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# The Corruption of Televised *Character Overhaul*: From “Human Figure” to Material Formlessness

Pablo Cabeza-Macuso

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## Introduction

- 1 One of the features of the TV series character is, according to Jason Mittell, *character overhaul*. The author defines it as follows: “[...] someone undergoes a dramatic sudden shift, often tied to a supernatural or fantastic situation that creates body switches or clones, but we retain our serial memories of earlier events and relationships”<sup>1</sup>. This article aims at unfolding the figurative consequences of such a notion when articulated with that of corruption. The analytical practice mobilized in this paper, attentive to both narrative and actoral aspects, is in line with Nicole Brenez’s figurative analysis:

The character is not primarily a biography, an individuality, a body or an iconography, but a symbolic circulation of plastic elements, narrative patterns and semantic articulations. Often (and this could be a characteristic of classic cinematographic usage), this circulation aims to crystallize, to produce synthetic effects, in the mode of a typical personification or that of a singular individuation. But many other models of circulation can be envisioned [...].<sup>2</sup>

- 2 The character considered as a circulation of figurative elements, narrative schemas and *actoral* inventions could be likened to André Gardies’s “*instance actorielle*.”<sup>3</sup> Although Gardies’s theoretical undertaking is solely semiological, it has the merit of raising the point that the *actoral* instance is “a combination of heterogeneous traits” made up of an agent (in the semantics of narrative), a role (according to pre-existing genre codes), a character (in the film’s diegetic universe), and an actor (the sociocultural codes of Myth according to Edgar Morin). From then on, I will pay attention to the filmic existence of characters insofar as they are part of a long-term narrative, are embodied by actors and actresses, and participate in the figurative inventions specific to the works studied. To this end, I will focus on three semi-serial science-fiction/fantasy TV series<sup>4</sup> to

determine the relationship between character overhaul, corruption, and the episodic setting. This paper mobilizes *Sliders*, *Angel*, and *Doctor Who* (2005)<sup>5</sup>: two contemporary American series broadcasted in the 1990s and ending in the early 2000s, as well as an English series scheduled since 2005. Although their fictional universes are very different (science fiction for *Sliders*; fantasy for *Angel*), those two American series share similar conditions of creation, broadcast and reception, since they both originate from a network (*Sliders* was broadcasted on Fox then Sci-Fi Channel, *Angel* was hosted by the WB).

- 3 The invention of a semi-serial form was born at the heart of the production constraints inherent in network television, offering the aesthetic and narrative possibility of combining episodic plots with the “closure pledge”<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, this serial form exists outside the USA, since the *Doctor Who* series, although very episodic in its early days (1963-1989), and originating from BBC One (a public channel), would, from its revival in 2005, make the aesthetic and narrative proposals of *complex TV* its own<sup>7</sup>. Thus, the framing of the corpus is justified, on one hand, by the singular status of the episode as arranged within the semi-serial format, and on the other, by the fact that TV series share figurative inventions around human bodies undergoing the effects of multiple “corruptions.” In other words, it is because these series seem to share the same visual figure (at first strictly episodic) that comparative analysis is required to identify, circumscribe and analyze the figures in question. “Corruption” will be considered from a “material” or “*matériauologique*” angle, i.e. as an operator that allows us to account for the relationship between the body’s matter and its temporarily stabilized state in the form of a human body. Following Sophie Lécole Solnyckine, I adopt a *matériauologique* approach to images. This “[...] is concerned with the intelligence and expressiveness of the material, with what it is possible to think of the figure from the material, when we are attentive to the way in which forces affect forms”<sup>8</sup>. This approach “[...] characteristically signals an intention of coalescence, of continuity, which seeks to dissolve the classical subjection of matter to form”<sup>9</sup>. Stories of the corruptions of human bodies will provide an opportunity to problematize back and forth between the realm of the figurative, relating, according to Lécole Solnyckine, to the realm of form that “is exercised in the field of the representable,” and the realm of the figural, relating to the intervention of material in form, thus “unrepresentable but presentable”<sup>10</sup>. “Corruption” will therefore be seen as an operation that reveals the “material” beneath the “form,” once it is acknowledged that the “form” has been renamed the “Human Figure” (i.e. the character’s bodily form), and that the “material” is never self-evident, since it is perpetually brought into play within the diegesis, depending on the work. Moreover, the material corruption of Human Figures is a form of character overhaul regularly limited by the format of the episode (or double episode). However, the episode is not just a link in a chain (the verticality of the season) but can also be analyzed horizontally through a principle of figurative equivalence between several series<sup>11</sup>. This horizontality can be likened to iconological work, which aims first at assigning images to a repertoire, whether literary, mythological, pictorial, photographic or cinematographic<sup>12</sup>. Iconology teaches us that an image is always in relation to other images<sup>13</sup>.
- 4 With that in mind, I shall be taking a closer look at the horizontal relationships between a visual figure within an episode and images from other, seemingly distant TV series. Furthermore, the episode can be the result of the singular crystallization of a

plastic phenomenon involving a series' past. In this case, the aim is to analyze the gradual, intermittent elaboration of a visual figure within a single television series: figurative equivalence between several works then gives way to a genealogy of images on the scale of a single work. For this reason, I will revisit the findings of the first part (the study of episodic figures) in light of the near-entirety of *Doctor Who* (from 1970 to 2007). The *relationniste* position adopted here in line with Jean-Michel Durafour's work implies that the relationships between the analyzed images are not, of course, the only existing relationships, but they are the ones that seem to have been the most overlooked, while also possibly being the most decisive<sup>14</sup>. In addition to sharing a common focus on the Human Figure, in its oscillation between a stabilized figurative form and a shapeless figural materiality, the three TV series mobilized here thematize an often similar political context. Corruption of the figure as the "fall"<sup>15</sup> of the Human Figure is thus analyzed here as a direct seizure of "power" over bodies. The stories of social and economic domination under study narrate a power that reduces the individuals over whom it is exercised to mere matter, or "material". How, then, are these materials, (de)formed by power, figuratively treated? What remains of the televised character if "material" supplant "corporeal form"?

- 5 To answer these questions, the figure of the mannequin, first studied in *Sliders* as a reification of bodies, will be referred to in order to understand an episode of *Angel*. Secondly, I will analyze the exploited bodies used solely for their appearance, which are no longer supported by an organism. The body simply becomes a shapeless material, like a costume falling to the ground in *Angel* and *Doctor Who*. Next, I will examine the serial dimension of a figure through the example of the "viscous paste" in *Doctor Who* (2005). I will try to demonstrate that this figure, which appears repeatedly throughout the series, seems to crystallize around more openly political themes in the 2000s. The figure of the viscous paste is characterized by a synthesis of the examples studied above, *via* an oscillation between an assumption of identity (reification) and a return to a formless material (remnant, waste). Finally, this figure allows us to consider the corruption of bodies as a survival of the images of extermination "camps"<sup>16</sup>.

## Episodic figures of corruption

### The mannequin "downgrading" the character in *Sliders* and *Angel*

- 6 *Sliders* tells the story of a group of friends traveling through the multiverse and wishing to find their original Earth. In the first two seasons, the first "*mouvement*"<sup>17</sup> of the series is characterized by the desire to find the right Earth: to each episode corresponds a new Earth that has taken a different course from what the protagonists know. At the end of season 3, the series shifts into a second "*mouvement*" in which the challenge is no longer to find home but to fight against the alien invader that has colonized the characters' home. Florent Favard identifies this shift as the passage from a biographical quest (plot centered on the characters) to a cosmological quest (plot centered on the exploration of the fictional world<sup>18</sup>). The episode "My brother's Keeper" (S04E19) is thus at the heart of this second "*mouvement*", in which each visit on a planet aims at accumulating weapons and knowledge to fight the invader. The episode tells the story of a society where the wealthiest part of the population can afford the organs of the paupers. The creation of clones has made it possible, *in fine*, to replace the poor in this organ transfer operation. The corruption of some (the clones or the poor) is the

condition for the survival of others<sup>19</sup>. In other words, full resemblance to oneself in the long run (no more loss of limbs, no more accidental disfigurement, etc.) is only made possible by the disfigurement of others or their-clones. "Corruption" is directed towards bodies that are institutionally "downgraded," i.e. no longer belonging to the regime of anthropomorphism in Didi-Huberman's sense, i.e. "everything that tends to make man a divine likeness, everything that generally tends to idealize the human Figure"<sup>20</sup>. If clones no longer belong to the regime of anthropomorphism, then to what regime of image do they belong?

- 7 According to Nicole Brenez, "four classical figurative models inform our apprehension of the body": the logical model<sup>21</sup>, the mechanical model<sup>22</sup>, the fetish<sup>23</sup>, and the organic model characterized by "ongoing figurative research into movement, anatomy, flesh, the corpse, the flayed, the skeleton [...]"<sup>24</sup>. I would suggest the idea that the figure of the mannequin, in the figurative economy specific to this episode, replaces that of humanity, without calling into question the organic model. First of all, the severed limb of an extra is precisely replaced by a plastic one: the impoverished are bound to become mannequins. This image becomes a "figure" as soon as it is explicitly mobilized in the setting occupied by resistance fighters, the poor and the disenfranchised. As Nicole Brenez says, following Erich Auerbach, the figure is "the establishment of a relationship: the movement of one thing towards its other. Figuration thus consists in a translation, an ordered relationship of plastic forms, creatures, phenomena and meanings in a text [...]"<sup>25</sup>. The figure is therefore not necessarily "[...] a 'thing,' but the way of establishing signifying connections between different things [...]"<sup>26</sup>. The setting in the *Sliders* episode, built on the narrative's unjustified profusion of mannequins of all kinds, serves exactly to establish a figurative relationship between the social situation of the poor and the image of the mannequins. Indeed, it is always and only within this same setting that the deprived and downgraded characters are brought into play. This "downgrading" (in Didi-Huberman's sense), both social and figurative, primarily concerns secondary characters and extras. The extra can be defined as a "non-actor"<sup>27</sup> because he is "[...] neither actor nor character, he is even the one for whom the actor-character interval is reduced to nothing; the one who is worth nothing other than for himself, for what he puts into the film of documentary truth, of humanity reduced to the essential (appearance, movement, the indistinct noise of voices)"<sup>28</sup>. Extras are bodies that do not achieve the status of characters, since they are nameless, have no narrative function, and passively occupy the set. Besides, I prefer to use the term "non-recurring character" instead of "secondary character":

Indeed, [formula semi-serial] series always feature two types of characters: the series' main or recurring characters, who therefore belong to the narrative arcs of the form, and those who only appear in a single episode, and therefore form the very core of the form structure<sup>29</sup>.

- 8 Non-recurring characters are not, in the literal sense, "secondary," since they are at the heart of the action and not mere witnesses<sup>30</sup>. Indeed, the situation of the clones and the destitute takes up the entire plot, and the main, recurring characters are totally devoted to their cause for the duration of the episode. However, the main reason why they are so much in the spotlight is that one of the main characters, Quinn Mallory, finds himself affected by the "downgrading" inherent in the clone condition. The general movement of the episode is that of an *aesthetic shift* of the recurring character Quinn Mallory. The character's "aesthetics" is now understood in the sense of Benjamin Thomas. He distinguishes two states of the filmic character: he can be a function in the

economy of the narrative (“[...] he is above all a set of pragmatic words, gestures and behavior, motivated by the designs of the narrative [...]”) and/or a sensitive subject (“a human figure whose existence in the image is ostensibly that of a being in the process of experiencing the world as a web of sensitive phenomena, and whose actions are above all qualifiable in that they unfold in the sensory field: listening, contemplating, walking, touching, smelling...”)³¹. The aesthetic shift at work in the episode manifests itself in an inverted journey, like a chiasmus, between that of Quinn Mallory, the main character who undergoes a “downgrading,” and that of his clone who gains a sentient existence. Quinn Mallory gets mixed up with his clone and denied reflexive awareness and sentience, while his clone discovers a society unknown to him and asserts himself for the first time as a “sensory subject”³². If, from a narratological and aesthetic point of view, the extra and the non-recurring character cannot be confused, they nevertheless share, within the diegesis, the same downgrading, i.e. an eviction from the regime of anthropomorphism. This eviction is aesthetically embodied in *Sliders* by an institutionalized exclusion from the sphere of “sentient subjects.” If “[...] the necessarily aesthetic powers activated by the *sentient figure* formulate ethical or political questions in *affects* and *percepts*”³³, then it is certainly an inseparably *aesthetic* and *ethical* issue that the figure of the mannequin expresses. Indeed, this figure formulates the ideal of a functional being *without sensibility*, who can be used to the point of exhaustion, until his physical integrity is corrupted, until he becomes himself waste to be disposed of. In the scenes featuring extras and non-recurring characters, most of the mannequins are upright and in good condition, as were the clones before they were corrupted, while others are dismembered and accumulated in a shapeless heap in garbage cans, like the missing image of the destroyed clones. Thus, the corpses of the clones are never shown, and only this figurative correlation can allow us not to *see* them *clearly*, but to *feel* them in a *latent* way. In this episode, the poor and the clones are exactly like mannequins, since the figurative correspondence relies on a similar treatment in the capitalist regime. Indeed, the capitalist society introduced in the episode is essentially based on the temporary exploitation of bodies. Therefore, the clone (as an organ stock), the employee and worker (as a labor force) and the mannequin (displayed-in shop windows) are temporarily exploited to the point of complete wear and tear, before being discarded once their bodies can no longer serve the function assigned to them.-This way, the clone ends up sacrificed, the worker falls into poverty and the mannequins are dismembered.

- 9 However, this observation cannot be final. First of all, the close-ups of mannequins offer a clear visual presence that cannot be cut down to the effect of a simple set. They are filmed through close-up just as a real face would be. Moreover, when a non-recurring character repeatedly shoots a mannequin, it is precisely the figuration of the clone as a mannequin that is attacked. The act of shooting the mannequin can be understood as a visual attempt to bring down the assignment of the clone to an inferior status (its sensitive downgrading) in order to initiate a struggle for the recognition of human rights to be applied to clones.
- 10 The figure of the mannequin is mobilized almost unchanged by the *Angel* series. Although the fictional context is different, the figurative context is similar. *Angel* is the spin-off series from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and focuses on the eponymous Angel. Angel seeks to redeem all his past crimes by setting up a detective agency in Los Angeles to help the underprivileged against paranormal events. Thus, despite the major narrative

evolutions that would set the series apart, each episode's narrative is composed of an episodic plot, dedicated to a non-recurring character, and of a serial plot centered on the relationships between the main characters and their involvement in the fight against Evil<sup>34</sup>. After a strongly serial season 4, with an apocalyptic plot centered on the recurring characters, season 5 has the characters bring back the principle of helping others at the core of their lives, which formally translates into a more explicit return to episodic plots.

- 11 In "Just Rewards" (S05E02), Angel has to deal with a black market in which wealthy demons can pay to possess other inanimate human bodies. Those bodies appear in a salon like ready-to-wear clothes. The characters' posture evokes that of mannequins. However, is it still appropriate to think of them as characters? The distinction between non-recurring characters and extras is no longer relevant, since the figure of the mannequin no longer affects characters in the strict sense of the word: the only extras left in the image are those who have completely tipped over to the side of the scenery, becoming *themselves* a kind of mannequin. Considering their very status, extras are always closer to the set than to the character. According to Didi-Huberman, they "[...] thus form the paradox of being a mere decoration, but human"<sup>35</sup>. Furthermore, their corpse-like appearance matches the slang term "*figurant*" (the French word for "extra"): anonymous corpses on display at the morgue<sup>36</sup>. Unlike *Sliders*, in which non-recurring characters and extras are figuratively linked with real mannequins in the diegesis, in *Angel* the extra *is* the mannequin, which is indicated by his postures and positioning in space. If, on a narrative level, the extras are indeed at stake, their figurative status has to be clarified with Luc Vancheri's notion of the "*figurine*." According to Vancheri, "if every figure is first and foremost an extra, understood as a generic category of filmic man, the figurine can be read as that man who has definitively ceased to exist, but has left a body behind"<sup>37</sup>. First, the "*figurines*" are presented in a tracking shot to the left, that reveals the frozen bodies in the foreground and background, but the absence of light prevents them from being clearly discernible from the setting. Once the light is switched on, a panoramic shot to the right-sweeps across the entire space, revealing a kind of frozen play: each body is identified in a kind of playlet (having a drink, playing the piano, chatting with someone, etc)<sup>38</sup>. This luminous reverse shot does not, however, lessen the feeling of mannequin-like figures, indistinguishable from the set, since the scenography insists on the space visitors must cross in order to choose the body that suits them<sup>39</sup>. The process of becoming-mannequin is more advanced here than in *Sliders*, as the figure indicates human beings whose sensibility and individuality are completely annihilated, being no more than a ready-to-wear body: *it is the extra who is himself the mannequin as a figurine in the set*. In *Angel*, for example, the figure of the mannequin is used to describe the extras that, in the diegesis, are never anything other than figurines. This absolute dehumanization of extras reduced to the state of scenery offers both a critique of the use of bodies in most TV series (the extra is a body exploited to "furnish" a set) and a counterpoint to the Angel team's ethical project of welcoming everybody as a person worthy of interest and attention: thus, not as "secondary," but merely non-recurring character<sup>40</sup>. In these two examples, the figure of the mannequin expresses the exploitation of the human body by the dominants of a definite social situation (wealthy social classes dominate clones; wealthy demons dominate their victims).

- 12 In *Sliders*, character overhaul is fully effective thanks to the existence of multiple clones, whereas in *Angel*, character overhaul is a possibility that is never really



actualized on screen (the possessions are not narratively very much explored, despite the fact that the same radicalized visual figure is present). This analysis aimed at showing how the figure of the mannequin impacts the main character by imposing a decentered aesthetics as he experiences the downgrading suffered by non-recurring characters (*Sliders*), while it affects non-recurring characters by lowering them to the status of "decorative" extras (*Angel*). Downgrading can now be understood in a second sense. In each case, the character is *downgraded* on the scale of character typologies: the main character is considered "secondary" for the duration of an episode (Quinn Mallory confused with his clone), while the bodies likely to be considered as non-recurring characters are restricted to being mere shadows in the background, *figurines*-mannequin occupying an empty space.

- 13 The becoming-mannequin of the character, reducing the human body to a senseless material to be disposed of freely, is nonetheless based on an "organic model." The organism is always assumed, as it is essential to the process of corruption involved in by the more fortunate: organ theft in *Sliders* and possession of a functional body in *Angel*. Does the "fall" of the character not call this organic model into question? In other words, what are the "*matériaulogique* models" underlying the figuration of bodies if the organic model is no longer the foundation of the characters? Also, what is the political specificity of the images in our corpus when this fall into shapelessness summons up the "Body Snatchers" films in the tone of comedy?

### "Costume-identity" as material and ideal corruption in *Angel* and *Doctor Who* (2005)

- 14 "Falling" is the consequence of corruption when it affects the corporeal form, i.e. when there is no longer any organism to support the body. The Human Figure collapses to the ground like a shapeless material heap, leaving behind only the character's bodily envelope. The formlessness here is what questions the Human Figure, "that is, it [the bodily form] finds itself downgraded, just deprived of a secular ontological privilege that demands 'that everything has its form'"<sup>41</sup>. I will now analyze television images in which Man falls in the direction of a shapeless material: "that is, when his very humanity acts as a rag thrown in a shapeless heap on the ground. And let us not understand this as a mere metaphor: history teaches us, in its long duration, how men have found themselves metamorphosed into shapeless draperies of flesh"<sup>42</sup>. In the present corpus, the character's fall into shapeless material is moreover inseparable from a process of resemblance, since the fall is always associated with the imitation of another character: shapelessness is only possible (the abandonment of a character's appearance) because there is a subsequent resemblance (a future imitation). A similar figurative device is employed in the "Body Snatchers" trilogy of films (Don Siegel, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, 1956; Philip Kaufman, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, 1978; Abel Ferrara, *Body Snatchers*, 1993). However, each film actualizes it in a different way. Don Siegel's film tells the story of a small American community in the fictional town of Santa Mira, which is gradually being replaced by alien copies. In other words, when a character falls asleep near an alien pod (that seems strangely vegetal), he or she is gradually "devitalized" while a hidden double is located in the near set. Nevertheless, Siegel's film never clarifies what happens to the body substituted by a copy. At the very end of the film, the replacement of the main protagonist's girlfriend is only understood retrospectively, once the audience is confronted with her strange behavior. An ellipsis

silences the organic and figurative mystery of the substitution. Kaufman's remake reenacts the same scene, this time confronting his character directly with the collapse of his friend's face. A row of close-ups first shows the actress with make-up, revealing her character's vegetal transformation. Later on, a close-up of the character is performed without her titular actress, as she is replaced by a fake head in her own image. The actor playing the main character no longer holds the actress's face in his hands, but an artificial fabrication that shows a face in the process of being deformed until it appears to be nothing more than a crumpled piece of cardboard. It is not until Abel Ferrara's second remake that the characters are confronted with the total disappearance of their bodies, which are reduced to ashes. Kaufman's film already suggested that the original bodies would end up in garbage cans, but Ferrara's is the first film to give them an elaborate figurative treatment, according to what Nicole Brenez has coined the "logic of the major image": "this consists in figuratively unfolding to the end what in previous versions was treated in terms of an ellipsis"<sup>43</sup>. Towards the end of the film, a series of tracking-in shots presents anonymous bodies in a state of decomposition, collapsing on themselves like empty shells, until they become a heap of ash that is indifferently swept away. For the first time in this series of films, the original body is visualized as a "remnant," a waste product to be tossed into garbage bags: "Because killing is not enough: you have to degrade, damage, discredit. *Body Snatchers* is a laboratory of figurative torture [...]"<sup>44</sup>.

- 15 Has this *Body-Snatchers* figure of the "fall of Human Figure," a prerequisite to further imitation, not gone beyond its strictly filmic frame? How would such persistence appear in a televised context? In fact, this fall adds another dimension to corruption, since, in addition to coming from the corruption of the character's bodily envelop (material corruption), it leads to the corruption of his reputation and social status through a comical narrative ("reputational" or "ideal" corruption).
- 16 The "Carpe Noctem" episode (S03E04), from the *Angel* series, introduces the existence of an evil aerial entity (i.e. without a body of its own) capable of possessing various characters. This episodic tale of possession is divided into two parts. Firstly, a non-recurring character, exclusively confined to the pre-credits scene, bends over in pain in a close-up shot before his body collapses, in the manner of images from the "*Body Snatchers*" films. This fall of the Human Figure combines two image regimes: the actor on screen is replaced by a digital double to represent the beginning of the body's collapse (fig. 1), and then a matching cut introduces a plastic suit roughly resembling the actor in question. The fall of the Human Figure begins with a digital special effect, but concludes with a striking return to materiality, as it is a real piece of plastic filmed on the set (fig. 2). In retrospect, we understand that this was a body possessed by an entity: once used to its full capacity, the body is left on the ground like a piece of waste to be disposed of without remorse. Indeed, the body adopted by the entity falls to the ground, like a suit, never to reappear in the series.

Figure 1



Actor's digital double; *Angel*; S03E04; director: James A. Contner  
© The WB

Figure 2



A shapeless plastic body; *Angel*; S03E04; James A. Contner  
© The WB

- 17 This entity is thus the real non-recurring character at the heart of the episode, the central threat that Angel's team will have to face, since it will, in a second stage, possess Angel's body. In this pre-credits scene, identity is treated, both narratively and figuratively, as a mere costume. This “temporary identity” adopted by the entity, and sent away from the pre-credits scene, is constructed solely as a qualitative identity in Stéphane Ferret's sense. Unlike “numerical identity, which defines the relationship an individual maintains with himself throughout his career”<sup>45</sup> or “*sortale* identity, which unites numerically different individuals under the same species or genus category,”<sup>46</sup> qualitative identity “alludes to a resemblance between one or more individuals that is

as strong as one may wish"<sup>47</sup>. Since the possessed character in the pre-credits scene is in fact only a secondary, non-recurring, unnamed character, his material corruption to the point of shapelessness only impacts the body's "image," i.e. its qualitative identity. This is why I speak of a costume-identity when a character's identity is reduced to its appearance (qualitative identity) by means of a plastic material that visually resembles a kind of costume. When the entity takes possession of Angel's body, it is still his qualitative identity that is at stake (since his friends do not notice the substitution), but also his numerical and *sortale* identity. Indeed, the demon does not belong to the same *sortale* identity as Angel, since it belongs neither to the realm of humanity nor to the realm of vampirism. He also breaks with the continuity of memory belonging to Angel's body: there is therefore, for the same visible body (Angel's), a discontinuity of numerical identities (the aerial entity replaces Angel's spirit). This identity discontinuity is nevertheless embodied figuratively, since every numerical identity or subjectivity is associated with what might be called a "technique of the body"<sup>48</sup>, or a "habitus"<sup>49</sup>, i.e. the singular way in which an actor or actress embodies his or her character. Following Stéphane Ferret, I argue that qualitative identity does not come without the need for perpetual "re-identification," especially in fantasy, where identities are more "vagrant"<sup>50</sup>. For Ferret, re-identification (specific to the field of qualitative identity) works through "identity symptoms"<sup>51</sup>: "An identity symptom is a clue that gives us good reason to think that this is the object"<sup>52</sup>. If these notions are considered within a framework of filmic and actoral analysis, it might be argued that numerical identity (a character's subjectivity) is inevitably correlated with a "gestual répertoire," i.e. a set of gestures, postures, timbres of voice, behavior, etc., invented by actors and actresses to embody their characters<sup>53</sup>. This "gestual répertoire," part of numerical identity (since it identifies the subjectivity informing the body), and part of qualitative identity (visible behavior as appearance), functions in the same way as Ferret's symptoms of re-identification. Indeed, the change in numerical identity brought by Angel's possession is notable only for the behavioral incongruities that blur the re-identification of qualitative identity: Angel no longer behaves as he should. This change in behavior, as a "symptom" of the change in numerical identity, is the main source of the episode's comic tone. Finally, this aspect could be seen as a corruption of his reputation: Angel's numerical identity is corrupted by the very body initially attributed to him. The reputational corruption concerns above all Angel's relationship of respect and chastity with women. The entity possessing Angel never ceases to raise his eyebrows in an outrageous manner and makes sexual advances to every woman he comes across. The entity is also characterized by actions that are out of sync with the body it possesses, as it lacks the information necessary for its behavioral adjustment: it rings the bell at the hotel reception desk whereas the building belongs to Angel, it mistakes Angel's sidekick for a simple delivery boy, it rushes for food whereas Angel, as a vampire, does not eat. The entity's desynchronization with its immediate environment is reflected in its never-ending physical agitation: it gesticulates uneasily in its chair when it thinks Angel is homosexual, jiggles excitedly at the hotel entrance, and dances around a broom to taunt Angel, who is trapped in the body of an old man.

- 18 This reputational corruption, though episodic, functions as a parodic callback to season 2, in which Angel explores the darker side of his personality and dismisses his entire team. This reputational corruption is also anchored in the past, not in *Angel*, but in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, with the character of Angelus at the center of the plot in season 2<sup>54</sup>. What is more, this story more or less anticipates deliberately the romance between

Angel and Cordelia, as the entity in Angel's body explicitly flirts with Cordelia. The strictly episodic plot thus conjures up both an intra- and extradiegetic past, in which Angel's morality may have been flickering, and an as yet undiscovered future, with a possible romance. Episodic reputational corruption, based on an initial material corruption (the costume-identity), only makes sense in terms of our familiarity with the character, and thus involves the memory of the series. In *Doctor Who* (S01E05), this costume-identity figure takes a more satirical and political turn, affecting not only the reputation of one character, but that of a political institution.

- 19 *Doctor Who* (2005) tells the story of the "Doctor," a renegade time-lord who travels the universe back and forth in his TARDIS spaceship, occasionally rescuing people in need. However, the series bases most of its plots in Great Britain, not without reflexivity, for it is produced by national broadcaster BBC One. The series is therefore semi-serial, with each episode based on a problem to be solved by the Doctor being followed by a narrative arc spanning on at least one season. The episode "World War Three" (S01E05) relates the arrival of the Slitheen on Earth and their takeover of the entire United Kingdom. The Slitheen are an extraterrestrial race capable of imitating their victims' bodily envelope in order to temporarily take up their identity. This identity theft, mostly targeting ministers or political advisors, is carried out in an overtly satirical tone. Satire is a common device in *Doctor Who*. According to James Chapman, during the 1970-1974 period of the first *Doctor Who* series (entitled "Earthbound"), ministers, and politicians as a whole, are invariably characterized as incompetent and cumbersome<sup>55</sup>. The "Third World War" episode (S01E05) is of primary interest to us since it deals with the costume-identity figure as a satire of corrupt power. The identity of non-recurring characters is used as a costume by aliens: the character's qualitative identity is placed on hangers like a garment (fig. 3, fig. 4). Here, material corruption is a visual operation of dissociation between the stolen qualitative identity and the Slitheen's body. As in *Angel's* example, the fall of the Human Figure combines two kinds of images: a digital double for the fall and a plastic-made material to represent the body envelope treated as a costume by the Slitheen. Identity becomes a skin-costume that can be changed at will onto a body that can take on any number of identities. In *Doctor Who*, a person's identity is reduced to a garment or costume, which can be discarded at will. This operation of identity shrinking, in which identity is seen in material terms only, bears witness to the violence and lack of consideration the Slitheen have for humanity in general. What is more, is this costume-identity not the embodiment of political power as a role to be played, in which identities are not fixed and reliable, but merely "costumes" to be laughed at?

Figure 3



Identity as costume; *Doctor Who* (2005); S01E05; director: Keith Boak  
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Figure 4



Identity as costume; *Doctor Who* (2005); S01E05; director: Keith Boak  
© BBC One

- 20 Indeed, the aliens are taking on the appearance of ministers to carry out their plan: causing a third world war in order to eventually “sell” the Earth for maximum profits. From then on, this costume-identity represents the integration of a “foreign [alien] body” into public institutions in order to defend the interests of the extraterrestrial race: such use of our ministers’ images by an alien owning maximum power can be a constantly renewed allegory. Historically, accounts of “Body Snatchers” are read out of a fear of communism<sup>56</sup>, yet the plot of that episode, alongside the context of contemporary capitalism, can encourage us to perceive it as the stranglehold of private profit-making interests at the very heart of the state<sup>57</sup>.
- 21 The relationship between bodies, corruption and power operates on two levels: the downgrading of characters through material corruption, thanks to a situation of social domination (the figure of the mannequin); and the material corruption of bodies as a leverage for reputational corruption (the figure of the costume-identity). The costume-identity in *Doctor Who* has the particularity of being part of a comical, satirical and allegorical context, developing what remained potential in *Angel*: a piece of plastic in the “image” of a character and *resembling* a costume (*Angel*) becomes, in the *Doctor Who* diegesis, a *real costume* used as such by the invaders. The character overhaul is thus twofold: through the corruption of their body (only their corporeal envelope remains) and the corruption of their values. Reputational corruption can also be seen in terms of the corruption of a role or institution. The role is understood in the sense of André Gardies, that is to say as a “cultural entity, pre-existing the work, [the role] appears as a relatively stable figure, nonetheless subject to minor variations [...]”<sup>58</sup>. The role pre-exists the film and thus provides a set of rules and constraints. According to Claire

Cornillon, in *Angel*, the eponymous character conforms to the codes of chivalry<sup>59</sup>. The overhaul of the character through reputational corruption thus directly challenges this chivalric role with the entity behaving in the opposite way to *Angel*'s values. In *Doctor Who* (2005), material corruption is not the corruption of a role, but of an institution in its broadest sense. This is why, *in the end*, this form of corruption can also be described as ideal, since it refers to abstract notions that transcend its actual embodiment in fiction (chivalry, British political power). This character overhaul, specific to the figure of the costume-identity, which in part engages the series' memory, nevertheless remains limited by the framework of the episode, since it mainly affects the non-recurring secondary characters characteristic of the semi-serial format. But are there any figures of corruption, material and/or ideal, that are worked on and reformulated over several seasons? What would serial corruption be on the scale of a single work?

## The serial oscillation of individuation in *Doctor Who*

### Genealogy of the "viscous paste" figure

- 22 I would like now to develop a serial analysis of the figure of the "viscous paste," perceived as the political crystallization of plastic phenomena explored in previous seasons of *Doctor Who* (1963). The fall of the Human Figure here brings about the series' own internal genealogy, summoning up the figure of costume-identity previously studied (qualitative identity figured as waste). In the double episode "The Rebel Flesh/The Almost people" (S06E05-06) of *Doctor Who* (2005), the Doctor finds himself in a 22<sup>nd</sup> Century acid factory where employees have been replaced by remotely-controlled worker-clones, especially designed to suffer workplace accidents *in lieu* of the so-called "original" workers. The employees are then the non-recurring characters at the center of the episode, along with the clones whose existence is justified for purposes of physical corruption solely: the material corruption of their bodies due to acid leaks inside the factory. Over the course of the episode, the clones become empowered, gaining the ability to live independently from the will of the workers who gave them life in the first place.
- 23 Humanity as becoming-matter – through duplication – is a recurring trope in both series (1963 and 2005). In the episode entitled "Spearhead from Space" (S07E01, 1970), an alien consciousness replaces key members of society with plastic copies called Autons. This is a direct legacy of the "Body Snatchers" films, but in the plastic, rather than the vegetable, "*matériauologique*" sense. Although the Autons look like mannequins, these images do not belong to the figure of the mannequin studied in *Sliders* (neither an organic model or downgrading of the Human Figure, nor the same political context). Although this episode does not yet involve a problematization of power and subjugation, *duplication is nonetheless already envisaged as a material process*. In other words, following Didi-Huberman, resemblance is not the agent of the Same, but a process<sup>60</sup>. Indeed, resemblance is never complete. The faces do not perfectly resemble each other, since their overtly conspicuous material nature prevents duplication from being imperceptible. The copied face is thus shown as a plastic "mask." *Individuation is also introduced as temporary*, since the Autons can fall back into the state of material and lose their faces. The 2005 revival of *Doctor Who* added a new dimension to the Autons. Here, *a character is treated as waste* when "swallowed" by a garbage can-shaped Auton



for duplication ("Rose," S01E01). However, duplication does not yet lead to death, and seems to be a comical version inspired by Kaufman and Ferrar's "Body Snatchers" where copied characters are reduced to ashes and thrown into garbage bags.

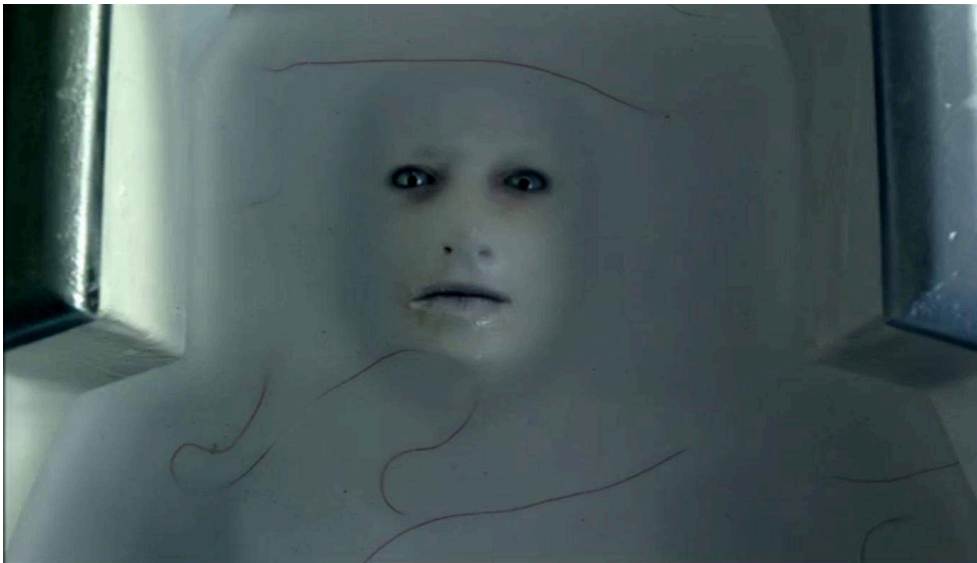
- 24 The double episode entitled "The Rebel Flesh/The Almost People" rephrases all these elements (material duplication, resemblance as a process, temporary individuation, character as waste) within a more explicit political context (the factory worker). At the same time, the *matériauologique* imaginary becomes more specific, as a "material imagination of dough"<sup>61</sup> affecting the construction of characters. In this episode, duplication is based on a process of individuation from a "viscous paste"<sup>62</sup>. This material, within the diegesis, reenacts the two meanings that can be given to the notion of figure. A first sense of "outward appearance," or "giving shape," but also a second sense of "dissimilarity," or even formlessness<sup>63</sup>. In this way, the figure of the viscous paste oscillates between the taking shape of identity by the complete replication of an individual, and a return to a pre-identity material formlessness. In fact, the double is presented as emerging from a viscous material called "The Flesh" during an educational scene intended for the audience, which visually presents all the types of faces that will be used in the course of the episode. The scene thus underpins the *matériauologique* genesis of the doubles, insisting on the muddy origin of imitation, in the sense given to the term by Sophie Lécole Solnychkine:

[T]he image conceived from mud is no longer to be considered as an analogical double, as a reception or redoubling of the forms of the world, but as the *power to shape the world*.<sup>64</sup>

Indeed, the shaping of the character is not an imitation of the mirror-image paradigm, but rather of the modeling-image paradigm<sup>65</sup>. The imitation of a character *through* the modeling of a viscous paste does indeed fall within what Lécole-Solnychkine calls a "zone of viscosity": i.e. "[...] that moment of indistinction between model, material and molded at the origin of every image"<sup>66</sup>. The faces of clones are figuratively constructed as a negotiation between model, material and molded, from which five different states derive: the shapeless face, the face-material, the face-stigmata, the human face (replica of an individual) and the monstrous face.

- 25 The shapeless face is the face emerging from the viscous paste (fig. 5). It is the equivalent of the Autons' head without individualized faces. The face-material is a face replicating that of an individual, but whose material source remains eminently visible: the actress is clad in a kind of mask ostensibly giving the impression of having viscous skin. The resemblance is thus thwarted by its very material basis. It is reminiscent of the plastic face of the Autons, but from now on, this face-material is the face of the clones when they rebel, partially denying their human face, since the latter is that of their submission to a power.

Figure 5



Shapeless face ; *Doctor Who* (2005); S06E05; director: Julian Simpson  
© BBC One

- 26 Here, the worker's alienation is literally a becoming-other. The stigmata-face is more resembling than the material-face, but it is still marked by stigmata as long as the clone remains in a state of identity flickering (he does not fully conform, remaining in a state of hesitation, but not rebelling either). Finally, the monstrous face is the logical continuation of the stigmatized face, when the wavering identity collides with incomprehension and human cruelty: a clone discovers what looks very much like a mass grave made up of all the clones previously "used." Adopting human form is then no longer possible, and the clone enters an irreversible process of monstrous expansion.
- 27 The political limit of *Doctor Who* lies precisely at the intersection between the becoming-monstrous that constitutes a threat in the narrative, and the conformism of identity that the series advocates, since the "good" clones are those who conform to the identity assigned to them by a relationship of social domination<sup>67</sup>. The alienation is thus twofold: the "original" workers are dispossessed of their human singularity by the creation of clones, and the clones "become other" by conforming to the identity imposed on them. This imposed identity is both numerical, since they share all the workers' memories, and qualitative, since they are also "in the image" (but an image-molding) of the workers.
- 28 The operation of clone's individuation originates in violence and suffering, and takes the form of a scream. The violence is both that of the material corruption of the bodies and that of the editing, which clashes with the conventions of image legibility. The empowerment of the clones is presented by a succession of very brief shots of the screaming material-faces, cut to the faces of the original workers (fig. 6). The recurrence of images of screaming in this double episode serves as a reminder of their social status (or, more precisely, their lack of "social" status). As they individuate, it is the past suffering contained in the material of the viscous paste that incarnates itself in a body and figures itself through the scream. The pre-individual viscous paste capable of temporarily individuating into a Human Figure carries the traumatic memory of all

previous profanations undergone. The “pre-individual” draws its inspiration from Gilbert Simondon’s analysis of individuation: “The individual would then be grasped as a relative reality, a certain phase of being which presupposes beforehand a pre-individual reality, and which, even after individuation, does not exist on its own, for individuation does not exhaust all the potentials of pre-individual reality at once [...]”<sup>68</sup>. Individuation is therefore a process that emerges from a common pre-individual affect (as inscribed in the material from which they all originate).

Figure 6



Screaming clones; *Doctor Who* (2005); S06E05; director: Julian Simpson  
© BBC One

- 29 The viscous paste as figure here goes beyond the notion of character. The figure is merely a stage in the individuation of the material, a temporary formal fixation of a viscous paste, closer to vital bubbling than to organism. Indeed, the figure manifests itself even before the clones are introduced as characters: the liquid bath giving birth to them. Similarly, when characters die, they do not disappear from the shot, but *persist* in the image in the material form of viscous paste, which both pre-exists and survives the character (fig. 7). We shall see that this *persistence* of the figure in the shot, despite the character’s death, is not unrelated to the *multiple survivals* at work in the images.

Figure 7



Viscous paste; *Doctor Who* (2005); S06E05; director: Julian Simpson  
© BBC One

### The corruption of bodies as survival of "camp" images

- 30 Finally, the Warburgian viewpoint of "survival" allows us to "cross all iconographic, generic and ideological boundaries: the same morphology can be used by artists in very different, if not antithetical, contexts and for very different symbolic purposes"<sup>69</sup>. According to Didi-Huberman, the survival of figures makes one think of both "the indestructibility of traces" and "their relative erasure, their perpetual transformations"<sup>70</sup>. Warburgian survival is thus conceived from an "energetic tension," or even a "dynamic inversion," since "[...] its vocation to intensify affect in form goes hand in hand with a kind of insensitivity to contradiction: it is always possible to leave one meaning for antithetical meaning"<sup>71</sup>.
- 31 This is why, after both the ideal corruption of the role of the knight (*Angel*) and of British political power by the costume-identity (*Doctor Who*, "World War Three"), as well as the comic image of the character as waste (*Doctor Who*, "Rose"), the fall of the Human Figure via the figure of the viscous paste can be seen as a survival of the images of the extermination camps integrated within the context of working-class exploitation ("The Rebel Flesh"). This fall of the character, which acquires very different meanings from various narrative functions, belongs here to what Ophir Lévy calls "camp imagery": "The expression thus designates the repetition and displacement of the main motifs of deportation and genocide, which, entirely decontextualized, resurface in cinema in a more or less disguised way"<sup>72</sup>. Ophir Lévy also distinguishes between "reminiscence" and "recycling" within this imagery:

The first is based on a principle of association, when a visual or scenic element in a film reminds the viewer of one of the famous concentration motifs. These motifs then seem to return as if by accident, as if the film were unaware of the connotations attached to them. [...] On the other hand, the recycling of "camp" imagery brings them back to their exact original function of coercion (concentration camp), dehumanizing marking (tattoo) and extermination (gas

chamber) of a given population by a totalitarian political regime. Except that the victims are now clones, mutants, androids or extraterrestrials<sup>73</sup>.

- 32 It seems to us that this episode of *Doctor Who* implements a "reminiscence" of this imagery when the former worker clones are shown as "rags" actually alive in the diegesis: a mass grave of bodies is discovered, in which the organic mingles with the fabric ("rags"), but a mass grave of "living," slightly mobile bodies. In this image of a mass grave, albeit made up of *multiple bodies*, lies a form of return to a *single material* (fig. 8). The viscous paste thus *survives* in two senses: it survives the clones' death (narrative and figurative issues) and carries the *survival of camp* imagery (figural issues).

Figure 8



Reminiscence of camp imagery; *Doctor Who* (2005); S06E05; director: Julian Simpson  
© BBC One

- 33 Didi-Huberman himself conjures up the notion of the formless to comment upon photographs of Auschwitz in terms of the "dissimilar"<sup>74</sup>. He points to the coexistence of the similar (everyday human gestures) and the dissimilar (the "almost shapeless carpet made up of all the lying bodies") within a single photograph. In *Doctor Who*, it is the similar – the original worker – that inflicts the worst atrocities on its clone, condemning him to "dissimilarity." In fact, the "living rags" are the result of a condensation process, as they simultaneously present us with two types of originally distinct documentary photography: the mass graves of naked human bodies made dissimilar, and the piles of clothing of Jewish victims. What is more, the political space to which the clones in *Doctor Who* belong rephrases and radicalizes Michel Foucault's analyses of bio-power in a science-fictional mode.
- 34 Indeed, bio-power allows us to relocate the origin of the motives behind Nazi crimes, in that the purpose of this power is no longer to kill, but to invest the realm of life. Foucault's synthetic formulation of bio-power is: "a power to *make* live or to *reject* in death"<sup>75</sup>. The clone-workers are indeed about regulating and producing life: power creates life, invests directly the lives of the clones, and finally leaves them to die in mass graves. This life production is also a form of domination backed by racist

thinking. According to Michel Foucault, racism “[...] ensures the function of death in the economy of bio-power, according to the principle that the death of others is the biological reinforcement of oneself as a member of a race or population [...]”<sup>76</sup>. In both *Sliders* and *Doctor Who*, the material corruption of the clones is based precisely on the desire to keep untouched a population legally instituted as superior. Nazism – as an exemplification of bio-power – is never far, since this political regime is partly characterized by the exposure of one population to widespread death in order to maintain the existence of another<sup>77</sup>. Therefore, nazism would be “[...] an immediate decision about life, i.e. a decision about its value, or lack of value”<sup>78</sup>.

- 35 However, the “living rags” in *Doctor Who* are not the only “clandestine images” (as Lévy puts it) reminiscent in our corpus. We noted that the downgrading of the clones in the *Sliders* episode involved the figure of the mannequin. Didi-Huberman uses the vocabulary of the mannequin to describe the Auschwitz experience: “It condemns all human existence to the status of ‘mannequin,’ the death of which will eventually transform into the ‘ignoble tumult of stiffened limbs’”<sup>79</sup>. Moreover, *Sliders* conjures up the memory of Nazi crimes against humanity through the presence of scientific experiments performed on dehumanized living beings (clones). Lévy speaks of “[...] dehumanizing protocols that reduce individuals to nothing more than vile, interchangeable objects of experimentation [...]”<sup>80</sup>. This episode of *Sliders* makes visible a state of exception that is starting to become the rule, according to Giorgio Agamben’s definition of “camp”:

*By the very fact that its inhabitants [or clones] have been stripped of all political status and reduced entirely to bare life, the camp is also the most absolute biopolitical space ever realized, where power has only pure, unmediated biological life in front of it. Thus, the camp is the very paradigm of political space at the moment when politics becomes biopolitics and homo sacer virtually merges with the citizen*<sup>81</sup>.

- 36 *Sliders* is a “camp” from the outset, but in Agamben’s sense of the word, since the clones are reduced to pure material by being excluded from the social field. Following Agamben, it is precisely this exclusion that underpins the seizure of power over these bodies. The camp thus becomes the “secret matrix” of this episode of *Sliders* narrating “the creation of a space for bare life as such”<sup>82</sup>. Finally, Ophir Lévy makes tattooing, as a mark of dehumanization, an important issue in the possible “recycling” of camp imagery<sup>83</sup>. In *Sliders*, the clones are dehumanized by means of a barcode inscribed on the back of their necks: the barcode replaces the tattoo as “reminiscence”<sup>84</sup>. Clones are then the result of a dehumanizing scientific experiment, and are depicted, in a roundabout way, as dismembered mannequins like “tumults of stiffened limbs.” More generally, the denial of the clones’ humanity by their dismemberment for industrial purposes in *Sliders* is strongly reminiscent of the Nazis’ reuse of human remains: salvaged gold teeth, but also crushed bones and ashes used as pounding material for roads still under construction<sup>85</sup>. This is why, beyond the imagery of the camps, the “afterglow” of the camps (again in Lévy’s sense) is present in almost all the examples cited so far. The afterglow effect is manifested in the “generalized degradation of bodies.” According to Lévy, this degradation sometimes intertwines a concentration camp context and a working-class context<sup>86</sup>.
- 37 Finally, the costume-identities used by the aliens in *Doctor Who* (S01E05) and initially affiliated with the “Body Snatchers” stories can also be reread in terms of a “camp afterglow” for several reasons. Firstly, Lévy himself assimilates the “Body Snatchers” films to the realm of afterglow through the widespread disappearance of the human

species, gradually reduced to ashes. Secondly, the presence of genocidal extraterrestrials often functions as a reminder of the extermination of Jews in science-fiction cinema — the assassins are literally *inhuman* and the crimes are exactly against *all* humanity<sup>87</sup>.

- 38 These figures of corruption affecting both the workers and the clones as non-recurring characters and the recurring characters of the Doctor and Amy Pond (the Doctor's sidekick on several occasions) is not without consequence. Indeed, we find out at the end of the episode that Amy Pond has been replaced by a copy, but without being able, on first viewing, to determine the exact moment of substitution. This figure of viscous paste is indeed figuratively haunted by past images (both diegetic and historical), but is also reinvested with a narrative stake when it concerns the future of Amy Pond's character (her status as a double will be clarified in the following episode). Finally, if the double is "in the image" of the "original" character, then the corruption of the double's body is also probably, reversely, a corruption of the image of the original character. This passage from the regime of anthropomorphism to the status of mere shapeless material is made palpable and unbearable because it concerns both the main character and because it invokes historical memory. The image of the original character, impacted by this operation, gives greater scope and emotional anchorage to the critical and historical statement.

## Conclusion

- 39 There is a form of *character overhaul* characterized by the episodic material and ideal corruption of a character's image *through* the presence of a double created solely to see his or her body desecrated. This desecration is analyzed as the figuration of a power that subjugates individuals. This subjugation is not to be separated from the relationship between character and material. To study this relationship, I chose a horizontal, iconology-inspired understanding of TV series that enable us to approach dialectically *a priori* heterogeneous works from a diegetic point of view, but actually close from a figural point of view. It seems possible and desirable to de-territorialize a figure in order to experiment with its efficiency within a diegetic framework that is *a priori* incompatible. In their own way, the forms of corruption studied here renew the fall of the Human Figure studied by Didi-Huberman: from the reification of bodies starting with the mannequin figure, to the definite corruption of the image of the character reduced to a costume-identity thrown to the ground (*Sliders*, *Angel*, and *Doctor Who* 2005). Each series reinvents and updates a figure in its own way. In *Sliders*, the mannequin figure *figuratively qualifies* the extras and non-recurring characters by proliferating in the set without any diegetic justification, whereas in *Angel*, it is the extras that *have literally become mannequins* by becoming part of the set. Similarly, in *Angel*, the figure of the costume-identity is first and foremost the complete destruction of a body reduced to a shapeless heap of plastic, whereas in *Doctor Who* (2005), the same costume-identity may be worn multiple times like a garment. In *Angel*, the shapeless plastic material *resembles* a suit, while in *Doctor Who* (2005) it *serves as costume* for the aliens.
- 40 The other methodological operation consists in experimenting in a different way with our relationship to a series' past, by determining the figural genealogy of an episodic figure. This genealogy enables us to identify not only previous occurrences, but above

all the crystallization of the figure around political issues of subjectivation and historical memory (*Doctor Who* 1963 and 2005). The classifications of *Doctor Who* by periods, producers and scriptwriters can be doubled by a history of the figurative forms specific to this series. *Doctor Who* images condense past fictional forms (the Autons), resonate with contemporary forms (waste), and invent their own future (viscous paste). Ultimately, the degradation of corrupted bodies is a constant reminder of the "clandestine images of the camps"<sup>88</sup>, more or less consciously, and more or less explicitly. Iconology, applied to TV series, enables us to think of all these images together, since they are all haunted by the survivals of the same traumatic historical event, despite their undeniable, manifest differences (in terms of narrative issues, dramatic tone and political purpose).

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## NOTES

1. Jason Mittell, *Complex TV. The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 138.
2. Nicole Brenez, *De la figure en général et du corps en particulier : l'invention figurative au cinéma* (Bruxelles, Paris : DeBoeck Université, 1998), 52. All translations of critical quotes are mine.
3. André Gardies, *Le Conteur de l'ombre : Essais sur la narration filmique* (Lyon : Aléas Université Lumière-Lyon 2, LERTEC, 1999) and André Gardies, *Le Récit filmique* (Paris : Hachette, 1993).
4. The semi-serial is a form of television series that combines self-contained, episodic plots with long-running, serialized plots. According to Claire Cornillon's thesis, while the format stabilized historically in the United States in the 1990s, its beginnings can be traced back to the 1970s. (Sarah Hatchuel and Claire Cornillon, "The Ethics of Serial Narrative Structures," *Series - International Journal of TV Serial Narratives* 6, no. 1, (23 July 2020): 57-64, <https://series.unibo.it/article/view/10393>
5. *Doctor Who* is indicated as *Doctor Who* (2005) and *Doctor Who* (1963) to distinguish the original series from its 2005 revival. The date therefore does not refer to the release dates of the episodes, but indicates the series in question.
6. Florent Favard, *Écrire une série TV : la promesse d'un dénouement* (Tours : Presses Universitaires François-Rabelais, 2019). Episodic plots are not necessarily self-contained, but can also play a part in the gradual construction of the promise of an outcome.
7. *Complex TV* is also characterized by a hybridization between episodic and serial formats, even if Jason Mittell's and Claire Cornillon's analyses do not exactly corroborate each other (Claire Cornillon, *Les séries dramatiques semi-feuilletonnantes formulaires des grands networks américains de Moonlighting (1985-1989) à The Flash (2014- )* Thèse de doctorat Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2022).

8. Sophie Lécole Solnychkine, *Dans la Boue des images* (Sesto San Giovanni : Mimésis, 2023),13.
9. Sophie Lécole Solnychkine, *Æsthetica antartica* : « *The Thing* » de John Carpenter (Aix-en-Provence : Rouge Profond, 2019), 20.
10. Lécole Solnychkine, *Æsthetica antartica*, 21.
11. Jacques Aumont, *Comment pensent les films : apologie du filmique* (Milan : Éditions Mimésis, 2021),131.
12. Jacques Aumont, *Comment pensent les films*, 35.
13. Jean-Michel Durafour, « Écologie, » in *Dictionnaire d'icologie filmique*, dir. Emmanuelle André, Jean-Michel Durafour et Luc Vancheri (Lyon : Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2022), 210.
14. "Relationalism, by asserting that every being is only because it is in relation, by positing that no term can be thought of without the least other *whatever it may be*, also allows us to think that there *may always exist other relations for a term than the one it has with another term* [...]."An image is always more than what we perceive of it: "*It is up to man to confront the inhuman part of images.*" (Jean-Michel Durafour, *Cinéma et cristaux. Traité d'écologie* (Sesto San Giovanni : Mimésis, 2018), 18).
15. This phrasing is openly excerpted from Didi-Huberman's iconological work on the "drapé-tombé". The author analyzes what he calls the gradual "fall" of the "Human Figure", based on occurrences of the "Ninfa" (Aby Warburg) in-history of art: from the upright position surrounded by her drape, to the dissociation of body and drape, via her gradual collapse, and finally the drape alone on the ground like material waste. See Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ninfa Moderna : essai sur le drapé tombé* (Paris : Gallimard, 2002).
16. The final subsection follows Ophir Lévy's analysis. See *Images clandestines. Métamorphoses d'une mémoire visuelle des « camps »* (Paris : Hermann, 2016). Thus, I assume from now his choice of retaining the quote marks for the term "camps".
17. "A segment of a television series, lasting longer than one season, it is delimited by the *tilts* and isolates zones presenting a certain unity, in terms of plot advancement, rhythm, tone, configuration of the fictional world..." (Favard, *Écrire une série TV*, 272).
18. Favard, *Écrire une série TV*, 103.
19. Roger Bozzetto points out the earlier example of John Boyd's novel *The Organ Bank Farm* (1970), "in which human clones are used to provide 'spare parts'" (Roger Bozzetto, « Les clones dans les mondes "imaginaires" de la Science-Fiction, » *Biofuturs* 213 (2001), <https://www.quarante-deux.org/archives/bozzetto/ecrits/territoires/clones.html>). These works intertwine two usually distinct genetic possibilities: reproductive and therapeutic cloning. Here, reproductive cloning has a therapeutic function. On this distinction, see Mark Hunyadi, *Je est un clone : l'éthique à l'épreuve des biotechnologies* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 2004), 128.
20. Georges Didi-Huberman, *La Ressemblance informe ou Le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille*. 2nd ed. (Paris : Éditions Macula, 2019 [1995]), 36.
21. This model "is not indexed to nature or naturalness, but stems either from an artist's creativity alone (the claim of classical humanism), or from an external necessity (Plato's ideal form), or from the rules of construction bequeathed by tradition' (Brenez, *De la figure en général*, 33).
22. "[A]ll figures that challenge the body's relationship to itself in a quest for perfection [...] that needs neither reflection nor experience, that is pure action and even pure operativity in the act and, for that, resembles nothing more than an electric cable" (Brenez, *De la figure en général*, 34).
23. i.e. anything that incorporates otherness into the body, whether this Other be absence, an excess or a lack of presence, elsewhere, otherwise, lack..." (Brenez, *De la figure en général*, 35).
24. Brenez, *De la figure en général*, 33.
25. Brenez, *De la figure en général*, 44.
26. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico : dissemblance et figuration* (Paris : Flammarion, 2009 [1990]), 95.

27. Gardies, *Le Récit filmique*, 95.
28. Jacqueline Nacache, *L'Acteur de cinéma* (Paris : Armand Colin, 2005), 99.
29. Cornillon, *Les séries dramatiques semi-feuilletonnantes*, 235.
30. Cornillon, *Les séries dramatiques semi-feuilletonnantes*, 235.
31. Benjamin Thomas, *Sujets sensibles : une esthétique des personnages de cinéma* (Bruxelles: La Lettre volée, 2022), 9.
32. Benjamin Thomas, *Sujets sensibles*, 12.
33. Benjamin Thomas, *Sujets sensibles*, 10.
34. Cornillon, *Les séries dramatiques semi-feuilletonnantes*, 251.
35. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Peuples exposés, peuples figurants* (Paris : Les Éditions de Minuit, 2012), 149.
36. Didi-Huberman, *Peuples exposés*, 152.
37. Vancheri, Luc, *Figuration de l'inhumain : essai sur le devenir-accessoire de l'homme filmique*. Saint-Denis, Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1993, p. 14.
38. Again, this corresponds to the status of the extra, since Jacqueline Nacache reports, in her book dedicated to the film actor, the account of a professional for whom the extra "represents the art of living (in front of a lens or in front of spectators) a scene from everyday life" (Nacache, *L'Acteur de cinéma*, 98).
39. One of the characters guesses right when he mentions "dolls" in the dialogue.
40. Cornillon, *Les séries dramatiques semi-feuilletonnantes*, 265
41. Didi-Huberman, *La Ressemblance informe*, 146.
42. Didi-Huberman, *Ninfa Moderna*, 109.
43. Nicole Brenez, *Abel Ferrara : le mal, mais sans fleurs* (Paris : Cahiers du cinéma, 2008), 115.
44. Brenez, *Abel Ferrara*, 98.
45. "Socrates as a child is the same man - *homo sapiens* - as Socrates as an adult" (Stéphane Ferret, *Le Philosophe et son scalpel : le problème de l'identité personnelle* (Paris : Les Éditions de Minuit, 1993), 14).
46. "Socrates and Plato under the concept man; Socrates, Plato and a hippopotamus under the concept animal" (Ferret, *Le philosophe et son scalpel*, 14).
47. "Socrates and himself, two identical twins with each other" (Ferret, *Le philosophe et son scalpel*, 14).
48. Marcel Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 2013 [1950]), 368.
49. Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 2010 [1972]), 256.
50. Here, I rely on Stéphane Ferret's formulation of "biographical wandering." (Ferret, *Le Philosophe et son scalpel*, 26).
51. Stéphane Ferret, *L'Identité* (Paris : Flammarion, 1998), 16.
52. Ferret, *L'Identité*, 16.
53. Pablo Cabeza-Macuso, « Pour une typologie actorale, narrative et esthétique des « échanges de corps » dans quelques séries télévisées, » *A l'épreuve* 10, 2024, <https://alepreuve.numerev.com/articles/revue-10/3207-pour-une-typologie-actorale-narrative-et-esthetique-des-echanges-de-corps-dans-quelques-series-televisees>.
54. Angelus is Angel's "evil" personality, which manifests itself when certain conditions are met. It is the evil version of the character, reminiscent of the "evil twin" trope in fantasy or science fiction stories.
55. James Chapman, *Inside the Tardis: the Worlds of Doctor Who* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 81.
56. Although such an orthodox reading has been challenged. See Éric Dufour, *Le Cinéma de science-fiction : histoire et philosophie* (Paris : Armand Colin, 2011),70.

57. Other episodes also document the wrongs of capitalism. Chapman points to the "Planet of the Ood" episode, in which a situation of slavery is linked to the capitalistic production regime (Chapman, *Inside the Tardis*, 225).
58. Gardies, *Le récit filmique*, 61.
59. Cornillon, *Les séries dramatiques semi-feuilletonnantes*, 267.
60. Didi-Huberman, *La Ressemblance informe*, 442.
61. Gaston Bachelard, *La Terre et les rêveries du repos* (Paris : J. Corti, 2004 1946 ), 76.
62. Gaston Bachelard sees "paste" as "primitive matter" (Bachelard, *La Terre*, 16).
63. Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, 26.
64. Lécole-Solnyckine, *Dans la Boue des images*, 25.
65. Lécole-Solnyckine, *Dans la Boue des images*, 225.
66. Lécole Solnyckine, *Dans la Boue des images*, 24.
67. Gilles Deleuze reminds us that, for Michel Foucault, power represses secondarily only, since it incites, distributes, controls, disciplines and normalizes above all else. See Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (Paris : Les Éditions de Minuit, 2004 [1986]), 36 and Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité. 1. La volonté de savoir*. (Paris : Gallimard, 1994 [1976]), 190. What is more, neither *Sliders* nor *Doctor Who* episodes end with a revolt from the exploited, since the protest is strictly individual and has no political outlet. The series even seem to promote this individual mode of action, without any collective commitment, since it is valued within the diegesis by the main protagonists: in *Doctor Who*, the Doctor seems satisfied with the media's denunciation of the exploitation of the clone-workers, without ensuring that their conditions of existence are actually transformed; in *Sliders*, the group of travelers continues its journey through the multiverse without the cloning system, and the social organization that makes it possible, being destroyed.
68. Gilbert Simondon, *L'Individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information* (Grenoble : Millon, 2005), 24.
69. Didi-Huberman *Ninfa Moderna*, 36.
70. Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'Image survivante : histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg* (Paris : Les Éditions de Minuit, 2002), 158.
71. Didi-Huberman, *L'Image survivante*, 244-245.
72. Lévy, *Images clandestines*, 12.
73. Lévy, *Images clandestines*, 19.
74. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images malgré tout* (Paris : Les Éditions de Minuit, 2003), 56.
75. Foucault, *La Volonté de savoir*, 177.
76. Michel Foucault, *Il faut défendre la société* (Paris : Gallimard Seuil, 1997), 270.
77. Foucault, *La Volonté de savoir*, 180.
78. Katia Genel, « Le biopouvoir chez Foucault et Agamben, » *Methodos*, no. 4, 2004, <https://journals.openedition.org/methodos/131>.
79. Didi-Huberman, *Images malgré tout*, 59.
80. Lévy, *Images clandestines*, 35.
81. Giorgio Agamben, « Qu'est-ce qu'un camp ? », in *Moyens sans fins. Notes sur la politique* (Paris : Édition Payot et Rivages, 1995), 51.
82. Agamben, « Qu'est-ce qu'un camp », 47.
83. Lévy, *Images clandestines*, 57.
84. Ophir Lévy notes that, in science-fiction cinema, the tattoo repeatedly becomes a "barcode". Moreover, science-fiction cinema has already mobilized narratives of cloning, for the purposes of organ harvesting, within a "camp imagery" (Lévy, *Images Clandestines*, 66, 70).
85. Didi-Huberman, *Images malgré tout*, 13.
86. In the Marxist thought of Georg Lukàs, Theodor Adorno and Lucien Goldmann, man's status as a thing in the making is the product of capitalism. Georg Lukàs's central thesis on reification, popularized by Ophir Lévy, is as follows: "in the age of capitalism and commodity exchange, men

having acquired the habit of perceiving themselves and the surrounding world according to a schema analogous to that which governs their relationship to things, reification has become for them a 'second nature' (Lévy; *Images clandestines*, 53)." Concerning Pasolini, Lévy reminds us that "Beyond its own power of haunting, it was therefore also as a paradigm of radical political thought that the memory of the 'camps' innervated modern European cinema, making the concentrationary horizon appear as the *reverse*, as the 'Real' finally unveiled of the capitalist and bourgeois world (Lévy, *Images clandestines*, 197).

87. Lévy, *Images clandestines*, 78.

88. Lévy, *Images clandestines*.

## ABSTRACTS

This paper analyzes the status of televised character overhaul from the angle of material corruption through the study of three semi-serial TV series : *Sliders*, *Angel*, and *Doctor Who*. The first section analyzes the episodic figures of corruption. Firstly, the manner in which a character is downgraded via the figure of the mannequin in *Sliders* and *Angel*. Secondly, the first section examines the material and ideal corruption in *Angel* and *Doctor Who* via the figure of "costume identity". A link is made with the "Body Snatchers" movies from the motif of the fall of the "Human Figure". The second section studies the serial oscillation of individuation in *Doctor Who* with a genealogy of the "viscous paste" figure in the first *Doctor Who* series (1963). Finally, this genealogy helps to interpret the "viscous paste" as a survival of "camp" imagery in *Doctor Who* (2005).

## INDEX

**Keywords:** Character overhaul, Doctor Who, Angel, Sliders, matter, survival

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