

## **Bronwen Calvert: ‘The Real Deal’: Cyborg Identity and Simulacra in *Dollhouse***

Many scholars working on *Dollhouse* note that the process of imprinting individuals with constructed personalities, a process that requires ‘Active architecture’ to be installed permanently in the brains of each individual, creates cyborgs (for example, Calvert; Erickson; Randell-Moon). Through their artificial, hybrid embodiment, cyborgs break down and confuse binary oppositions (organic/technological, natural/constructed, and more) and the image of the cyborg is closely connected with ideas of performance, masquerade and simulation. Taking Jean Baudrillard’s formulation of successive ‘phases of the image’, the simulacrum illustrates the third phase in which ‘signs of the real’ take the place of ‘the real itself’ (Baudrillard 166). As for ‘the real’, ‘in a culture of simulation, images [...] perform to make the world as we know it, to generate our sense of what is real’ (Toffoletti 121). These definitions fit very well with the concept of manufactured Active personalities in *Dollhouse*.

In this paper, I shall explore the representation of certain Doll characters, especially Priya/Sierra and Daniel Perrin, whose storylines accentuate tensions between simulated and ‘real’ or (in the show’s terminology) ‘actual’ identities. Further, I shall examine how individuals without Active architecture, like Topher and Adelle, are affected by close proximity to Dolls. While a character like Priya/Sierra can be seen to ‘perform’ across ‘multiple demographic categories [...] as a woman, as an Asian woman, as a migrant’ (Mukherjea 65), and definitely emphasizes the point that ‘the Dollhouse sells [...] the simulacrum of perpetual consent’ (Nadkarni 84), others more subtly highlight ideas of performance, simulacra and ‘the real’.

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