

Soul Searching: Alter(nat)ing Realities in *Undone*

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Abstract

This essay traces the complex interplay of hybridity and doubling present throughout in the sci-fi television series *Undone* (2019). We show how highly experimental audiovisual techniques accentuate the myriad identities and overlapping realities that Alma, the protagonist, both represents and experiences. At the same time, these innovative formal and structural devices position the viewer to experience narrative and temporal instability together with the protagonist. Particular attention is paid to the uniquely affective style of rotoscoping and the significance of recurring literal as well as figurative uses of the mirror. The protagonist becomes both the subject and object of the gaze even as the fixture becomes a conduit or portal to distinct geographies and temporalities. We argue that much as the show's innovative and elaborate visual style reflects personal (and ultimately narrative) hybridity, the mirror itself catalyzes new ways of seeing.

Key Words: *Undone*, rotoscoping, rotoscoped mirror hybridity

*The authors wish to acknowledge the tireless efforts of our research assistants, Annie Means and Clara Epelman. The Student-Faculty Summer Collaborative Research Grant at Whitman College made this collaboration possible.

Every trauma is a trace... The external event, whether it occurs as a form of prolonged structural oppression as in the case of racism or colonialism or as an instantaneous event like a car accident, inscribes itself in the psyche.

The Future Life of Trauma, xi

“Promise me, mijo. No jumping through mirrors looking for other dimensions. No digging up the courtyard looking for mines. And no cutting yourself in half. I need you to be... normal”

Matt Mendez, *The Astronaut*, 233

Raphael Bob-Waksberg and Kate Purdy’s *Undone* (2019), the West’s first serialized television program to employ the meticulous technique of rotoscoping, is a fascinating production about a Mexican American woman named Alma (“Soul”) who survives a traumatic car accident and subsequent coma. As a result, the protagonist seems to develop extraordinary new abilities which allow her consciousness to travel through time and space, even as she sees visions of her deceased father, leading her to question and later investigate the established facts of his death. Alma’s new abilities disrupt what is otherwise presented as a mundane existence. Grappling with relentless tedium, Alma is drawn to the allure of a fantastic or imagined utopia as a form of resistance against the norms of capitalist and patriarchal society. With a mixture of curiosity, trepidation, and wonder, the protagonist opts to explore what she perceives to be multiple, superimposed realities even as she struggles to navigate ongoing deceptions, bewildering events, and disorienting situations that lead to an uncertain future. At the same time, she is frequently overcome by dark family secrets that emerge unpredictably from a suppressed past. Yet Alma refuses to take prescribed medication for PTSD or heed warnings regarding a genetic predisposition for schizophrenia. Throughout its eight-episode first season, the show’s elaborate non-linear structure makes use of flashbacks, parallel storylines, and narrative looping to revisit, time and time again, the accident and significant moments from Alma’s troubled childhood. In this way, the series speaks to issues of trauma, mental illness, and both social and cultural alienation, while borrowing from conventions of speculative genres such as science fiction, fantasy, and crime fiction to tell an alluring and visually arresting story.

It is no coincidence that Alma seeks guidance and training in how to navigate distinct yet co-existent spatial and temporal realms, an ambivalent state not altogether unlike the precarious conditions that characterize her daily life. Alma inhabits the dissonant physical and symbolic spaces between cultures, heritages, ethnicities, and languages. Importantly, the show’s geographical setting, San Antonio – a borderland territory formerly held by Mexico but currently occupied by the United States – appropriately reflects conflicting histories of belonging and identity. As the daughter of a Mexican mother and an Anglo father, Alma learns at a young age that analogous tensions abound within her childhood home. A heated debate around a cochlear implant reveals that she herself is the site of competing interests; her parents offer conflicting and seemingly irreconcilable arguments even as the conversation readily shifts between English, Spanish, and ASL. Eventually they remove a reluctant Alma from the Deaf Community despite her having been happy and at ease within Deaf Culture. What’s more, the physical device – which, controversially, creates an indeterminate space of oscillation between two cultures, and could thus be thought of as a metaphor for the process of assimilation into (Anglo) American society – visibly marks her difference within the hearing community, particularly as a child learning to adapt.¹ In parallel fashion, Alma’s hybrid Chicana identity together with her complex cultural identity as a mestiza (with a mixture of Indigenous and Spanish heritage in the maternal lineage) likewise requires constant navigation not only across linguistic, racial, and ethnic borders but also between Catholic, Jewish, Spanish, and Indigenous roots and traditions.

1. Key scenes depict Alma’s childhood as marked with profound sensorineural hearing loss; a disability later corrected through surgical intervention. Importantly, a cochlear implant does not restore but instead bypasses normal acoustic or hearing processes. Alma learns to take advantage of this neuro-prosthetic device to detach from realities she does not want to face. She not only learns to cope, but in fact willfully controls her perception of ambient sounds such that hearing impairment becomes a profound ability, a power she wields with increasing determination. Ultimately, the cochlear implant allows her to control sound much as her father implores her to control time. For an impassioned critique of *Undone*’s casting choices and representational strategies of hearing disability see Sara Novic’s “Bending Reality: *Undone* is a Testament to Hollywood’s Crippling up Problem.”

The richly complex and multifaceted nature of this televised series demands a correspondingly intricate and innovative critical response. Consciously mirroring the unconventional nature of *Undone*, we have co-authored two fully independent, yet mutually informing articles. Detailed formal analysis in the first lays the groundwork for a strongly theoretical turn in the second. As such, this essay, which traces the complex interplay of hybridity and doubling present throughout *Undone*, is directly linked to the following essay in this volume.² Here, particular attention is paid to the uniquely affective style of rotoscoping and the significance of repeated literal as well as figurative uses of the mirror. Within *Undone*, the looking glass catalyzes new ways of seeing; the protagonist becomes both the subject and object of the gaze even as the fixture becomes a conduit or portal to distinct geographies and temporalities. With our combined analytical approaches, we likewise aim to offer dual readings and conceptualizations, providing a new spin on how form and content interact by means of cross-referencing techniques. Reading against the grain, in the sequel to this article, we demonstrate how the series engages Chicana feminist borderlands theory to offer a nuanced portrayal of the figure of la nueva mestiza, who in the Anzuldian imaginary is characterized by an oppositional consciousness and counterstance to systems of oppression in the US borderlands. We argue that clever narrative and audiovisual techniques of mirroring play a crucial role in the show's mainstreamed, at times simplistic, vision of Anzuldian feminist theory and speculative Chicana subjectivities. Together we show how increasingly experimental audiovisual techniques position the viewer to experience narrative and temporal instability together with the protagonist, even as *Undone* dramatizes recurring themes found in Chicana realist fictions addressing the subjective experience of marginalized groups in US society.

Seeing Double

Throughout the series, highly experimental audiovisual strategies accentuate the myriad identities and overlapping realities that Alma represents and experiences. Much as the show's innovative use of defamiliarizing soundscapes shift and transform according to Alma's experiences, *Undone's* elaborate visual style mirrors personal (and ultimately narrative) hybridity. Rotoscoping involves a unique blending of live-action filmmaking with hand-drawn or digital animation meticulously traced over the contours of the original footage, frame by frame. The result is a fluid visual form that, somewhat paradoxically, preserves individualized traits and the intimate details of facial expressions, corporeal gestures, and bodily movement while simultaneously warping personal identity. Actors remain recognizable and identifiable even as they are rendered unfamiliar and estranged. The innovative technique similarly alters and distorts physical objects and geographical locations. Imposing an otherworldly quality upon the ordinary creatively suggests the shifting nature of time and space.

Rotoscoping further allows for fluid transitions between scenes, states of mind, storylines, and timelines. Unknown or unknowable temporal and spatial realities are presented on the same plane as the habitual or customary routines of the protagonist's daily life. Undifferentiated stylistically, dreamscapes become plausible and credible; reality becomes implausible, incredible, even alienating. As Kim Louise Walden notes with respect to Richard Linklater's oneiric and similarly rotoscoped films, "By creating a deliberate tension between the real and the represented, what this digital technique seems to make possible is a form of animation that questions the relationship between notions of truth, verisimilitude, and reality" (11). Radically defamiliarizing the familiar invites (if not forces) the audience to share in Alma's ongoing perceptual states of disorientation and dislocation, leaving it difficult to distinguish delirium, fantasy, or delusion. Blurring the distinction between what is real and what is subjectively

2. The second article, "Soul Searching: Chicana Feminist Imaginaries in *Undone*" is also included in pages -- of *Ciberletras* 48.

interpreted or experienced, the hallucinogenic style aptly conveys the protagonist's ongoing traumas, altered states of consciousness, and deepening psychosis. As a result, the "recombined-as well as intensified and expanded-modalities of perception, sensation, and expression" (Manojlovic 198) made possible with rotoscoping, allows the show to simultaneously convey schizophrenia and the higher states of consciousness Alma believes herself to achieve. This is paramount, as *Undone* neither forces a distinction between these readings nor offers a hierarchical privileging upon the viewer. Both interpretations remain not only possible but plausible according to the show's mode of presentation and internal narrative logic.

Arguably, then, this highly expressive, layered visual aesthetic creates an effect of indeterminacy and liminality. Digital film and media scholar Maja Manojlovic, in fact, describes rotoscoping as an interstitial style that "reconfigures the conventional perceptions of space (and time) to produce an aesthetics of the in-between" (185). With *Undone*, in addition to blurring boundaries between the real and the imagined, the technique further signals an inherent instability and multiplicity of both personal and narrative identity. In this vein, the use of composite figures can be understood to reinforce and amplify the show's unifying thematic thread, that of having one foot in two worlds. It is with these words that Alma's father, Jacob, specifically references her supposed ability to inhabit two distinct planes of existence – the natural or living world and the supranatural or metaphysical realm – and simultaneously operate both within and outside of chronological time.

In addition to fluidly alter(nat)ing spaces, realities and identities within the fictional storyworld, rotoscoping live action footage of popular actors further allows for a doubling or bridging between the diegetic multiverse and the extradiegetic world. This occurs in two distinct but interconnected ways. As theorized by Marvin Carlson with respect to theater, audiences maintain "performance memory" (58) and hold expectations based on individual actors' previous roles. As he elaborates regarding the stage presence of esteemed actors, it remains "difficult, perhaps impossible, once their career is underway, for them to avoid a certain aura of expectations based on past roles. The actor's new roles become, in a very real sense, ghosted by previous ones" (67). At the same time, in theatrical works as well as in film and television, viewers have a certain foreknowledge with respect to the predictable traits of stock characters. *Undone* capitalizes on both forms of audience anticipation and reception. Inseparable from their rotoscoped representations, the distorted but readily identifiable faces, voices, and corporeal forms of *Undone's* strategically assembled actors deepen their characters' identities through type casting, even as the animation style functions simultaneously to distance the actors from the episodic world of *Undone*. As digital media scholar Kim Louise Walden notes, no matter how deeply an actor might inhabit their character, the mere iconographic nature of their likeness undeniably draws forth the connotations, stereotypes, and memories associated with their personal star power. In her estimation with respect to *A Scanner Darkly*, "the viewer is never able to forget the recognizable face of Reeves lurking beneath the animation and hence the layers are never completely able to coalesce into a single unified figure" (13). Not unlike the main character, the audience, too, is simultaneously pulled in two distinct directions.

Such doubling proves to be especially relevant with the cast of *Undone* whereby previous roles performed by recognizable film and television stars influence audience reception. In fact, the writers at Decider.com (a New York Post pop culture website that aims to help viewers locate streaming content) go so far as to state that a primary reason the show is so effective is that "every character in *Undone* may look familiar." The screen presence of Constance Marie in the role of Camila (Alma's mother), for example, strongly evokes the stereotyped or archetypical

maternal trope of the overbearing Chicana matriarch. Not only did Constance Marie previously perform Selena's mother, Marcela Quintanilla, in the movie *Selena* as well as Angie Lopez, a selfless but somewhat strict wife and mother in the sitcom *George Lopez*, she was also cast as Regina Vasquez - the strong-willed, single Latina mother to a deaf child in the acclaimed television series, *Switched at Birth*. Similarly, Bob Odenkirk (Alma's father, Jacob), best known for his portrayal of Saul Goodman in *Breaking Bad* and *Better Call Saul*, later played an idealized but often absent paternal figure, Father March, in *Little Women*. Perhaps most importantly, viewers will recognize Rosa Salazar (Alma) as a familiar protagonist in various science fiction films from *The Maze Runner* series to *Alita Battle Angel*. The latter, significantly, used the technique of performance-capture animation to create a CG or digital likeness of Salazar as a revived cyborg with amnesia. Not altogether unlike the process of rotoscoping, this "augmented animation hybrid" records body and facial performance in order to fuse live and synthetic action.³

Arguably then, *Undone*'s primary actors "appear in new roles with a double ghosting, the cultural expectations of the emploi [type] itself overlaid with those of the actor's own previous appearances" (Carlson 59). Seemingly type cast for their prior roles and physically recognizable beneath the tracing and layers of rotoscope animation, the select cast members maintain a level of familiarity. Understood to embody and reaffirm the authenticity of the stereotyped roles of mother, father, and sci-fi time traveler, the actors themselves impart an aura of verisimilitude. In contrast, when considered from another perspective, "the viewer has a sense of the individual underneath the animation who is obscured by its rotoscoped version, and so takes on a ghost-like, almost spectral quality" (Walden 14). Considered this way, rotoscoping can be seen to create distance and foster an unsettling if not destabilizing effect. Fittingly, then, the physical presence of the characters in *Undone* remains complexly multilayered. The actors themselves bear the traces of their own previous roles even as they embody their real-world personas and stardom. Paradoxically, the cast's familiarity simultaneously allows a suspension of disbelief even as that familiarity belies that "other plane" of existence, the world inhabited by the spectator. In this way, rotoscoping's intrinsic hybridity bears multiple and at times contradictory traces, appropriately signaling complex meanings and identities.

Moreover, rotoscoping can be understood as inherently metafictional. Overlaying live action with drawn animation necessarily points back on itself, highlighting visual form as a constructed artifice. Ellen Grabiner, detailing Linklater's experimental and often philosophical or existential explorations in the medium, contends that by its very design rotoscoping necessarily engages the audience in not only thinking about but actively experiencing the very act of looking. In her view, "undoing the index" (deliberately distancing or separating the filmed subject from the resulting image) brings self-conscious awareness to the craft itself (41). Blending the seeming realism of live action with the overtly artistic nature of hand drawing also underscores the subjective if not unreliable nature of perception. When taken to extremes, such as when images disintegrate, disassemble, or fall apart (a repeated trope in *Undone* that often accompanies narrative looping and time travel), the very limits of representation become foregrounded. What's more, this dynamic interplay of form and content replicates the processes of traumatic memory. Visually representing time as splintered, fractured, and unstable reproduces the unknowability and belatedness intrinsic to trauma, in which unpredictable triggers cause past traumas to be re-experienced as sudden, fragmented flashes or as endless, repetitive loops.⁴

3. Frederick Luis Aldama and Christopher González' *Reel Latinxs: Representation in U.S. Film and TV* offers an historical overview of Latinx representation in popular media. For more information on the process of "augmented animation" in *Alita Battle Angel* see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hOMuRopLgXg>. Frederick Aldama's "Speculative-Real Ethnoracial Spaces and the Formation of a Nephantler Warrior" brilliantly examines how borderland spaces in *Alita Battle Angel* challenge traditional, mainstream depictions of ethnoracial identities.

4. For more on structures of traumatic memory and literary representation see Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* as well as Anne Whitehead's *Trauma Fiction*.

Looking through the Looking Glass

ISSN: 1523-1720
NUMERO/NUMBER 48
Enero/January 2023

As a hybrid visual form, rotoscoping, then, simultaneously points into and out of the diegetic world, highlighting the complexities of narrative form and thematic content while aptly reflecting the intricacies of the protagonist's multilayered sociocultural identity. In parallel fashion, *Undone* employs the recurring motif of mirrors as an organizing structural element that advances the plot, establishes the relationship between viewer and protagonist, and offers glimpses into Alma's warring interior states. What's more, much like the geographical setting of San Antonio, the physical properties of the bathroom mirror, itself divided, aptly reflects Alma's complex hybrid identities. Split in two halves, the looking glass serves a double functionality. On the one hand, as a mundane household object, mirrored doors simply provide access to the interior of the medicine cabinet; on the other hand, the mirror exists as a portal offering passage to other temporal and spatial planes. Understood metaphorically, as the second half of this study explores in depth, the mirror ultimately comes to reveal the condition of the postcolonial subject.

Seemingly banal at first glance, throughout *Undone* mirrors function as far more than mere home décor. As an object that one can both see and see through, the looking glass, unsurprisingly, serves as a tool for self-reflection. Understood in this way, the protagonist simultaneously exists as both the subject and the object of the gaze. Notably, mirror scenes become increasingly complex across the eight episodes, advancing the storyline in unexpected ways. As the show progresses, mirrors reflect Alma's increasing powers and deepening psychoses together with her evolving sense of self. Three pivotal, interrelated scenes illustrate the significance of the mirror's structural role in *Undone*.

Following the dramatic car wreck at the show's opening, a recurring montage accompanies the attention-grabbing first words: "I am so bored of living" (*Undone*. Season 1. Episode 1. 00:01:07-00:01:08). The camera functions as an observer-witness throughout the sequence, remaining stationary and with Alma neatly centered at a relatively fixed distance. From this unchanging perspective, we observe Alma re-enact, over and over, the common every-day rituals of waking up with the same person, eating the same breakfast, and driving the same route to go to the same job. Static camerawork and a repetitive soundtrack reinforce the stable, yet tedious monotony of daily life even as she dispassionately describes her daily regimen through the disembodied technique of narrative voiceover. The accumulation and repetition of insignificant quotidian acts presented from an unchanging vantage point in a dull, flat monotone voice suggest an existential crisis. Notably, at the midpoint of this montage, the camera positions the audience to witness the mundane activity of brushing one's teeth, precisely from the perspective of the protagonist's reflection in the bathroom mirror. Breaking the so-called fourth wall, we watch Alma as if we were gazing out at ourselves. This immersive, doubling technique strategically places the viewer in Alma's subject position within the mirror, creating shared perspectives and effectively establishing viewer identification.

In striking contrast, a later iteration of this predictable sequence depicts Alma deviating from her standard routine as well as from the prescribed narrative script. Appropriately, the camerawork and soundtrack also radically shift. Rather than standing in as Alma's reflection, the audience can only view her reflected image in the mirror, from an angle, as she uncharacteristically makes herself up. The viewer, no longer directly aligned with the protagonist, has been distanced and displaced. Blaring rock music, coupled with a devious smile, imply rebellious behavior. But rather than share the joke, information is now withheld from the viewer and narrative tension

escalates. Only upon arrival at her sister's engagement dinner are we let in on the secret. Subverting her mother's wishes that she bleach her lip and make herself beautiful, Alma defiantly flaunts an eye-liner mustache. In challenging beauty norms, disrupting gender binaries, and refusing to participate in the institution of marriage (she breaks up with her boyfriend, Sam, after this event), Alma deliberately situates herself outside of the established, patriarchal social order. In this way, this alternative mirror scene reveals Alma's refusal to adhere or assimilate, suggesting a willful determination to not belong.

Although a key element of the show's introduction, it isn't until the climax of the seventh episode that we again return to this pivotal sequence, albeit with significant changes. Here, a parallel montage depicts Alma completely absorbed in dance, shown to utterly transcend the trivial routines of her daily life. Alma's prior narrative voiceover expressing an inability to find meaning in her life has been replaced by the uplifting words of a ceremonial dancer who not only recognizes but affirms Alma as *mestiza*. Explaining *La antigua* as a way to connect with and honor the ancestors as well as a ritual to empty oneself and be open to the future, she invitingly informs Alma that "all of our dances connect us to each other [...] Even though you don't know the dance, you know the dance". (*Undone*. Season 1. Episode 7. 00:18:48-00:18:56). These words repeat as the soundtrack and visual sequence advance the storyline from dancing at Becca's wedding reception to dancing on the street and in her home. No longer static, the camera moves in an effort to follow Alma as she spins and turns across the frames. Significantly, as she performs the previously monotonous daily morning ritual, the mirror reflects Alma, toothbrush in mouth, but no longer actively engaged in brushing. Instead, her hands and feet respond to an unstoppable inner rhythm. Alma continues this fervent dance even as she performs her duties at work. In letting go of her Anglo father and embracing the very indigenous roots that her mother wishes to deny, Alma finds inner strength, a sense of pride, and the joy of belonging to a community.

In keeping with ritual self-cleansing and spiritual connection achieved through ceremonial dance, throughout *Undone* mirrors not only reflect interior states they also serve as portals bridging diverse worlds. In this culminating sequence, specifically, the mirror connects disparate narrative threads and causes timelines to rapidly converge. The show comes full circle. As the music and dance reach a frenzied crescendo, Alma rushes headlong into an oval mirror at the daycare, one that previously allowed her father to enter her world and that now serves as a window onto the past, projecting events from that fateful Halloween or All Soul's Day when her dad died. Now, in keeping with rotoscoping's stylistic doubling of actors and their prior roles, the mirror comes to enable an additional level of structural or narrative doubling. This scene simultaneously presents alternate understandings or interpretations, by presenting both internal and external perspectives. The children bear witness and report what they saw: "Teacher ran to the mirror, there was a big crash and she got bloody" even as Alma emphatically declares, "No! I know that's what it looks like in your reality but that's not what happened," (*Undone*. Season 1. Episode 8. 00:09:43-00:09:54) utterly denying their version of events. In short, a decisive narrative rupture or splitting takes place, one that presents two opposing stories or plotlines.

The viewer becomes a witness to how words and images dramatically collide. Nine minutes of airtime trace Alma's journey through the looking glass and into the past where she and her father observe themselves on that fateful night twenty years earlier. But then, abruptly, a contradictory sequence seemingly undoes the entire narrative sequence. Now the camera aligns with Alma's first-person perspective as she gazes up to find the children looking down on her supine body, suggesting time travel did not occur but instead she blacked out.

What's more, we view Alma's bloody forehead. Potentially a cut incurred by the shattered mirror, the wound directly echoes her injury from the initial car wreck. Uncannily, Alma herself has created a narrative loop, one that encompasses the narrative action of the whole first season. Hurtling herself into the mirror eerily replicates the action of recklessly speeding through intersections, providing an alternative reading to the show's entire chronology and plotline. The circular structure invites a re-viewing, and upon closer inspection one notices that with each iterative re-creation of the car wreck scene the words "real crash" appear on billboards in the background. As such, and much in keeping with Alma's own precarity, viewers find themselves in the liminal space of Todorov's fantastic, vacillating between two parallel (narrative) worlds.

Bordering on a Conclusion

Cleverly, this final mirror scene not only fosters a rereading of the entire first season, but also opens the door to subsequent seasons by allowing for endless future possibilities. Indeed, since the initial writing of these essays, a second season has been released where Alma, having successfully entered a parallel timeline in which her father is still alive, encounters a different version of herself and those close to her. Ever the sleuth, Alma now seeks to uncover both her mother's and Jacob's mother's interconnected secrets. But upon finding her abilities reduced, she can only experience time travel and fused perspectives through Becca. Such paired encounters compel Alma to explore beyond herself, discovering a family history of trauma as experienced by women, the legacies of both of her genealogies: European Jew and Mexican Catholic. In this way, season two extends beyond Alma's personal predicaments to engage broader issues of intergenerational familial trauma and questions of postmemory.⁵

Continuities abound even as the show takes on different themes and motifs. Fittingly, visual and narrative elements have been recombined; plotlines have been disassembled and reassembled. Decidedly autoreferential, the second season is replete with self-citations. Together with the protagonist, the viewer relives a series of reminiscent scenes, but unlike traditional narrative flashbacks, these overtly doubled scenarios contain surprising and unexpected outcomes. Reencountering Sam on the San Antonio Riverwalk reveals he has a girlfriend. Boxes in the familiar attic now contain her father's abandoned research alongside the electronic blackjack game. Upon revisiting her dad's classroom, we discover that Alma has somehow become the teacher. In another role reversal it is now Alma who urgently insists upon making use of her abilities, while her father remains hesitant, fearful, and reluctant. In many ways, then, the second season can be understood as a narrative remix in which many of the same situations and archetypes reappear but have been reassigned or re-cycled.

We've seen how the oneiric effects of rotoscoping create a setting and atmosphere in which dream, reality, and hallucination become nearly indiscernible. Similarly, when familiar situations and scenes are altered, realigned, and rendered anew they likewise become warped, confusing, and difficult to navigate, thrusting both characters and seasoned viewers into the disconcerting realm of the uncanny or *unheimlich*. At the same time, however, a pleasure derived from recognition of the source accompanies the surprise of the transformations. Akin to Linda Hutcheon's theory regarding adaptations, viewers experience a profound sense of gratification in deciphering what she terms "palimpsestic doubleness" (120). While one could, theoretically, watch the second season independently of the first, the knowing spectator will have a deeper, richer understanding. There is a sense of satisfaction in appreciating nuances. The technique of incorporating numerous visual and narrative reprises in *Undone's* second season deliberately

5. For more on postmemory, or the transmission of traumatic experiences to a second generation, see Marianne Hirsch's *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* and *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*.

“creates the doubled pleasure of the palimpsest: more than one text is experienced—and knowingly so” (Hutcheon 116). Viewers, like Alma, remember. And so, we too, become intricately ensnared in intertextual loops.

With its intricate remix of narrative and visual metaphors, whereby the second season can stand on its own even as it overtly echoes and reflects the first, the show can be understood to model, as it were, the cross-referencing techniques that we are consciously performing with these linked essays. In tune with the decidedly interrelated structure of the series, our study likewise becomes somewhat unconventional, whereby separate approaches and independent arguments remain strongly interconnected. By first presenting a formal(ist) analysis that deliberately gives way to strongly theoretical considerations and reinterpretations of now familiar scenes, we stage a hybrid critique of how form and content interact, ourselves offering a performance of dual readings.

To this end, much as *Undone* revisits and restructures its own initial premises, let’s now re-consider the role of the mirror. To recapitulate, we previously examined how the looking glass, understood literally, provides a means for self-reflection and audience identification as well as a portal to other worlds and temporalities. Importantly, by means of the mirror, Alma is at once both the subject and the object of the gaze. On a metaphorical or philosophical plane, the mirror also maintains a key function as a conduit to Chicana feminist thought. Not coincidentally, in her own work pioneering Tejana theorist Gloria Anzaldúa begins her journey into the Coatlicue state – a transitional, liberatory state – precisely by recalling her own father’s death and dwelling on the mirror as both a household object and a metaphorical device. As she explains, “a mirror is a door through which the soul may “pass” (42). While obsidian once provided ancient seers with a glossy material surface upon which to interpret visions of the future, Anzaldúa further posits a contemporary functionality related to “the act of seeing” (42). Specifically, the mirror shows two aspects of the self: the self that has been captured and objectified in the mirror by the glance, frozen in place. But, in somewhat contradictory fashion, the one who looks into the mirror also sees, that is to say, sees through and gains awareness, possesses knowledge. As such, Anzaldúa speculates that mirrors contain the power to facilitate new ways of seeing and, in turn, new ways of being.

To be continued...⁶

6. See note 2 of this article.

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