implied that Locke's connection to the island runs much deeper than previously revealed. In a flashback to his childhood, Locke is visited by Richard Alpert (Nestor Carbonell), one of the Others, who administers a series of tests. There is a range of similar questions which can be asked about the true nature of Ben, who at first appears to be a villain, although that is also later called into question. By removing key pieces of satellite information about characters and refusing to simply define its heroes and villains, Lost presents a narrative universe which continually questions and destabilizes the good/evil binary. Similarly, narrative kernels which provide context for the entire narrative on a macro level are also notably absent. As viewers see the Swan Station hatch prior to learning about the Dharma Initiative or the Others, effect often precedes cause. These narrative fissures provide gaps of ambiguous meaning where spectators are encouraged to make connections and attempt to unravel Lost's mysteries.

While satellites, kernels, and the narrative gaps created by these elements create mystery, the many visual and thematic motifs which are dispersed throughout the text are also pivotal to the facilitation of the puzzle narrative. These motifs provide clues, insights, and information, and it is possible for viewers to take pleasure in recognizing these patterns. Visual motifs include close ups of eyes, polar bears, and light and dark. Polar bears, for example, roam the island. Not only does one maim Mr. Eko, but during the mini-arc at the beginning of season three, Kate and Sawyer are kept in their old

cages. In first season episode "Special," they are in a Spanish comic book read by Walt. In season two episode "Fire + Water," in a flashback, Charlie and his band Drive Shaft film a commercial for diapers. In the crib with them appear several stuffed polar bears. Spectators who watch closely may also pick up on the vast connections between the many primary and secondary characters who appear in each other's flashbacks. For example, Hurley owns the box company that Locke worked for pre-island, Jack's father had drinks in a bar with Sawyer in Australia, Libby (Cynthia Watros) was the person who supplied Desmond with his sailboat, Jack and Desmond met in an empty sports stadium years before their arrival on the island, Ana Lucia travelled to Australia with Jack's father, and so on. These visual cues and synchronicities which are distributed throughout the narrative operate as a series of clues or puzzle pieces that are significant to the over-arching mysteries and also provide pleasure to viewers who watch closely enough to notice such details. There are also a number of continuing themes, including rebirth, coincidences, car accidents, philosophy, secrets, problematic father figures, and perhaps most iconically, the debate of fate versus free will which has permeated the entire series. It is precisely these types of elements which inspire Lost's fervent fanbase to interpret and re-interpret the text in order to produce a broad range of speculations and theories concerning the narrative questions not yet answered.

Lost's polysemic construction is highly suggestive of video game play. According to Steven E. Jones, "The formal structures of the show, within and across episodes, were modeled on video-game forms and conventions from the start, and so was its fundamental mode of production and reception."[16] In particular, Lost seems to

[16] Steven E. Jones, "Dickens on Lost: Text, Paratext, Fan-based Media," The Wordsworth Circle, Volume 38, Issue 1-2, (Winter/Spring 2007): 72.

parallel the genre of video games called adventure games, which are focused on narrative and problem-solving. As in many problem-solving video games, viewers amass clues, hints, tools, through their viewing of the program. Some of these clues are hidden in the corners of the mise-en-scène to be found with the use of the stop-and-start capabilities of DVD and DVR, while others involve references to philosophical figures or popular culture. Lost's use of meaningful anagrams is another way in which viewers who pay close attention may be rewarded. For example, Ethan Rom is an anagram for "Other Man" and Mittelos Bioscience, the company name the Others use when they recruit Juliet, is an anagram for "Lost Time." Many of these clues and hints are given to the viewer. Not all of them have yet carried through into meaningful conclusions, but sometimes they are, such as the mysterious cable Sayid finds in season one that eventually leads to the Looking Glass Dharma station. Puzzle-solving video games also tend to be user-driven, rather than following a set linear narrative trajectory. This is echoed by Lost's non-linear storytelling style and the way in which this structure shapes how the spectator makes sense of the narrative. Furthermore, there are a startling number of similarities between Lost and the video game Myst which was released in 1993. Like Lost, in Myst the player is dropped on a mysterious island where they must explore an extensive backstory while also playing many of the puzzles which exist in the game's virtual environment. There are a number of other parallels. They both begin with a character falling from the sky, their back stories contain problematic father figures, and the main characters are stranded on an island. Lost's similarity to Myst has been a source of discussion within Lost fan communities, and has also been acknowledged by producer and writer Damon Lindelof. Jones also discusses the

connections between them, stating "Both Myst and Lost engage their characters and players or viewers in discovering the mysterious underlying intentions controlling the worlds in which they take place."[17] Lost's narrative ultimately suggests video game structure. Video games are open texts much more so than television programs.

Lost's similarities with video game structures also extend into the question of whose perspective is being portrayed through the narrative, and this also contributes to the instabilities of meaning that permeate the program. The survivors of the plane crash are in a similar position to the spectator, as when the story begins, there is no pre-conceived set of rules or structure to follow. The narrative propels forward in an exploratory manner from this position of estrangement, as Lost leaps from character to character, creating a multi-threaded story which is seen from a variety of perspectives, each revealing different parts of the story. As with soap operas, the ensemble-based cast and character-centric episodes allow a multitude of different subjective views of the narrative to come to fruition as well as allowing a 'slowing' of time. The diversity of perspectives conveyed comprises not only the plane crash survivors, but other characters such as Ben and Juliet, members of the Others. The Others, a group which in itself has a name loaded with meaning, are almost universally viewed as villains through the perspectives of the survivors, especially in the first two seasons. The Others are responsible for a number of kidnappings and murders throughout the series, yet the audience is asked to identify with Juliet, and are increasingly questioning if Ben, the supposed arch-villain, is evil at all. This is further reinforced in the season four finale, "There is No Place Like Home, Parts 2 & 3." There is a scene where the Others join forces with Kate and Sayid to free Ben from Charles Widmore's mercenaries, who

[17] Jones, 73.

are led by Keamy (Kevin Durand). This scene is particularly interesting in terms of viewer identification, because it encourages the spectator to identify with characters whom for almost four seasons have been the program's villains. This shift in perspective suggests a morally unstable universe where Manichean conceptualizations of the good/evil binary that informs much of Hollywood output, both in film and television, are notably absent. This connects to the ways that Lost questions the role of the subject in post-9/11 society, as it suggests an increasing disempowerment of individuals at the hands of power structures such as government, or in this case, multinational corporations like Widmore Corporation. This instability is further reinforced by the constant questioning of the survivors' perspective. There is a continuing discourse in Lost's dialogue where "evil" characters such as Ben insist that the Others are not the "bad guys" and that they are trying to do the right thing. The viewers begin to question if the heroes are in fact the villains.

If one likens the position of the spectator to an active video game player, then the narrative theories provided by film theorist Edward Branigan can offer insight into the thematic functions of this particular structure. Branigan argues that the spectator plays a specific role in the comprehension of a film narrative while they are watching it. Branigan does not see narrative as working in a unilaterally top-down direction, since the spectator is playing a role in the creation of meaning in the exchange between the text and the audience. In other words, the narrative is not simply unfolding in front of the spectator. While Branigan references more conventional film texts and not television, Lost, because of its game-like narrative, provides an example which brings his ideas into sharp focus. This polysemic open text compels the viewer to creatively

interpret the text because of its non-linearity and strategically missing chunks of narrative; this is how the text must be understood. This process of understanding is illustrated in particular by the close analyses which characterize Lost's online fandom, which I discuss in chapter four. This fragmentary style of storytelling is intrinsically connected to the internal themes of the program, particularly those concerning fate and free will. Thus, Branigan's arguments reflect the narrative of Lost itself, as he looks at how traditional narrative strategies are seen as offering an unbalanced power dynamic in which the spectator is propelled forward by the narrative. Branigan sees spectators as possessing a degree of interpretive agency, since he views them as contributing to the processes of meaning creation that transpire within narratives.

This narrative structure is how Lost is able to open up a wide range of ideological questions concerning the position of the subject in the post-9/11 era. The program engages with a number of issues and anxieties, and this has been recognized in the popular media. For example, J. Wood released the book Living Lost: Why We're All Stuck in the Island where Wood suggests that "Lost has become a repository for our sense of distress that has been generated, rightly or wrongly, through our media, government, and the collective cultural response to such voices."[18] For example, the basic premise of the program, a plane crash, is related to the general fears and anxieties about air travel which were heightened in particular shortly after the events of September 11, 2001.

Torture and terrorism, two issues which frequently circulated within the media in the post-9/11 era, appear within the narrative through the back stories of Sayid. Sayid is a particularly interesting character, since he is a Muslim Iraqi former member

[18] J. Wood, Living Lost: Why We're All Stuck on the Island, (Garrett County Press, 2007), ix.

of Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard, which should codify him as an enemy Other. Sayid is not entirely Othered in his representation, as he is in fact a clever character with a range of skills which prove useful to the castaways. Moreover, he is charismatic and the audience is encouraged to identify with him when they see him protecting, working and fighting with the other survivors. In his second season one episode, "The Greater Good," in his flashbacks, Sayid is blackmailed by the American government to help catch his college roommate Essam (Donnie Keshawarz) who is involved in terrorist activities in Sidney, Australia, in exchange for the whereabouts of his childhood love, Nadia (Andrea Gabriel). While Sayid himself is not a terrorist, its presence in his character's history is significant because it speaks directly to its historical context.

Most of Sayid's flashback episodes are heavily concerned with his training as a torturer. He is a skilled interrogator who uses torture to pursue the truth. He uses his skills of torture in "Confidence" to try and determine whether Sawyer is hiding Shannon's (Maggie Grace) asthma medication. In season three's "Enter 77" flashbacks, Sayid is living in Paris and is captured and confronted by Amira (Anne Bedian), a former torture victim of his who recognizes him in the street. In season two's "One of Them," the survivors have captured Ben, yet they do not yet know that he is the leader of the Others. Ben claims to be the lone survivor of a hot air balloon that crashed on the island. He says that his name is Henry Gale, but the survivors are extremely suspicious and hold Ben prisoner in the hatch. Sayid, working with Locke, manages to get Ben alone in the armory so that he can use his torture skills to extract information. Sayid does this in secret because he rightfully assumes that Jack will object. Locke, in

defending his decision to help Sayid, says to Jack, "You're raising an army, and why you didn't ask me to help, well, that's your business, but there's only one reason to raise an army, Jack, and that's because we're at war. And like it or not, whatever Sayid has to do behind that door, that's part of it too." The way in which the characters discuss the decision to torture Ben echoes the discourses concerning the use of torture methods on suspected terrorists in American military facilities. Interestingly, throughout Sayid's flashback episodes, there is a clear role that American authorities play in the development of his violent tendencies. For example, in "The Greater Good," it is the CIA that asks Sayid to become involved in an underground terrorist group in Australia, ultimately resulting in the suicide of Essam. Also, in "One of Them," in a flashback of Sayid's life as a soldier during the Gulf War, it is shown that Sayid's first experience torturing someone was not part of his job as a soldier. Rather, Inman manipulates Sayid into torturing a fellow Iraqi soldier in order to find a missing American helicopter pilot. Through Sayid, Lost is able to incorporate a range of issues which speak to the post-9/11 cultural context, and questions are opened up about things such as the side effects of American foreign policies. While it does not work through what Ellis describes as raw news reality into an easily digestible conclusion, Lost's open text structure raises these questions and allows the spectator to decide. Lost pulls these issues such as terrorism from the post-9/11 cultural consciousness, and uses them throughout its narrative. But at the same time, as with Sayid, there are no clear moral answers, especially given that often integral pieces of information are missing. For example, the role of Inman in forcing Sayid to torture raises questions about American actions abroad, but these questions are not given easy answers.

The Others are seen throughout the first three seasons especially as the villains of the program, and their name in itself is an incredibly loaded term. The Other has historically fulfilled a function in American myth of reinforcing the self by defining its enemy opposite. As Evelyn Azeez Alsultany describes, "There is always a group that is targeted, racialized, positioned as criminal, illegal, or suspect and used to consolidate American national identity."[19] There are some striking similarities between the Others of the Lost island and terrorists. In the first two seasons, the Others are invisible enemies that surround the survivors in the jungle, and even live amongst them in secret performing acts of sabotage and gathering intelligence, such as with Ethan and Goodwin. If the Others represent the enemy, this is continually destabilized by, as I have discussed, the Others' resolute belief that they are *not* evil, and the unfolding narrative which casts doubts in the minds of the spectator as to their guilt. In Stuart Hall's article "The Spectacle of the Other," he discusses the reasons that representations of Otherness are so prevalent in media. Hall examines why popular representations so frequently adopt discourses of the Other and aid in the reinforcement of difference, particularly in terms of race. Hall states that, "racialized discourse is structured by a set of binary oppositions. There is the powerful opposition between 'civilization' (white) and 'savagery' (black)."[20] While difference between the Others and the survivors is not predicated on distinctions between races, the binary opposition between "civilization" and "savagery" is particularly relevant for Lost, since this binary is collapsed for both groups. The castaways attempt to maintain a semblance of civilization on a deserted

---

[19] Evelyn Azeez Alsultany, The Changing Profile of Race in the United States: Media Representations and Racialization of Arab and Muslim-Americans Post-9/11, (Ann Arbor: Pro Quest Information and Learning Company, 2006), 2.

[20] Stuart Hall, "The Spectacle of the 'Other,'" Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader, Margaret Whetherelle et. Al. (ed.), (London: Sage Publications, 2001), 334.

island where they have been stripped of most modern amenities. Jack and Locke act as de facto leaders who make decisions for the group. The castaways organize systems of water distribution and Sun plants a communal garden. The Others are, at least on the surface, represented as savages, as evidenced by many incidents in the narrative. For example, the Others kidnap all of the children from both the tail and fuselage sections of the plane. In the beginning of season three, they kidnap Sawyer and Kate, imprison them outside in animal cages and force them to perform manual labour, such as breaking rocks. Yet the castaways are also prone to acts of extreme violence and aggression, such as Sayid's brutal beating of Ben. The Others live in a residential community that resembles North American suburbia where they engage in "civilized" activities such as weekly book clubs, yet when they have their initial encounters with the survivors of 815 in season two they are all dressed in primitive clothing with no shoes. The question of who is "savage" or who is "civilized" is a matter of perspective, as it is clear that both sides believe that the others are the villains.

Lost is able to generate this questioning of good and evil through its manipulation of viewer identification. In the very beginning of the program, the viewer is asked to identify with and care for these characters, starting with Jack in the pilot episode. In the first season, Jack, Charlie, Locke, Sun, Hurley, Kate, Sayid, Sawyer, Claire, Jin and Boone are all spotlighted through flashback episodes which focus on them specifically. The audience identifies with these characters as they see them victimized by the faceless mysterious Others who also live on the island. Ethan Rom kidnaps pregnant Claire, and all of the children are kidnapped during the night. This encourages the audience to identify with these characters and view the others as villains,

but this is constantly undermined. For example, during the season two finale, "Live Together, Die Alone," when Michael asks the Others, "Who are you people?" Ben answers, "We are the good guys." The audience is also encouraged to like one of the Others, Juliet. She makes sacrifices to help the survivors, such as her decision to kill Pickett (Michael Bowen) in order to save Jack and Kate. While the survivors doubt her for quite some time, she eventually proves her loyalty and is shown to be a sympathetic character who does not at all fit with earlier portrayals of the Others as universally ruthless savages. This is also established through the flashbacks into her back story which show that she, like the survivors, has been antagonized by Ben. Lost, and the shifting perspectives offered throughout the narrative in combination with the ambiguous sense of good and evil, plays upon viewer identification and ultimately incites the audience to question who is good and who is evil. After almost two seasons of portraying the plane crash survivors as the heroes, this is called into question. While the questioning of good and evil is universal and not unique to the post-9/11 era, in combination with these other elements, such as terrorism, torture and globalization, Lost really speaks to its contemporary context. This connects with the post-9/11 American mindset that in order to maintain the American way of life, there are negative consequences which must be accepted alongside the positive. This marks a departure from more simplistic and straightforward narratives of American supremacy.

Lost is noted for occasionally appropriating traits of the horror genre, which elicits certain connotations related to the concept of Other. The Others seem to be connected somehow to the island's smoke monster, as evidenced by Ben being able to summon it in season four's "The Shape of Things to Come," although for the most part

the origins and functions of this creature remain largely unexplained at present. In the pilot episode, the monster is an unseen force. It is unknown what exactly is responsible for horrific deaths, such as that of the plane's pilot who was ripped from the cockpit in the jungle. The sound effects associated with its presence, a mixture of thumping footsteps, clicking and mechanical screeching, accompanied by the uprooting of trees, suggest either a dinosaur or some type of machinery. It is not actually seen until season one finale "Exodus, Part 2." The scenes where the survivors must escape the smoke monster in particular resonate with horror genre expectations, since they are usually highly suspenseful chase scenes where the characters must run or hide in order to escape a gruesome fate. The smoke monster appears to select victims without discretion, and kills them by grabbing them and slamming them into the ground. It also can appear in human form, as in "The Cost of Living" when it appears to Mr.Eko as his younger brother Yemi. Robin Wood, drawing on psychoanalysis, looks at how in horror film, society's repressed fears become embodied in a horrific Othered monster character, who wreaks havoc until society's fears are either assuaged, or annihilated completely. While Lost is certainly not a pure horror text in any sense, it is drawing upon what is already a politically-charged genre that has routinely dealt with society's underlying anxieties. While Wood discusses the different societal anxieties that inform horror cinema, such as women's unrepressed sexuality, there is no clear singular fear which is embodied by the smoke monster, since throughout Lost's four seasons, the smoke monster's role has been so undefined. The monster is not defeated or subdued in any way because the question remains, "What or who is the monster?" This, in conjunction with the as of yet unclear role of the Others, suggests an erosion on this

absolute Other which has always played a key role in forming and reinforcing hegemonic American identity.

As Lost has progressed, the mysterious Widmore Corporation, run by Charles Widmore, has had an increasing role in the narrative. The Widmore Corporation is a large conglomerate of different companies, whose first appearances in the narrative are peripheral in nature. For example, the balloon belonging to the real Henry Gale had a Widmore Labs logo on the side. In season three episode "D.O.C." Desmond, Jin, Charlie and Hurley find an injured woman, Naomi (Marsha Thomason), who had parachuted onto the island. This is the survivors' first contact with anyone from the outside world since their plane crashed, and when they tell her that they are the survivors of Oceanic flight 815, she responds that there were no survivors of flight 815. According to Naomi, the bodies and the plane had been found. In the third episode of season four, "Confirmed Dead," it is confirmed that the plane was found in a deep ocean trench off the coast of Indonesia by an ocean salvage boat. It is stated by Tom in "Meet Kevin Johnson" that the wreckage had been staged by Widmore himself, who had purchased an airplane and exhumed a cemetery in Thailand. The team of mercenaries sent to search for the island in season four were all recruited and sent by Widmore. Keamy (Kevin Durand), the leader of this group, is instructed to kill the survivors of flight 815 if they exist because Widmore is so determined to keep the island a secret from the rest of the world. Widmore, as made clear in "The Shape of Things to Come," is locked in a rivalry with Ben and will do whatever it takes to gain possession of the island. In "The Constant," when Desmond travels back in time, it is revealed that Widmore bought a copy of the ship's log of the Black Rock, which is the

nineteenth century sailing ship which is mysteriously marooned on the island. Widmore and his corporation represent the unmitigated powers of multinational corporations. Although it is unknown what he wants to do with the island, it is clear that he is trying to exploit the island, while Ben is trying to protect the island. Furthermore, their increasing significance in the narrative is again another way in which good and evil are continually de-polarized. Because what is "special" about the island is still unclear, the morality of these characters in their actions is also uncertain. The increasing importance of the Widmore Corporation ultimately suggests how Lost's narrative has shifted its focus from fears which emerged in response to 9/11 towards these overarching power structures which disempower the individual subject.

While Lost engages a range of issues that are floating around in mass cultural consciousness in the wake of the events of 9/11, the strategically placed gaps in the narrative prevent the program from espousing any one universal understanding of these events. Lost's themes of fate and free will drives much of the narrative, and this central debate fuels larger questions about the numerous issues raised within the narrative. How can the individual subject feel a sense of control or agency in a universe that is entirely dictated by various bureaucratic systems of power, such as mass culture and government? Lost's video game structure, while drawing upon and modifying more conventional television styles, persuades the viewers to become active and engaged and use their cognitive energy to interpret the narrative. This suggests that consumers are participating in a dynamic process rather than being subject to the larger forces of narrative. Lost's structure indicates that consumers have become more active players in

textual interpretation. An analysis of how the text has been received and interpreted by its fandom will shed light on how this open text structure affects viewing agency.

Chapter Four: The Decipherers of Lost: Bloggers, Fans and Participatory Culture

Lost's fan following provides a particularly interesting example to consider within the context of academic discourses concerning participatory cultures and the notion of fans as a form of cultural resistance. While much has been written about fandom, there tend to be two general schools of thought concerning fan subjectivity. There are some such as Henry Jenkins who celebrate the fan as a maverick among consumers who works against the dominant cultural hierarchy. Conversely, Sara Gwenllian Jones is critical of the view that fandom is antithetical to the culture industries, and instead argues that cultural products can in fact be made with this specific type of consumption in mind. Others, such as Matt Hills, attempt to cultivate an understanding that tolerates the contradictions between these two opposing perspectives. Not only do these circulating discourses surrounding the implications of fandom for the fan as subject spark a particular resonance with the core fate/free will theme of Lost, but the fans of the program itself also function as compelling examples to test these theories.

Lost's following has developed in response to the video game-like narrative structure of the program, since it is largely built around the construction of often incredibly detailed theories which attempt to untangle the central mysteries of the narrative, usually on blogs or discussion boards. This notion of the fan as a decipherer, and the kind of deeply engaged critical consumption required seemingly suggests the possibility for agency, but this type of fervent involvement with the text has been directly courted by the producers of Lost through both podcasts as well as the viral

marketing approach known as an ARG (Alternate Reality Game). ARGs are an interactive online game where users can work together to problem solve, thus mirroring the narrative structure of the show itself. While these highly investigative modes of viewer interaction are not entirely unique to Lost, they are atypical within the context of more conventional fan practices. Yet these two different modes are not mutually exclusive, since more typical varieties of fandom activity such as fan fiction, "relationshipping," the writing of episode guides, YouTube videos, and so on, exist alongside more in-depth textual interpretations. Lost's game-like narrative, cult status, fan following and innovative marketing strategies operate as a crystallization of the transformations of the television form associated with the era of TVIII. Cult programs are typically seen as existing on the cultural fringes, but Lost presents a full-scale intentional commercialization of fan consumption, and this problematizes earlier conceptualizations of fans as a resistant minority. While there are of course real-world social events, such as conventions, where Lost fans may congregate, this chapter will focus explicitly on the role of the internet in facilitating Lost's fandom. An analysis of Lost and its fans within this context, drawing upon scholars such as Hills and Jenkins, will examine this question of fan agency in relation to these overarching issues of fate and free will in the post-9/11 historical context. The way that Lost engages its fans suggests that there has been a transformation of fandom from a deviant form of consumption into a desirable mainstream demographic.

Lost is only a recent example of what has become a persistent trend in prime time serial drama, the cult television program. Other examples include Twin Peaks, The Prisoner (1967 – 1968), The X-Files, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel, Firefly,

Battlestar Galactica, Roswell (1999 – 2002), the various incarnations of Star Trek, and so on. It is difficult to define exactly what constitutes a cult television program, at least in terms of what is contained within the text itself, since cult status stems from audience response. Because cult television shows span across a broad range of different genres, it is difficult to distinguish exactly what makes these programs particularly conducive to the highly engaged modes of consumption associated with participatory cultures. Rhonda Wilcox argues that many of these programs fall under a genre which she describes as "Unreal TV." She argues that, "The series…generally display self-awareness of textuality fueled by hybridization of genres (detective, horror, comedy, soap opera, etc.) and paralleled by an awareness of social influences."[1] Wilcox states that Unreal TV usually couples richly detailed and often fantastical narrative worlds with emotional realism. She says, "Interpreting symbols or contemplating self-reference – both involve active viewing. And, again, these series offer emotional connection to vivid, often mythic characters. It is therefore not surprising that many of these series have strong fan reactions."[2] Indeed, Lost's intricate narrative, its blending of various genres such as science fiction, horror and soap opera, alongside its often intimate portrayals of its various characters and their back stories, adheres to Wilcox's description of Unreal TV. While Wilcox's definition is broad and generalized, it does help in pinpointing which characteristics within Lost as a text have attracted and sustained its cult following. In Lost's case, the term "cult" perhaps carries a slightly different connotation, since it has achieved considerable mainstream popularity, rather than the more marginalized type of success typically associated with the term cult. Lost

---

[1] Rhonda Wilcox, "Unreal TV," Thinking Outside the Box: A Contemporary Genre Reader, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 201.
[2] Wilcox, 204.

is very much like its predecessor, The X-Files, in that it has been able to gain widespread commercial success, while having a fanbase whose consumption practices are very much in line with the notion of cult status. Although Wilcox describes the common attributes amongst a broad range of often divergent genres of television texts, looking to the category of Unreal TV will not provide a thorough understanding, since it reduces the cult television program to what is contained within the narrative, and a cult following is located outside of the text.

Not all television programs which feature fantastic narratives alongside emotional realism have been able to generate the type of viewer interest that Lost has. Gwenllian Jones emphasizes that the fan is a distinct and profitable type of consumer who is actively cultivated by cultural producers. This is particularly relevant when examining fandom within the context of TVIII because of its process of fragmentation which works to splinter an already increasingly segmented audience. Cultural producers need to hold on to these fragments of audiences, and this is built into the production of Lost. Yet, it is important to recognize that cult status is achieved through what is in fact a two-way process between producers and the way audiences receive the text. Producers and marketers cannot merely ascribe cult status to a television text because that status must be developed by fans as well. This type of consumption is developed more organically in a complex dialectical process between both consumers and producers. Hills shows how "Cult shows become so over time, through audience routines and repeated viewings, as well as through organized fandoms, reading protocols, textual forms, the situated agency of media producers, and media institutional

contexts, such as syndication or prolonged seriality."[3] Hills argues that cult status is created not through merely the text itself, but how that text circulates in the media more widely. Cult TV is created through a series of intertextual relations, including peripheral texts related to the program, and also how the program is described in other media. Hills acknowledges that cult status is dependent on a complex and dynamic set of factors, including both fans and producers, and that reducing cult status down to one of these categories is problematic because it discounts all of the others. Lost's following is particularly relevant when looking at how both Hills and Gwenllian Jones view the cult television program precisely because the cult following has been so readily encouraged by producers. At the same time, it should be pointed out that the authors of the program claim that this was not initially their intent. On the DVD extras for season two, there is a featurette called "Mysteries, Theories and Conspiracies," producer Carlton Cuse states, "I don't think we ever anticipated the sort of fervent discussion of what the heck is going on on the show. Sure, we thought there'd be a few people speculating here and there, but we didn't realize it would become this zeitgeist pastime."[4] Yet, a large internet fan following has developed, with information sites such as The Lost Notebook and discussion boards such as The Fuselage providing fans with a forum to discuss, analyze and organize information concerning the text of the program. Thus, Lost's cult status is the result of a constellation of factors, both extending from the marketing strategies of the producers, as well as how consumers have responded.

In chapter three, I discussed the polysemic and intricately detailed narrative structures of Lost. This open text style narrative gives its viewers clues and hints, and

---

[3] Matt Hills, "Defining Cult TV: Texts, Inter-texts and Fan Audiences," The Television Studies Reader, Robert C. Allen and Annette Hill (ed.), (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 522.
[4] Lost, Created by JJ Abrams and Damon Lindelof, DVD, Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2006.

for the fans who watch most attentively, it offers pleasure for those able to unlock secrets not yet revealed. This mode of viewing is the focus of many Lost fans. There are websites, such as The Lost Notebook or Lostpedia, as well as numerous fan-written blogs and discussion boards, where fans catalogue, analyze and discuss every minute detail of the program. Some fans will pick apart each episode frame-by-frame; this particular approach is aided in part by the availability of technologies such as DVR which allow viewers to stop and start the episode. On BuddyTV, a general television website, still-frame analyses are available for each episode, as fans find the hidden Easter eggs placed within the mise-en-scène. For example, in a still frame analysis of season four episode "Ji Yeon," a fan says, "When Sun went into labor, the episode of 'Expose' in which Nikki's character is killed off was playing on her TV. I found this hugely entertaining because, while many fans would much rather forget about Nikki and Paulo, the Lost writers haven't."[5] Other examples of still-frame analysis actually contain information which has not yet been revealed otherwise in the narrative, such as the second season episode "Lockdown," where a map of the island momentarily appears on the blast door in the hatch. This map contained information about other Dharma stations not yet revealed, and fans went to great trouble deciphering the map, as well as trying to connect it to the larger mysteries of the show. This scene also seems to imply that there is some intent on the part of the producers to cultivate this type of fan interest, despite whatever denials they have made, particularly given how esoteric some of these details are.

---

[5] BuddyTV, "Lost Easter Eggs: "Ji Yeon" #2 - Nikki's Back!" (March 14, 2008), Accessed 21 October, 2008,
< http://www.buddytv.com/articles/lost/more/lost-easter-eggs-ji-yeon-2-nik-17664.aspx >

The formulation of detailed theories which seek to explain the different mysteries of the program, while not unique to Lost, is not exactly a common practice among all television fan cultures, since it tends to happen in response to mystery narratives. The website, LOST-Theories.com, functions as an archive where users post often highly detailed theories about the program. The online fan communities of Twin Peaks, a program which Lost has often been compared to in terms of narrative complexity, were very similar in terms of the intensely detailed nature of the narrative analysis. Jenkins discusses in detail the online fan communities of Twin Peaks. He states, "The formulation of such theories is the logical response to a mystery, part of the typical reception of any whodunit, yet rarely has the consumption of a mystery been conducted in such a public fashion. The technology of the net allows what might previously have been private meditations to become the basis for social interaction."[6] The collective of Lost fan communities, and their compiling of various theories and prediction, certainly mirror the activities of Twin Peaks fans. The role of the internet in facilitating such discussions taps into the questions raised by Lost in terms of post-9/11 anxieties that deal with individual agency in the era of expanding government and corporate power. Technology works to give the illusion to its users that they are able to use the internet to somehow express their own identity, when in fact they are inextricably entangled within these overarching power structures.

Many of the theories, posted on various websites, discussion boards, and blogs, range in detail from extremely brief, to richly detailed. Amongst the dozens of theories posted on LOST-Theories.com, there are theories that all of the characters are clones,

---

[6] Henry Jenkins, Fans, Bloggers and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture, (New York and London: New York University Press, 2006), 124.

the island is purgatory, Ben (Michael Emerson) stays still while time moves around him, the island is rigged with extremely advanced surveillance technology and that is how the Others have so much knowledge about their enemies, the lead character Jack is actually the mysterious figure of Jacob, and so on. [7]

Many of these theories not only take into account information contained within the text, but fans often seek to make connections with the broader context of popular culture. Lost is well known for its numerous references to different intellectual figures and philosophers, such as John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, David Hume, and so forth. Fans occasionally will research these figures and incorporate it into their analyses. For example, one poster, fivestades, on Lost-Theories.com, discusses the significance of Jeremy Bentham, the inventor of the panopticon, to the program's surveillance motif. In the finale of season four, Jeremy Bentham is used as an alias for the character John Locke. The poster explains the various mysteries through an analysis which suggests that the island exists to develop surveillance technologies, such as the smoke monster. The poster explains, "There is no doubt in my mind of the Smoke Monsters (sic) function. It is one of many trial pieces of surveillance technology on the island..... It is designed to 'live' under the cities pop up (sic) and scan random members of the public for law breaking. It maybe even has the right to judge on site."[8] This example highlights the critical thinking processes which many Lost fans engage in through their ability to follow its intertextual connections.

While some fan theories involve this type of background research, there are different varieties of fan theories floating around the internet. Lost: A Theory on Time

---

[7] LostTheories.com, Accessed October 22 2008. < http://lost-theories.com/>

[8] "Eyeland," LostTheories.com, (September 9, 2008), Accessed October 24 2008. < http://lost-theories.com/theories/2008/sep/09/eyeland >

Travel is a theory that is so detailed and compelling that it has its own internet domain. It breaks down narrative events into a definitive chronology. The author concludes that all of the events on the island can be explained by the presence of a time machine. This theory goes into intense detail, accounting for many unanswered questions, such as the smoke monster, which according to the author, Jason Hunter, "is the 'physical means' in which the timeline course corrects itself."[9] The frequency and depth of these theories suggests similarity with the Twin Peaks following described by Jenkins. Lost's online fan communities partake in a consumption of the series that is highly analytical and indicative of critical independent thinking. Jenkins says, "If Twin Peaks was an exceptional television series, then they were an exceptional audience who possessed all the cultural competencies necessary to fully appreciate its greatness."[10] His statement gestures towards the ways in which Lost's audience has reacted to and interacted with its elaborate narrative. Jenkins adopts a celebratory view of such engaged fan culture, and this is not my intention here. While this type of analysis is not the only way Lost fandom is mobilized, it does suggest that Lost fans are capable of producing sometimes profoundly insightful, even educated, readings of the text. The theory-producing Lost fan is a far cry from the imbecilic cultural dopes described by early cultural theorists such as the Frankfurt School. While Lost fans can be competent readers, their capacity for understanding a complicated text in fact highlights exactly how polarized this binary of producer/consumer is within this context of TVIII and convergence culture. As these fans continue to provide innovative readings of the text, they also continually play into the hands of cultural producers. Lost's creators are able to include these markers within

---

[9] Jason Hunter, Lost: A Theory on Time Travel, (October 29 2007) Accessed October 22 2008. < http://www.timelooptheory.com/the_timeline.html >

[10] Jenkins, 132.

the text, such as the designs on the blast door in "Lockdown," with the knowledge that fans will eagerly scrutinize them. By cultivating the fan audience and continuing to create a text which is contributory to such in-depth analyses, Lost is able to keep its loyal fanbase interested.

Episode guides play an important role in how fans manage and record the large swaths of narrative data. For Lost fans, this can include the recording of even the smallest details. Hills argues that, "Official and unofficial episode guides appeal to fans of cult TV as a tool to manage seriality and make its repetitions and differences, its temporal unfolding, more orderly and immediately present to its fans as 'archived' knowledge."[11] Hills examines how these episode guides work, as secondary texts, to manage the seriality of the primary text. By managing the text, often in an encyclopaedic manner, Lost fans are able to, as Hills describes, "erase the temporality of consumable data,"[12] essentially converting television text into catalogued information that is easily navigated by fans. There are numerous websites on the internet which offer episode recaps. While the official ABC website itself has an episode guide, as does TV Guide's official website, these sources are official and not fan-authored. The Lost Recaps is a blog which features thorough summaries of Lost episodes, including screen stills, but also featuring the commentary of the blog's author. LostMedia has thorough episode summaries for every season. Perhaps the most interesting is the episode guide on Lostpedia. Lostpedia, which uses an interface identical to Wikipedia, hyperlinks from relevant terms and characters so that users can explore a non-linear

---

[11] Hills, "Cult TV, Quality and the Role of the Episode/Programme Guide," The Contemporary Television Series, Michael Hammond and Lucy Mazdon (ed.), (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 192.
[12] Hills, 192.

digital landscape at will. The entry for Lost's first episode, "Pilot Part 1," contains link to a number of other relevant entries. Not only can they look at profiles of characters such as Jack and Sun, related topics such as the mid-air breakup of the plane, the jungle and Charlie's band Drive Shaft, but they can also look at entries on repeated themes and motifs, such as an entry on rain. Furthermore, the Lostpedia, as with other wikis, is collectively written by many authors and as such, is a byproduct of the fan community as a whole. Such secondary texts work to expand the hyperdiegetic space of the narrative. Interestingly, Lostpedia also has a "Fanon" section which catalogues information related to Lost's fan culture, such as popular fan theories and websites. This information exists alongside the series canon, further suggesting the interconnected nature of the program and its most ardent viewers. Furthermore, the way that Lost has thoroughly embraced these new emerging technological practices also suggests how the lines are increasingly blurring between these forms, as suggested by Jenkins' concept of convergence culture.

The vast array of online fan sites plays a dual role, since they allow Lost fans to find new ways to enjoy the object of their admiration, as well as providing valuable market research to Lost's creators. Mark Andrejevic, through a case study focusing on the website Television Without Pity, examines how internet fan interactions are valuable assets to television producers. He states, "For producers, fan sites such as TWoP can serve as an impromptu focus group, providing instant feedback to plot twists and the introduction of new characters even as they help imbue the show with a kind of 'stickiness' coveted in the online world by creating a virtual community as an added

component of the show."[13] While it remains to be seen how much Lost's writers and producers look at fan boards, there are some indications within the text that they do pay some attention to what is transpiring within Lost fan communities. It is at least known that writers and actors frequent the official discussion board, The Fuselage. In season two episode "The Whole Truth," when Sun takes a pregnancy test that she acquires from Sawyer, Kate poses the question which viewers are surely asking, "Where did Sawyer find one of these anyway? I mean, who flies with a pregnancy test, right?"[14] Similarly, in season two episode "Dave," Hurley becomes convinced that all the events on the Lost island are not real and that he is imagining them, thus insinuating fan theories which have explained the events on the island as a dream or hallucination. Online fan communities, while not always officially condoned as with The Fuselage, can still become re-inserted into the commercial framework in which Lost exists as a consumer product. This implies that, as Andrejevic suggests, "*all* audiences are active, although perhaps not in the progressive sense the term has come to imply."[15] It is increasingly difficult to adopt the romanticized conceptualization of the fan as textual poachers given current trends towards mainstream cultivation of fans. Hills suggests, "The best we can hope for is a theoretical approach to fandom which can tolerate contradiction without seeking to close it down permanently."[16] It is these contradictions within Lost's fandom that seem to mirror the questions posed by the narrative of the program itself. The fate/free will theme and the narrative structure itself, address these

---

[13] Mark Andrejevic, "Watching Television Without Pity: The Productivity of Online Fans," Television & New Media, Volume 9, Issue 1, (January 2008): 25.
[14] Lost, By J.J. Abrams and Damon Lindelof, Perf. Matthew Fox, Josh Holloway, Evangeline Lilly, Naveen Andrews. ABC, (United States: Bad Robot), 2004 - 2008.
[15] Andrejevic, 25.
[16] Hills, Fan Cultures, (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 29.

ideas of agency in the post-9/11 world. As Lost's fandom presents a new form of mainstream commercialized cult consumption, it suggests ways that this deviant form of consumption has become increasingly sanitized by industrial structures.

In looking at the role of internet episode guides, discussion forums and blogs, there are underlying questions revolving around the tenuous status of the internet as virtual community. This question is innately connected to the question of fan agency, and furthermore, to how Lost captures the current cultural climate, since the post-9/11 context is marked by a decline in community as monolithic government institutions such as Homeland Security remove civil liberties in order to fight the War on Terror. Are Lost fans truly an online culture or community? An internet community, while it may emulate structures of real-life communities, is not necessarily the same thing, since it exists in a completely digital realm. These interactions depend completely on the uses of particular technologies. According to Gwenllian Jones, "Fandom is a construct, not really a 'culture' at all but a nodal gathering of disparate individuals who may well have little in common beyond a shared love for their cult object. The stability and coherence indicated by the nominations 'fan culture' and 'fandom' are largely artificial; the terms describe a set of consumer practices, modes of intense engagement, not a discrete, consistent or homogenous consumer population."[17] Gwenllian Jones sees fan practices only as a pattern of consumption. She is highly critical of the valorization of the fan from writers such as Jenkins, who she says paint the fans as "modern-day Robin Hoods."[18] Jenkins, on the other hand, does not see the notion of fan community as

---

[17] Sara Gwenllian Jones, "Web Wars: Resistance, Online Fandom and Studio Censorship," Quality Popular Television: Cult TV, the Industry and Fan, Mark Jancovich and James Lyons (ed.), (London: BFI Publishing, 2003), 171.
[18] Gwenllian Jones, 163.

problematic, since "[to speak as a fan] is also to speak from a position of collective identity."[19] Again, the questions that can be raised surrounding Lost's fandom echo the questions of community raised within the program. Sarah N. Gatson and Amanda Zweerink perform an in-depth ethnographic study of online communities for Buffy the Vampire Slayer. They discuss how there are two dominant threads in academic thought on the issue of internet community, in which machines are seen as either stunting humanity's growth, or "Providing new avenues for human development."[20] The latter is the position taken by Gatson and Zweerink, who examine how online fan communities are a form of adaptive cultural practice, and furthermore, politicized, particularly in terms of identity. Jenkins argues that digital technologies in fact enable not only fandom, but fandom as a source of cultural production in the form of fan fiction or fanzines, as well as consumption. Fans engage in this complex process of consumption and creation, which again creates an illusory sense that when working within a community whose collective identity is predicated upon consumption that fans are able to take control of their object of admiration. Where Gwenllian Jones and Gatson, Zweerink and Jenkins argue from opposite sides, Lost's fandom lies somewhere in the middle.

Not all online Lost fan sites are concerned with the labrynthine narrative, as female fans are often drawn to the relationships and romances between the various characters. This relates to Wilcox's definition of Unreal TV and the notion of emotional realism. As Jenkins describes, "Female fans often use the program as a basis

---

[19] Henry Jenkins, Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture, (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 23.
[20] Sarah N. Gatson, and Amanda Zweerink, Interpersonal Culture on the Internet: Television, the Internet and the Making of a Community, (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004), 13.

for gossip."[21] "Relationshipping" is a term used to describe support for different romantic pairings of characters, such as Jack and Kate, Sawyer and Kate, or Claire and Charlie. This can manifest through online LiveJournal communities, message boards or fan sites. In addition to pairings that exist within the narrative, some fans also "ship" non-canon pairings. For example, the LiveJournal Lost and Snarky is dedicated to the various permutations of pairings between the characters Sawyer, Kate and Sayid. With the ease and availability of video editing software, there are numerous fan-made videos on websites such as YouTube which celebrate different pairings by editing together footage from the program set to music. These pairings may be canonical, in that these relationships actually exist on the program. Some pairings are non-canon, in that fans pair up characters who are not together on the program. For example, a video called "Hurley and Libby – Lost" features footage of the two characters set to Rascall Flatts' "What Hurts the Most." While some fans of Lost spotlight the heterosexual pairings, it is the tradition of slash fiction which has been seen as challenging hegemonic gender construction.

Fan fiction, the writing of non-canon stories by amateur writers based on the characters and narrative of the program, is very much alive within Lost's fan following. The Lost Fan Fiction Archive is a website with hundreds of different stories written by fans. The fan fiction is separated into four categories, slash, heterosexual, multi-pairing and general fan fiction. The stories are rated according to how graphic they are, and this ratings system is based on the North American film ratings system. Some of these stories contain graphic sexual content. It is slash, which refers to non-canon homosexual pairings, which has been the object of some scrutiny. Slash fiction is

[21] Jenkins, 126.

mostly written by female writers. Anne Kustritz argues, "It offers singular challenges to normative constructions of gender and romance as it allows women to construct narratives that subvert patriarchy by re-appropriating those prototypical hero characters who usually reproduce women's position of social disempowerment."[22] Slash fiction emerged from science fiction fandoms in the early 1990s, and has been associated in particular with the original Star Trek series and the pairing of Spock and Captain Kirk. The writing and distribution of fan fiction has proliferated significantly through internet fan communities, since it is a much more cost effective way to publish material, and this has become a staple in many online cult television communities. At the time I am writing this, there are 153 different stories available at The Lost Fan Fiction Archive, with numerous character pairings, such as Jack and Sawyer, Sayid and Sawyer, Charlie and Sayid, Jack and Boone, and so on. Women writers are able to reconfigure the narrative of the program to generate stories which radically deviate from the canonical text. While this can be seen as a form of resistance, at least in terms of how women are able to subvert patriarchy through their appropriation of Lost, these writers are still working within the constraints of consumption, suggesting a tenuous sense of agency. While fans are able to use these practices to produce their own cultural artifacts in order to assert a sense of identity, they are restricted in that they are never really escaping the boundaries of consumption. Slash fiction is arguably limited as a means of asserting fan agency.

The line between fandom as a form of resistance to social hierarchy and the fan as automaton consumers playing into the hands of cultural producers, is increasingly

---

[22] Anne Kustritz, "Slashing the Romance Narrative," Journal of American Culture, Volume 26, Issue 3, (September 2003): 383.

blurred, since older "resistant" forms of fan practices exist alongside a newfound industry acceptance of fandom. In the 1990s, prior to the widespread availability of internet access, fandom genuinely did exist on the fringes of mass culture. Hills points out, "An expressed hostility within fandom towards commercialization and commodification"[23] has contributed to the view that fandoms are "somehow anti-consumerist."[24] This can be related to a number of lawsuits from 20th Century Fox against fan sites for shows like The X-Files and The Simpsons (1989 – present) for using copywritten materials. In 1997, LucasFilm attempted to stop online slash fiction and digitally altered pornographic images of Star Wars characters. Such antagonism between cultural producers and fan cultures has died down considerably. However, the cultural climate where Lost has found its success is markedly different than, for example, the context in which Jenkins discusses early internet fan discussions of Twin Peaks. Lost's fans have been thoroughly embraced by the producers of Lost, and this is evidenced in a number of ways. Weekly podcasts have included interviews with writers and actors, as well as numerous appearances by producers Lindelof and Cuse. Lost: The Official Magazine is a bi-monthly official publication. It is, however, Lost's viral marketing campaigns which embody the way that Lost has embraced both fan cultures as well as technology. This also suggests that the term "cult" may be shifting in the context of TVIII, since the term typically implies that it runs counter to the mainstream, which is now readily accepting cult practices.

Viral marketing is a relatively new form of marketing that has accompanied the influx of technologies associated with TVIII, and this type of marketing has played a

---

[23] Hills, Fan Cultures, (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 28.
[24] Hills, 28.

significant role in how Lost is marketed to its fans. While there are slightly different definitions in circulation, Justin Kirby states, "Viral advertising consists of creating contagious advertising messages or material that get passed from peer to peer in order to increase brand awareness."[25] Viral marketing exists completely within the digital realm, and often the techniques used are so unusual that they garner more attention than whatever product is actually being advertised. Lost's very first foray into this type of marketing was the viral website for the fictional Oceanic Airlines (www.oceanic-air.com). Here, the website is configured similarly to genuine airline websites, where users can check for flight prices and flight status. The website contains a message from Michael Orteig, the company's president, stating "After 25 years of service, we are forced to close our doors. Due to financial difficulties in the wake of the Flight 815 tragedy, we are no longer able to sustain service."[26] On the top of the page, there is an image of a tropical beach. Upon close inspection, the image has a plume of black smoke, which becomes animated if one enters the correct words ("THE" and "BOY") on the main page. If one clicks the "FIND" button without entering anything, a seating chart appears which contains hidden images of characters such as Jack and Boone activated by clicking on the correct seats. There are various other Easter eggs throughout the website as well. Like other forms of viral marketing, the Oceanic Airlines website garners attention not only for the primary artifact being marketed, Lost, but also draws attention purely because of how unconventional it is. From a corporate perspective, it is expected that Lost fans will view the website and pass the web address along to other like-minded fans, essentially transmitting the message via free digital

---

[25] Justin Kirby, "Viral marketing," Connected Marketing: The Viral, Buzz and Word of Mouth Revolution, Justin Kirby and Paul Marsden (ed.), (Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann, 2006), 88.
[26] Oceanic Airlines, Accessed October 22 2008. < http://oceanic-air.com >

word-of-mouth advertising. The success of this website was later expanded upon by the continuing use of Lost-themed alternate reality games (ARG).

The use of ARGs in the promotion of Lost is important because not only does it incorporate fan cultures into corporate motives, but it also adheres to the notion of convergence culture or multiplatforming, a trend which has proliferated significantly with the technological advancements of TVIII. These marketing techniques, while used for a wide range of different products, are particularly suitable for the marketing of a cult television text. Cult television narratives tend to be sophisticated, as noted by Hills, who states, "[Cult TV] constructs immensely detailed, often fantastic, narrative worlds which we as viewers can never fully encounter, since much of this detail operates like a set of clues or hints to a consistent narrative world which transcends what we learn about onscreen."[27] Similarly, Gwenllian Jones points out, "The television text itself cannot be interacted with; it has no facility for material intervention and exists unalterably unassailable from opening sequence through to closing credits. The fiction that it generates, and which vastly exceeds containment by any discrete text, is a different matter."[28] The ARG, which is a subtype of viral marketing, is one way in which Lost has exceeded the boundaries of the televised text itself. ARGs are an interactive puzzle-solving game which takes place on the internet. Henrik Örnebring explains:

> ARG begins when players find or are directed to an entry point into the mystery (commonly a web page) and the first set of clues (this entry point is known as a *rabbit hole* or *trail head*). Players then alert other players through email or web forum messages and play commences. Play is collective and when someone finds the solution to a puzzle or the meaning of a clue this is

[27] Hills, "Defining Cult TV: Texts, Inter-texts and Fan Audiences," The Television Studies Reader, (Robert C. Allen and Annette Hill. London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 511.
[28] Gwenllian Jones, 167.

> generally posted online for all participants to see, so that everyone can progress through the narrative.[29]

Thus, the structure of ARGs somewhat mirrors Lost's narrative. As internet users can play the ARGs, the program invites spectators to "play" the game of Lost. Thus, in both cases, the consumption of Lost creates an illusion of agency for its consumers.

There have been three separate ARGs for Lost, all of which were created in conjunction with the program's writers. The first of these, The Lost Experience, launched in May 2006, at the end of the second season and throughout the following hiatus. The smaller-scale game, Find 815, took place during the hiatus between the third and fourth seasons. The most recent Lost-related ARG is the Dharma Initiative Recruiting Project, which took place during the hiatus between seasons four and five. These ARGs both allowed an expansion of the narrative of the program, and fulfilled a commercial role as well. A large reason that ARGs like The Lost Experience were so successful with Lost fans is because they promised to provide insights into the narrative of the program. **[SLIDE]** The Lost Experience was connected to the publishing of a tie-in novel, Bad Twin, which was released in May 2006. Bad Twin was, in the show, written by plane crash victim Gary Troup, and is read by Hurley in season two episode "The Long Con." The actual publication was written by ghostwriter Laurence Shames. The book that was released centers on Paul Artisan, a detective, who is hired by a member of the Widmore family. Not only did this novel include characters and elements from Lost, such as Charles Widmore, Alvar Hanso and Oceanic Airlines, but numerous video interviews with its fictitious author were made available at various

---

[29] Henrik Örnebring, "Alternate reality gaming and convergence culture: the case of Alias," International Journal of Cultural Studies, Volume 10, Issue 4, (2006): 446.

locations on the internet for users to find. On May 24, 2006, Hugh McIntyre, a representative for the Hanso Foundation made an appearance on Jimmy Kimmel Live. While this interview was a part of The Lost Experience, it is treated by Kimmel as if the Hanso Foundation is in fact a real organization. The most recent ARG, Dharma Initiaitive Recruiting Project, began at the annual San Diego ComicCon when a video was shown of a fan being taken into the Dharma Initiative Booth at the convention and taping what he saw. This was accompanied by a website for the Dharma Initiative (www.dharmawantsyou.com) where internet users can be recruited by the mysterious organization whose role in the Lost universe has yet to be fully defined. Here, users must pass various "skill" tests in order to be accepted as recruits. Essentially, Lost fans are able to interact on the internet with the fictional world in the television program.

The various Lost ARGs were successful with fans precisely because they already were engaged in this sort of problem-solving through their analyses of the narrative, making them particularly receptive to the extension of the text into the internet realm. Steven E. Jones argues that Lost's narrative is loosely based on video game structures, since viewers are invited to "play" the game of Lost. Internet users take gratification in unlocking the different phases of these ARGs. He states, "The whole point, in some way is that the marketing is simultaneously entertainment, that an ARG such as The Lost Experience earns the attention it gets by telling complex stories and engaging players in a real game-play, a series of pleasurable social acts of puzzle-solving and meaning-making."[30] This resonates with Jenkins' assertion that the propagation of convergence culture is a two-way consumer-driven process that is both

[30] Steven E. Jones, "Dickens on Lost: Text, Paratext, Fan-based Media," The Wordsworth Circle, Volume 38, Issue 1-2, (Winter/Spring 2007): 72.

top-down and bottom-up. While Lost fans are participating in what is essentially a sophisticated, albeit interactive, advertising campaign, which suggests that consumer agency is subverted by corporate motives, the fans who do play ARGs are not necessarily mindless subjects either. These games require highly critical modes of thinking and problem-solving skills, and also encourage consumers to interact with each other. Furthermore, the ARG is just as much an extension of Lost's narrative as it is a promotional tool. This dual function fulfills both monetary motivations, as well as expanding the possibilities of the television narrative. However, as Örnebring points out:

> There is still a 'hierarchy of meaning' among texts, where there is a clearly identifiable ur-text....that is marketed through other texts (books, comics, ARGs). The books, comics and ARGs might well refer to characters and events from the TV series, but flows in the opposite direction (ie. the TV series taking up narrative threads or using characters from other media texts based on the same fictional universe) are much rarer.[31]

This is also true of the Lost ARGs, which have acted parallel to the events portrayed on the program, although not necessarily intersecting with them. In Jenkins' original book in 1992, Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture, he not only examines how fandom provides consumers with a form of cultural resistance, but points out fandom's connotation of psychological deviance. The increasingly prevalent viral marketing strategies eagerly employed by Lost, as well as other network television programs, indicate that the commercial context, marketing practices, and even this perception of the overly zealous fan, have been normalized into industry practice. Because players of these games are working within an industrially dictated framework, consumer agency is dubious. Örnebring is critical of the tendency in academic criticism

---

[31] Örnebring, 448.

to celebrate the potential of ARGs to encourage participants to work through complex problems, reminding that "ARGs also fit well with industry goals and strategies of brand building and creating a loyal customer base."[32] Likewise, Kirby states, "Unlike traditional 'top-down' marketing to consumer techniques, viral marketing focuses on personal experience of the brand and taps into the new power of the consumer."[33] Lost's use of viral marketing exemplifies the steady shift towards widespread industrial acceptance of the fan as a viable consumer demographic. This resonates with Johnson's assertion that "Fan audiences are economically important to the industry, but they must be *managed* to fulfill that function."[34] Furthermore, it also suggests how the increasing power that consumers have over what they are consuming does not necessarily equate to consumer agency, since commercial practices are constantly adapting to technological shifts. Ultimately, the use of ARGs in the promotion of Lost presents a new approach to courting and maintaining a viewer fan base, and furthermore, the transformation of what could at one time be seen as a consumer fringe demographic into an audience that is genuinely viable and desirable to cultural producers.

Participatory cultures have been a source of much attention, as well as disagreement, among different scholars. Where Jenkins has worked to champion the fan as independent-thinking consumer capable of responding to and co-creating the text, Gwenllian Jones has painted fans as entirely complicit in commercial practices. Lost's fan following has provided an appropriate object for case study, particularly in the numerous way that its producers have capitalized on evolution of television technologies (TVIII) and the increasing blurred boundaries between television and the

---

[32] Örnebring, 450.
[33] Kirby, 92.
[34] Johnson, 64.

internet. Lost's fandom, like many others, is difficult to pin down in any absolute sense, since fan communities are never homogenous groupings. Lost fans articulate their affinity for the program in a variety of different ways. The narrative structure of the program allows fans to become engaged and creatively hypothesize in response to the clues, connections, and outcomes which happen on a weekly basis. At the same time, Lost's producers have thoroughly embraced this form of viewing as they have actively worked to cultivate the fan audience through viral marketing approaches. As Hills has suggested, fandom is perhaps best understood through examining these numerous contradictions. Lost has continued to ponder whether free choice is possible, or if humans are all tied into a pre-determined fate. Similar questions can be posed in relation to Lost's fandom, since its contradictions reflect the position of fans as consumers. As fans are capable of insights and personal expression through their consumption of their cult artifact, this is also reinserted into economic processes.

Conclusion

Through my study of Lost, my goal has been to connect a range of different materials in order to explore how the narrative theme of fate versus free will is articulated through Lost's construction, distribution and reception. Since television as a medium is experiencing increasing fragmentation, I focused not only on the internal workings of Lost as a singular text, but on how it circulates through mass culture more widely. Lost ultimately encapsulates a particular cultural moment where history, changes in technology and television practice, and new marketing techniques, are converging. Within the narrative, Lost taps into the sense of powerlessness experienced by individuals facing the complexities of globalization and the western response to terrorism. This question of agency threads through these different issues which have affected how Lost circulates, such as its fandom and how the narrative is affected by the increasing availability of different types of television technologies associated with the era of TVIII. As Jameson has suggested, there is no separation of the self from the organizational powers of history and culture which dictate the structure of existence. Indeed, as the Patriot Act has rewritten the role of individuals within American society by removing and modifying civil liberties, the role of the consumer is also evolving. Through an exploration of the network of meaning within and surrounding the text of Lost, I have charted how Lost and its peripheral texts engage this question of subjectivity.

Lost functions as a particularly relevant example of a television text because its producers and writers have so thoroughly embraced the new technological conventions available to them. While there have been many complexly written examples of PTS such as Twin Peaks and The X-Files, Lost's polysemic narrative inflects video game

structures a way that resonates with the processes of fragmentation and defragmentation of TVIII. While the widespread availability of DVR and DVD encourage consumers to engage in a close reading of the text through the elimination of flow, online viewing of episodes, or episodes watched on mobile viewing devices such as the iPod, present modes of viewing that are perhaps inhibited by poor picture quality and the still relevant notion of flow. By including visual clues in the corners of the mise-en-scène, the makers of Lost encourage spectators to take advantage of the stop-and-start capabilities of television technologies such as DVD and DVR. In chapter two, I explained in detail how such technologies indicate a marketplace wherein consumers have an increasing power over their television consumption. But as more choice and freedom is accorded to consumers, whatever chance consumers have at gaining agency is quashed, as multinational media corporations continue to integrate these technologies into their marketing schemes.

It is through Lost's open text structure that the narrative is able to open up many questions about the lack of power experienced by the subject in contemporary society. In chapter three, I examine the significance of Lost's narrative structure in detail. Lost adopts a number of more traditional storytelling strategies, such as soap opera style seriality and macro-level story arcs that are common to many examples of PTS. By adapting these strategies into a flashback and flash-forward framework, Lost reworks these aspects into a narrative which actually has many similarities with video game structures. Lost is told in a non-linear more exploratory manner, where there are shifts in perspective with each episode. These shifts illuminate different pieces of information as the story surges forward. For Lost, it is often significant what is *not* said rather than

what is, since these gaps within the narrative pique viewer interest and encourage the type of puzzle-solving consumption which is associated with Lost's fandom. As the mysteries unfold, the spectator is invited to creatively interpret and hypothesize in order to "solve" the riddle of Lost. This is driven both by the central mysteries of the program, as well as well as the numerous visual and narrative clues which are interspersed throughout the narrative. There are a number of repeated themes and motifs, such as problematic father figures, leadership, philosophy, polar bears, pregnancy, light and dark, and so on. Yet the most compelling of all of these themes is the question of fate and free will, which permeates much of the narrative, but is best exemplified through the tension between Jack and Locke. This fate/free will binary is of central importance not only to theme, but is spoken to by Lost's polysemic narrative structure.

A particular area of interest to me was the way in which Lost gestures towards its particular historical climate of the post-9/11 period. Cultural and historical scholars alike have described the post-9/11 period mentality as possessing a lack of absolute conceptualizations of good and evil. These categories are continually destabilized within Lost. Its open structure challenges the viewer to question these categories, opening up the text to possible non-hegemonic readings. While questioning the good/evil binary is of course not in and of itself unique to the post-9/11 period, there are a number of other elements in the story which very clearly speak to this historical context. For example, the program begins with a plane crash, speaking to anxieties of air travel that followed immediately after the attacks. Terrorism, through Sayid's back story, and more subtly through the role of the Others in the first two seasons, is also of

particular relevance. Torture and American actions in the Middle East are also incorporated through Sayid's back story. As well, the fear, power struggles, and estrangement which permeate the first two seasons connect with the post-9/11 consciousness. Through the power struggles and rivalries between characters such as Jack and Locke or Ben and Charles Widmore, leadership and problematic leadership are also circulating within the discourses produced by the show. While Ellis suggests that television provides culture a means of working through events and issues, Lost does this in a way that is relatively open-ended. It gestures towards these issues, but its polysemic structure undermines its potential for offering conclusions or solutions to these issues.

Fan cultures have often been a site within academic discourses of disagreement in terms of consumer agency. Henry Jenkins in the 1990s championed the fans as resistant consumers of culture who defy hegemonic consumer logic through their appropriation of texts. While television texts have been more readily targeted at and marketed towards fan consumption, Lost in particular is an innovative example. In the past, more antagonistic relationships have existed between cultural producers and participatory cultures. Lost marks a full-fledged departure from this dynamic. Its producers have thoroughly embaced Lost's fan culture through adopting fan-targeted viral marketing campaigns. The Lost Experience, Find Flight 815 and The Dharma Initiative Recruiting Project are all ARGs which simultaneously generated attention for the program, while also working to build up the mythology of the program and engaging the communal problem-solving which has characterized Lost's online fan communities. Lost's fandom is particularly well-suited to ARGs. Other projects

involving J.J. Abrams such as Alias (2001 – 2006) and Cloverfield (2008) have adopted similar viral approaches. Where Jenkins saw in fan cultures the possibility for gaining personal agency and building identity, Lost's fandom has been fully assimilated into and given legitimate acceptance by cultural authorities. Lost's targeting of fan audiences completely nullifies any possibilities for consumer agency, since fan practices have become normalized into industrial models. Narratively, Lost may possess gaps and fissures where the program is seemingly questioning the status quo, but its marketing as a mass cultural artifact is wholly hegemonic and grants its consumers little of the freedom of choice that is so often contested in its narrative, even though the practices of participatory cultures seem to suggest otherwise.

While Lost's narrative continually questions whether humans are tied to a pre-determined fate, and its flashback/flash-forward narrative structure suggest possibilities for a range of interpretations, the way in which Lost has circulated more widely speaks to its central theme. By following this thread of individual agency which connects Lost's narrative with its distribution and reception, I have illustrated the problematic nature of subjectivity in the post-9/11 context. Commodities and consumption ultimately not only shape the world, but how the subject views the world. While there are increasing choices available to the consumer in terms of consumption and textual interpretation, the organizational powers that these structures present are ultimately inescapable. Lost is now going into its fifth season, so the writers and producers still may take a side on the fate/free will question. However, even if they are able to suture back together the many questions raised, it will not necessarily negate those schisms of meaning.

The research and analysis contained within this thesis maps out how transformations in media have converged with conventional television narrative. As Lost's narrative raises so many questions about how the individual is constituted in the post-9/11 era amidst globalizing structures such as government and multinational corporations, the program's embodiment of the shifts in television technology also raises questions about the increasing ability of consumers to control their own consumption patterns. The way that Lost has embraced these technological changes, and the subsequent commercial success that it has received, also suggests the power of this commercial model, since it engages the consumer's need for agency. Technologies such as DVR and DVD grant consumers the ability to construct a viewing schedule which is predicated on their personal tastes and sense of identity while simultaneously incorporating this need for asserting personal taste into commercial models which generate revenue. The processes of fragmentation that accompany the age of TVIII indicate that television as a medium is becoming increasingly difficult to define, since these processes are so multi-directional and encompass different varieties of multiplatforming. This fragmentation also suggests how meaning becomes increasingly unstable, as it is subject to a vast number of different fluctuations depending upon mode of delivery.

Lost's central narrative question of fate and free will, and the increasing power that television spectators have over their consumption patterns, suggests the ways that individual subjectivity is negotiated in the post-9/11 context. With the War on Terror and the powerlessness that western civilization has felt against the indefinable and monolithic enemy that is terrorism, Lost taps into these underlying anxieties which

revolve around the problematic notion that individual social actors possess power within this context of globalization. It gestures towards these larger issues concerning how the individual is constructed by external cultural, social and political structures, and how the question of subjectivity has been affected by the post-Cold War universe. Lost adopts these notions of fate and free will and essentially re-configures them in such a way that maintains their relevance for the current time period.

There are of course limits to my study of prime time serial narrative within the context of both the post-9/11 era and TVIII, primarily because I have chosen to focus on one specific artifact, Lost. I selected Lost because it is in many ways a groundbreaking television program both in terms of marketing and its structure, and it also seems to encapsulate the current cultural and historical moment. By incorporating studies which have dealt explicitly with the evolution of contemporary television as a medium with an in-depth analysis of both the program and Lost's fan culture, I have utilized a model of academic inquiry which seeks to discover the ways that historical and technological context become embodied into the text of such narrative-based television programs. Indeed, as my analysis of TVIII suggests, television texts are not hermetically contained, but rather they exist in a multi-textual universe. By examining these different facets of distribution and reception in relation to the narrative, such an approach can help account for the effects of these processes of fragmentation. My study has mapped out the ways in which Lost's innovative use of narrative structure interlinks with its cross-marketing strategies. As my study has examined the ways that Lost has created new avenues of narrative structuring and cross-marketing, it has also opened up questions about how these issues have been incorporated into other examples

of television programming that could be explored through further academic inquiry. My three-pronged analysis which examines narrative, distribution and fan reception may also be a useful approach in examining newer examples of television shows. There are a number of other narratively complex television programs which engage the post-9/11 context such as Heroes (2006 – Present), 24, Dexter (2006 – Present), Battlestar Galactica and Jericho (2006 – 2008). My approach might provide a useful model of interrogating such texts to further understand how post-9/11 social anxieties are converging with the new possibilities of the television medium in this context.

Ultimately, Lost has achieved considerable commercial success which has catapulted it into a complete popular culture phenomenon. It is a program which taps into the underlying anxieties which have circulated in response to the events of 9/11 and the growing forces of globalization through its flashback/flash-forward narrative structure. Lost's multimedia marketing and the way that its producers have embraced its fan following suggests how individuals are encouraged to feel as if they are able to express their personhood within these hegemonic structures. The narrative structure fosters an almost unprecedented engaged form of viewing, which is particularly interesting given Lost's status as a mainstream television hit. Spectators, and also those fans of Lost who participate in its online cultures, are encouraged to creatively interpret and hypothesize the labyrinthine narrative. Those who watch closely enough to catch some of the more obscure details of the program are duly rewarded, and this seems to suggest that the processes of TVIII are creating a new, more active and media-savvy viewer. While this is true to an extent, this is also a tenuous sort of viewer agency, since this intelligent viewer is now its own marketing demographic.

In many ways, the concerns addressed within the narrative of Lost resonate with the wider cultural consciousness of the post-9/11 era under George W. Bush. As an iconic program which speaks to these wider concerns, Lost should be understood as a complex text which both engages with and reveals this historical context. Lost's visual and narrative complexity further indicate how television technology and television narrative formats are innately linked and affect each other. Television is an extremely complex cultural medium which is subject to a vast array of different fluctuations of meaning, both contained within singular texts, as well as related to the ideological structure of television as a whole. Lost's narrative cannot be separated from the implications of this wider context. Through my study of Lost, I have shown that while Lost's narrative, distribution and reception have all opened up questions concerning the role of the subject, it also contains the means to alleviate any potential instabilities that may also arise. To reach back to Foucault, while the discourses produced may address that the subject is trapped inside of discourse, the subject is still constructed by discourse, and thus, cannot escape. Through its complex engagement with the technological possibilities of TVIII and its engagement with historical social anxieties, Lost ultimately is a text which embodies a specific moment where culture, technology and history have converged, and furthermore, that this fate/free will binary remains a significant, although also evolving, philosophical question.

Bibliography

Alsultany, Evelyn Azeez. The Changing Profile of Race in the United States: Media Representations and Racialization of Arab- and Muslim-Americans Post-9/11. Ann Arbor: Pro Quest Information and Learning Company, 2006.

Anderson, Christopher. "Television Networks and the Uses of Drama." Thinking Outside the Box: A Contemporary Genre Reader. Ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005.

Andrejevic, Mark. "Watching Television Without Pity: The Productivity of Online Fans." Television & New Media. Volume 9, Issue 1. (January 2008): 24 – 46.

Ashby, LeRoy. "Epilogue: Pop Culture in a Post-9/11 World." With Amusement For All: A History of American Popular Culture Since 1930. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006.

Baudrillard, Jean. "The Gulf War Did Not Take Place." Hollywood and War: The Film Reader. Ed. J. David Slocum. New York and London: Routledge, 2006. 303 - 314.

Baudrillard, Jean. "The Spirit of Terrorism." The Spirit of Terrorism and Other Essays, trans. Chris Turner. London: Verso, 2003. 3 – 34.

Branigan, Edward. Narrative Comprehension and Film. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.

Braudy, Leo. From Chivalry to Terrorism: War and the Changing Nature of Masculinity. NewYork: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003.

BuddyTV. "Lost Easter Eggs: "Ji Yeon" #2 - Nikki's Back!" (March 14, 2008) Accessed 21 October, 2008. < http://www.buddytv.com/articles/lost/more/lost-easter-eggs-ji-yeon-2-nik-17664.aspx >

Burton, Graeme. "Television, Narrative and Form." Talking Television: An introduction to the study of television. London: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Carruthers, Susan L. "Media and Terrorism." The Media at War: Communication and Conflict in the Twentieth Century. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.

Casey, Bernadette et al. Television Studies: The Key Concepts. London and New 2007): 1 – 4.

Dawson, Max. "Little Players, Big Shows: Format, Narration, and Style on Television's New Smaller Screens." Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies. Volume 13, Issue 3. (2007): 231 – 250.

Deuze, Mark. "Collaboration, participation and the media." New Media & Society. Volume 8, Issue 4. (2006): 691 – 698.

Edgerton, Gary R. and Brian G. Rose, ed. Thinking Outside the Box: A Contemporary Television Genre Reader. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005.

Ellis, John. "Television as Working-Through." Television and Common Knowledge. Ed. J. Gripsund. New York: Routledge, 1999.

Ellis, John. Visible Fictions. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982.

Erickson, Christian W. "Counter-Terror Culture: Subversion or Legitimization?" Security Dialogue. Volume 28, Issue 2. (June 2007): 197 – 214.

Gatson, Sarah N. and Amanda Zweerink. Interpersonal Culture on the Internet: Television, the Internet and the Making of a Community. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004.

Giroux, Henry. A. "Democracy and the Politics of Terrorism: Community, Fear the Suppression of Dissent." 9/11 in American Culture. Ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln. Walnut Creek: Altamira Presss, 2003. 244 – 251.

Hall, Stuart. "Foucault: Power, Knowledge and Discourse." Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader. Ed. Margaret Whetherelle et. Al. London: Sage Publications, 2001. 72 – 92.

Hall, Stuart. "The Spectacle of the 'Other.'" Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader. Ed. Margaret Whetherelle et. Al. London: Sage Publications, 2001. 324 – 343.

Hayward, Jennifer. "The Future of the Serial Form." Consuming Pleasures: Active Audiences and Serial Fictions from Dickens to Soap Opera. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997. 135 – 196.

Hills, Matt. "Defining Cult TV: Texts, Inter-texts and Fan Audiences." The Television Studies Reader. Ed. Robert C. Allen and Annette Hill. London and New York: Routledge, 2004. 509 - 523.

Hills, Matt. Fan Cultures. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.

Hills, Matt. "From the box in the corner to the box on the shelf: 'TVIII and the cultural/textual valorizations of DVD." New Review of Film and Television Studies. Volume 5, Issue 1. (April 2007): 41 – 60.

Hills, Matt. "Cult TV, Quality and the Role of the Episode/Programme Guide." The Contemporary Television Series. Ed. Michael Hammond and Lucy Mazdon. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005. 190 – 206.

Hunter, Jason. Lost: A Theory on Time Travel. (October 29 2007) Accessed October 22 2008. < http://www.timelooptheory.com/the_timeline.html >

Jameson, Frederic. The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act. Cornell University Press: Ithaca, New York, 1981.

Jenkins, Henry. Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide. New York and London: New York University Press, 2006.

Jenkins, Henry. Fans, Bloggers and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture. New York and London: New York University Press, 2006.

Jenkins, Henry. Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture. New York and London: Routledge, 1992.

.Jones, Sara Gwenllian. "Web Wars: Resistance, Online Fandom and Studio Censorship." Quality Popular Television: Cult TV, the Industry and Fans. Ed. Mark Jancovich and James Lyons. London: BFI Publishing, 2003. 163 – 177.

Jones, Steven E. "Dickens on Lost: Text, Paratext, Fan-based Media." The Wordsworth Circle. Volume 38, Issue 1-2. (Winter/Spring 2007): 69 – 75.

Johnson, Derek. "Inviting Audiences In: The Spatial Re-organization of production and consumption in TVII." New Review of Film and Television Studies. Volume 5, Issue 1. (April 2007): 61 – 80.

Kirby, Justin. "Viral marketing." Connected Marketing: The Viral, Buzz and Word of Mouth Revolution. Ed. Justin Kirby and Paul Marsden. Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann, 2006. 87 – 106.

Kompare, Derek. "Publishing Flow: DVD Box Sets and the Reconception of Television." Television & New Media. Volume 7, Issue 4. (November 2006): 335 -360.

Kustritz, Anne. "Slashing the Romance Narrative." Journal of American Culture. Volume 26, Issue 3 (September 2003): 371 – 384.

Lasch, Christopher. "Introduction: Consumption, Narcissism, Mass Culture." The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times. New York: Norton, 1984. 23 – 59.

Lost. Created by J.J. Abrams and Damon Lindelof. Perf. Matthew Fox, Evangeline Lilly, Josh Holloway, Terry O'Quinn. Bad Robot. 2004 – 2008.

Lost. Created by J.J. Abrams and Damon Lindelof. DVD. Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2006.

Lost and Snarky. Accessed November 1 2008. < ttp://community.livejournal.com/lost_and_snarky >

Lost Recaps. Accessed October 25 2008. < http://lostrecaps.com/>

LostTheories.com. Accessed October 22 2008. < http://lost-theories.com/>

Lull, James. "Television and Communicational Space: The clash of global hegemonies." New Review of Film and Television Studies. Volume 5, Issue 1. (April 2007): 97 – 110.

Martin, Raymond and John Barresi. "Paradise Lost." The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self: An Intellectual History of Personal Identity. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. 255 -289.

McArthy, Ann. "Studying Soap Opera." The Television Genre Book. Ed. Glen Creeber. London: BFI Publishing, 2001. 47 – 48.

Mills, Sara. Discourse. New York and London: Routledge, 1997.

Mittell, Jason. "Film and Television Narrative." The Cambridge Companion to Narrative. Ed. David Herman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Mittell, Jason. "Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television. " The Velvet Light Trap. Volume 58, Issue 2. (2006): 29 – 40.

Mittell, Jason. "Television Genres as Cultural Categories." Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture. New York and London: Routledge, 2004. 1 - 28.

Newcomb, Horace. "Reflections on TV: The Most Popular Art." Thinking Outside the Box: A Contemporary Genre Reader. Ed. Edgerton, Gary R. and Brian G. Rose. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005. 17 – 35.

Newman, Michael Z. "From Beats to Arcs: Toward a Poetics of Television Narrative." The Velvet Light Trap. Volume 58, Issue 2. (2006): 16 – 28.

Oceanic Airlines. Accessed October 22 2008. < http://oceanic-air.com >

Örnebring, Henrik. "Alternate reality gaming and convergence culture: the case of Alias." International Journal of Cultural Studies. Volume 10, Issue 4. (2006): 445 – 462.

Parks, Lisa. "Flexible Microcasting: Gender, Generation and Television-Internet Convergence." Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition. Ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2004. 133 – 156.

Porter, Michael J, et. Al. "Re(de)fining Narrative Events: Examining Television Narrative Structure." Journal of Popular Film and Television. Volume 30, Issue 1. (Spring 2002): 23 – 30.

Poster, Mark. "Postmodern Virtualities." The Television Studies Reader. Ed. Robert C. Allen and Annette Hill. London and New York: Routledge, 2004. 581 – 595.

Roman, James. "Television Drama: From the Golden Age to the Soap Factory." From Daytime to Primetime: The History of American Television Programs. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2005. 149 – 170.

Spence, Louise. "Narrative Discourses of Soap Operas; or, How to Watch Soaps." Watching Daytime Soap Operas: The Power of Pleasure. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2005. 70 – 139.

Storey, John. Inventing Popular Culture: From Folklore to Globalization. Cornwall: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.

Thompson, Kristin. Storytelling in Film and Television. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2003.

Uricchio, William. "Television's Next Generation: Technology/Interface Culture/Flow." Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition. Ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2004. 163 – 182.

Wilcox, Rhonda. "Unreal TV." Thinking Outside the Box: A Contemporary Genre Reader. Ed. Edgerton, Gary R. and Brian G. Rose. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005. 201 – 225.

Williams, Raymond. "Programming: Distribution and Flow." Television: Technology and Cultural Form. New York: Schocken Books, 1975. 78 – 118.

Wood, J. Living Lost: Why We're All Stuck on the Island. Garrett County Press, 2007.

Wood, Robin. "An introduction to the American Horror Film." American Nightmare: Essays on Horror Film. Ed. Gregory A. Waller. Toronto: Festival of Festivals, 7 – 28.

YouTube. "Hurley and Libby - Lost" (July 2, 2006) Accessed November 1 2008 < http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q4Lq1MaO0yE>