

‘Rosie’s Room’ and ‘Bullet’s Phone’: The Commodification of the Lost Girl in The Killing and its Paratexts

This essay looks at what happens in the shift from the Danish to the American version of the popular TV series *Forbrydelsen/The Killing* in order to consider the cross-cultural significance of the ‘lost girl’ crime story. As feminist scholars have noted (Projansky 2014; Horeck 2009; Wanzo 2008), stories of ‘lost girls’ – girls or young women who have gone missing and/or are found murdered – are ‘recurring media spectacles’ (Wanzo 2008, p. 100) that play out a set of cultural anxieties and fantasies about gender, race, and violence. Sarah Projansky (2014) and Rebecca Wanzo (2008) have observed that race is a key factor in determining which lost girl stories attain the highest visibility in American culture and are seen to matter the most. It is indeed notable, as Projansky writes, that the “‘lost girl’ – kidnapped or dead before her time – over whom media culture incessantly worries, is white’ (2014, p. 8).¹ Recently, Barbara Klinger has suggested that the White Female Victim (WFV) has ‘vital status as transnational currency’ for TV crime dramas such as *Forbrydelsen*: she is the ‘gateway body’ that offers ‘a streamlined...compelling means of securing and maintaining audience attention’ (2018, p. 8) across serial narratives. Indeed, as Klinger asserts, ‘lost white girls in imported crime dramas are ideologically freighted affective commodities that flow to U.S. and other markets with similar generic and cultural penchants’ (2018, p. 9).

¹ While there are historical examples of cases of missing and murdered boys receiving extensive media attention, it is stories about missing girls that dominate contemporary US media coverage. Media commentators have dubbed the trend for such stories as ‘missing white woman syndrome’ (Iaccino 2014). Examples of true crime stories of missing and murdered white girls and women that have received extensive media coverage include: the JonBenét Ramsey murder; the Chandra Levy murder; the Natalee Holloway murder; the disappearance and reappearance of kidnapped Elizabeth Smart; and the murder of Caylee Anthony.

U.S culture's penchant for lost girl stories is part of a wider increase in 'U.S. media depictions of girls since the early 1990s' (Projansky 2014, p. 11). Noting the longstanding historical use of the girl as a figure for working through cultural anxieties, Projansky argues that 'at the turn of the twenty-first century, the convenient figure of the girl – already adept at standing in for various social concerns – surfaces once again to work through contemporary social issues, such as...neoliberalism and postfeminism' (2014, p. 11). Fiona Handyside and Kate Taylor-Jones agree that 'girls have become hypervisible in the contemporary popular cultural formation' (2016, p. 3). They suggest that: at the same time as 'neo-liberal postfeminist culture' emphasizes a fantasy 'of agency, choice, and empowerment for all,' it also opens 'up girlhood to different forms of cultural surveillance and commodification' (ibid., p. 3). 'Girl culture,' then, is a lucrative part of post-digital multi-media capitalist enterprises, where girls are understood as both major consumers and objects of media, and where their strong cross-over appeal places them at the commercial center of a range of ever expanding televisual, cinematic and web-based productions. The girl is increasingly put on public display, and made 'readily available to us' (Projansky 2014, p. 7) through digital screens and interfaces, which commodify her experience in terms of a 'logics of platform capitalism' that 'emphasize(s) metrics, numbers, "likes," and followers' (Banet-Weiser 2018, p. 13).

The trope of the 'lost girl' lends itself well to the market logic of a transmedia 'convergence culture,' in which the 'consumer gets courted across multiple media platforms' (Jenkins 2006, p. 3). Recent quality TV crime dramas, distributed on Netflix and other streaming platforms, participate in the networked spectacularization of the lost girl through their self-conscious use of digital technologies including CCTV surveillance cameras,

computer screens, smartphones and video cameras in their narratives,³ as well as in their accompanying paratexts. While TV crime drama has been accused of trading in degrading images of violated women for shock value,⁴ this essay focuses attention on how the lost girl trope is presented on such shows via forms of new media technologies. The central assertion of this essay is that, in order to fully account for the often-damning gender politics of contemporary TV crime dramas, one must look not simply to the content of their storylines but to their modes of framing and address across platforms, and the affective responses that they in turn enable and/or disable. How do technological processes of mediation and remediation shape cultural/ideological understandings of violence against girls and women on contemporary TV dramas? And how does the remediation of violence through the digital interface extend beyond the TV crime dramas themselves to the paratextual materials that increasingly surround post network TV?

AMC's website⁵ for *The Killing*, as I will critically examine, reframes and remediates the figure of the (white) lost girl through paratextual material including quizzes, crime scene photos, still pictures of lost girls, emails, video logs, and mobile phone footage. Through reference to these paratexts, in particular the interactive online simulations of 'Rosie's Room' (Season One of *The Killing* U.S.) and 'Bullet's Phone,' (Season Two of *The Killing* U.S.), I argue that the lost girl image is a firmly entrenched part of AMC's post-network TV business model of 'second screen' interactivity, with the white female victim serving as 'a vehicle of commercial accessibility and meaning across borders – a coin of the realm' (Klinger 2018, p.

³ In both versions of *The Killing*, but also in a range of other contemporary TV crime dramas including, for example, *The Fall* (2013-present) and *Top of the Lake* (2013-present), viewers gain access to the figure of the lost (dead) girl, whose death or disappearance often begins the mystery plot, through images from her previous life, in photographs, home videos, and surveillance footage.

⁴ For a good account of the debate over the extreme violence found in contemporary TV crime drama, please see Ruth Penfold-Mounce (2016).

⁵ AMC stands for American Movie Channel and is a cable and satellite television channel.

518). Noting the problematic way in which these paratexts establish their appeal to viewer interactivity through a commodification of the lost and murdered girl, this essay interrogates the extent to which crime TV's attempt to establish new modes of user engagement in the era of 'must-click TV' (Gillan 2011) exploits a longstanding cultural preoccupation with the figure of the dead girl.

Who Killed Nanna Birk Larsen/Rosie Larsen?

The promotional poster for the American version of *The Killing* serves as an example of what Jonathan Gray calls an 'entryway paratext,' which 'sets up, begins, and *frames*' our interaction with a text (2010, p. 43; p. 48). Drawing comparisons to the *Twin Peaks* promotional campaign from the 1990s, 'Who Killed Laura Palmer?' the US version centered around the question of 'Who Killed Rosie Larsen?' Where the worldwide transmission of *Forbrydelsen* promoted the figure of the female detective, Sarah Lund, played by the Swedish star Sofie Gråbøl, rather than victim Nanna Birk Larsen (Julie R. Ølgaard), the AMC version instead emphasized the lost girl storyline in its build up to the premiere of the show. The promotional poster for *The Killing* consists of a close-up black and white image of a young girl's (enigmatic) smiling face. 'Who Killed Rosie Larsen?' is scrawled in red letters over the girl's face, with 'every hour counts' written in small red print beneath, thereby flagging the central whodunit premise of the show's long-form serial drama. [insert fig.]

Both *Forbrydelsen* and *The Killing* share a central attribute of Nordic noir, its 'slow and melancholic pace' (Creeber 22). Praised by American critics for its 'slow burning' style of drama (Martin) and for its 'sense of time' (VanDerWerff "'The Killing' – Taking') – temporal attributes associated with Swedish and Danish TV dramas – the US version, where 'every hour counts,' is inseparable from the gendered plot of the lost girl. Temporality is central to the affective force of what Wanzo terms 'The Lost Girl Event.' As Wanzo has

noted, news coverage of lost girls in American culture fragments them into ‘before and after,’ in which time transforms their bodies so that the details of their lives before their murders are ‘always read in relationship to [their] murder and the aftermath’ (2008, p. 105). The Lost Girl event ‘causes anxiety about past, present, and future’ and deals with such temporal anxieties through constructing stories in which the lost girl functions as ‘the representative ideal of innocent girlhood whose idyllic childhood was cut short’ (ibid., p. 107). While Wanzo is referring to the press coverage of missing girls, I would suggest that in shows like *The Killing* the forms of visualization opened up by new media technologies, including interactive features and websites such as ‘Rosie’s Room,’ as I elaborate on below, convey the fragmented and reified ‘lost girl time’ even more acutely.

The idealization of the lost girl as a figure who is frozen in time is nowhere more apparent than through the frame of the screen. Indeed, both versions of *The Killing* contain a pivotal dramatic scene that reveals footage of the lost dead girl – when she was still alive. Mediated through videotape, the visual framing of the missing girl articulates – and assuages – anxieties about the tensions between past and present, before and after, and ultimately life and death. In *Forbrydelsen*, the video shows a message recorded by Nanna just before her brutal murder, as she was about to leave on an adventure with her childhood sweetheart. It shows her smiling and happy. She tells her family: “I want you to know I’ve never been happier... See you Mum and Dad, Teletubbies, I love you.” Significantly, the Danish version contextualizes the video image of the lost girl in relation to the parents’ deeply personal grief. The father first watches it in his truck, and then the mother in the space of the home.

In the American version, Rosie’s film also concludes with a message of heartfelt love for her family (displayed on a video notecard which she holds up): “Tommy (Evan Bird) and Denny (Seth Isaac Johnson), Mom and Dad, I love you.” But Rosie’s film, shot on Super 8, is a great deal more artful – and overblown than that found in the Danish version. Moreover, it

frames and visually presents that message in a dramatically different way. Detective Sarah Linden initially receives the film as a leftover piece of ‘evidence,’ when the case is closed. The camera focuses on her face as she watches the film but it is revealing that viewers do not actually get to see it until the family plays a video version on their television screen, in a neat mise-en-abyme of the TV crime drama itself. Dramatic music swells over images of Rosie dancing and smiling; her family watches on, crying and smiling at their beautiful girl, now restored to them. The video locks the lost girl into the frame, reified and enshrined. The title of Rosie’s video, ‘What I Know,’ is also, significantly, the title of the final episode of season 2 *The Killing* U.S. (#2.13, 17 June 2012), marking its status as a symbol for the show’s overriding ideological concerns. Whereas in the Danish version, Nanna’s home video message to her parents plays in episode 16 of 20, the American version, tellingly, withholds it until the final episode of season 2, where, I would argue, it is ‘mobilized into a narrative of comfort,’ (2008, p. 103) to borrow Wanzo’s phrase. As Wanzo writes of the Lost Girl Event in US culture: ‘Lost Girls must be fairy-tale heroines, golden in visage and character, offering bodies that can sustain a fairy-tale ending for others, even when the ending for the specific lost girl is a terrible death’ (2008, p. 10). The American version ends with an image of the idealized nuclear family of mother, father, and two young boy children cuddled up on the sofa together, watching the figure of the lost girl (their daughter and sister) on the television screen. The message is that the fairy-tale life can continue ‘within a nuclear family and the propagation of more ideal children’ (Wanzo 2008, p. 102).

It is striking just how hard the American version works to enshrine an image of Rosie as a ‘fairy-tale heroine,’ of untold purity and innocence. In the Danish version, Nanna, who is in love and in a sexual relationship with her boyfriend, uses her low-key video to tell her family that she is going off to see the world with him. In the American version, Rosie is also about to embark on an adventure, but not with a lover; instead, she is going on a solo journey

to look at monarch butterflies in California. Despite the strong suggestion throughout the series that Rosie might be involved in some quite nefarious activities, by the end it emerges that she was a virgin all along. Reified as wholesome and untainted, she comes to ‘represent the fairy-tale ending imagined as a possible future for the idealized child in the United States, those protected after the villains are caught’ (Wanzo 2008, p. 101).

But what is most significant about the ending of the American version of *The Killing* is the extent to which it commodifies Rosie as an ‘image.’ Indeed, I would go so far as to argue that Rosie’s video works to ‘brand’ the lost girl.⁶ As Alison Hearn argues, in the new image economy of ‘advanced corporate consumer capitalism’, the ‘branded self’ is a ‘persona produced for public consumption’ (28). In the video, Rosie narrates her story through the use of white notecards – an increasingly common confessional, self-branding practice on social networks including YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.⁷ Rosie’s notecard video ‘What I Know,’ intersperses printed notes that tell of how she wants to see the world, with images of her smiling face, and happy home video family footage from the past. It ends with an extreme close-up of Rosie looking up to the sky and then turning to look directly at the camera with a contented, hopeful smile. Here, the glossy packaging of the lost girl makes manifest the economic investment in her as an image-commodity designed to capture viewer’s attention (and generate profit for the television network AMC).

As indicated, the device of the screen draws attention to the lost girl’s status as an image and an ‘event,’ heightening the affective intensity of her loss and showcasing the importance of temporality to the lost girl fantasy, which reads idealized innocence retroactively through violence and death. In this way, *The Killing* ‘plays into US culture’s

⁶ Thanks to Tina Kendall for suggesting I explore the ‘branding’ of the lost girl.

⁷ See Wendy Chun’s chapter ‘Inhabiting Writing: Against the Epistemology of Outing’ in *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media* (2016) for a discussion of notecard videos as a confessional format.

saccharine sensibility about girls and violence, a sensibility that attends the appetite for horror and is inseparable from it' (Mead 2002, p. 18). But the digital framing of the white lost girl as a consumable, branded object does not just stop at the television program: it continues in the websites AMC constructs as paratexts to it.

Rosie's Room

Accompanying the first season of *The Killing* in 2011 was an interactive feature found on AMC's website called 'Rosie's Room.' This special feature invites viewers to become detectives:

Now you can join in the investigation by clicking through a virtual simulation of Rosie's bedroom. See what's under her bed, flip through her vinyl record collection, and troll through her computer including her social networking profile, vlogs, photos, emails... what music was she listening to just before she disappeared?

(*'Play the Detective: Explore Victim'*)

Through a click of the mouse, viewers can enter Rosie's room and search through her bedside drawers, listen to her phone messages, and watch video logs or 'vlogs' she posted on her laptop ('Break out your search warrant and explore Rosie Larsen's bedroom now,' reads the website link). It is significant that the promotional material for 'Rosie's Room' at times tries to position the user not only as a detective but as a *female* detective, in order, possibly, to make the search through a (dead) girl's bedroom appear less prurient. Thus, one blog inviting fans to search for clues in Rosie's room makes reference to Episode 4, 'A Soundless Echo,' (#1.4, 11 April 2011) in which 'Sarah visits the Larsen's [sic] home to conduct her own search of Rosie Larsen's bedroom' ('Clues'). Such a correlation between the fan-detective

and the female investigator also verifies the extent to which the figure of the ‘strong’ female detective mediates and legitimates viewer engagement with the lost girl on *The Killing* and other crime dramas like it.

‘Rosie’s Room,’ and the invitation to ‘play the detective,’ is indicative of fan practices more generally in the digital era. In *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*, Jason Mittell argues that the complex television serials of the digital age encourage a ‘new mode of viewer engagement,’ which he dubs ‘forensic fandom’ (2015, p. 52). This model of engagement ‘encourages forensic fans to dig deeper, probing beneath the surface to understand the complexity of a story and its telling’ (ibid., p. 288). The key concept here is ‘drillability,’ whereby complex television texts draw ‘viewers into the story worlds’ and urge ‘them to drill down to discover more’ (ibid., p. 288). While Mittell uses the model of an amateur sleuth for spectatorship of complex TV in general, such a notion of the investigative spectator arguably has its prototype in crime fiction television, which has long encouraged its viewers to be detectives.

The notion of amateur sleuthing or ‘desktop detection’ is evident in the description of ‘Rosie’s Room’ as ‘an interactive simulation of the victim’s bedroom that lets aspiring sleuths search for clues as they try to learn more about who Rosie was — and why someone wanted her dead’ (‘Play the Detective’). The site provides a list of the ‘most-viewed items in Rosie’s Room to date, including the “Peeps” photo gallery in the MiPhotos tab on Rosie’s MiWrld profile’ and ‘the emails in the “MiMessages” tab on Rosie’s MiWrld profile’ (‘Play the Detective’). While the list also includes her ‘vinyl records’ and her ‘books,’ most of the items have to do with new media technologies: video logs, mobile phone messages, emails, etc. Notably, ‘Rosie’s Room’ feeds into the idea of a capitalist subject whose identity can be ‘read’ through the products with which she is associated, even though as a ‘lost girl’ she is

never available to be experienced as anything other than the material traces of her consumptive practices.

Although the framing rhetoric for this paratext centers on the active engagement with finding out the ‘truth’ about who killed Rosie Larsen, one can question the extent to which Rosie’s Room is truly interactive, as it does not really turn up any new interpretations of the crime. Instead, I would argue that it is more concerned with evoking *affective* responses to the figure of the missing girl through what Vikki Bell has elsewhere called the ‘pathos of review’ (2008, p. 90). As Bell suggests, with our own increasing everyday use of technology to tell the stories of our lives, we are now constantly aware of the ‘power and pathos that this technology can potentially deliver to our future emotional selves’ (ibid., p. 90). The experience of reviewing the clues in ‘Rosie’s Room’ is not entirely about the search for the ‘truth’ but about the kinds of affects and ‘sensations’ (Bell 2008, p. 90) that our engagement with the technology itself activates.

Take, for example, Rosie’s video blogging, which the viewer discovers through clicking onto her laptop, which then opens out to reveal the frame of her screen, including her profile picture, her list of ‘top friends,’ and a side bar with ‘local news.’ In the middle of the screen, which is decorated with butterflies, are nine ‘vlogs,’ which one can open with a click. The titles range from ‘I’m Rosie!’ to ‘My First Vlog’ to ‘I’m bored!!!!’ and ‘Dancing.’ The most remarkable thing about the vlogs, which run from 1-3 minutes long, is how truly unremarkable they are: Rosie introduces herself; Rosie talks about how she loves butterflies; Rosie tells the camera how bored she is; Rosie dances. Even the provocatively titled “Secrets” gives nothing away; there is no plot enhancement or expansion.

And yet despite, or perhaps because of, their very mundaneness, the videos are infused with what Vivian Sobchack has called the ‘charge of the real’ (2004, p. 284). These short videos play on viewer familiarity with a YouTube and/or Facebook aesthetic,

characterized by the everydayness of the images and the videos that teenagers continually upload, display, and share across the internet and social networking sites. It is the familiarity of the form of the digital media technologies on display here, rather than any narrative content per se, that carries an emotional weight.

But what does it mean that the affective pull of such paratexts derives from an idealized image of the lost (dead) girl? Why is crime TV's model of 'forensic fandom' exemplified here through the lost girl fantasy? Projansky argues that the 'ubiquity of girls in turn-of-the-twenty-first-century media culture can be explained by their strategic usefulness to media industries seeking to adapt to and capitalize on rapid technological change' (2014, p. 12). As noted in my introduction, this strategic usefulness is in part due to the way in which contemporary digital networked culture projects the girl as a privileged consumer *and* a visualized object of display. Noting the widespread appeal of the figure of girl across the mediascape, Projansky, drawing on the work of Anita Harris, writes that 'the contemporary girl functions as an idealized citizen for the neoliberal global economy: a flexible, adaptable, pliant, enthusiastic, intelligent, and energetic participant in commodity consumption, personal responsibility and mobile work' (2014, p. 11). We see this image of the girl in the figure of Rosie Larsen, as promoted in 'Rosie's Room:' she is an enthusiastic user of social media, and articulates her sense of self and identity via social networks. At the same time, the invitation to look upon her body in her video logs, harks back to a longstanding cultural association between voyeurism, sexual display of the female body, and new viewing technologies.²⁸

In tracing the 'spectacularization of girls in turn-of-the-twenty-first-century media culture' (2014, p. 5), Projansky quotes Harris, who has argued that 'two types of girls dominate in contemporary media and political culture: the can-do girl who is "confident,

²⁸ It is noteworthy that one of the earliest precursors of vlogging was by a young female college student, Jennifer Ringley, who, in 1996, "began living her life under the gaze of a webcam" (Birchall 2008, p. 281).

resilient, and empowered” and the at-risk girl who ‘lacks self-esteem’ and/or engages in risky behavior’ (cited in Projansky 2014, p. 22). The prevalence of this ‘can-do/at-risk narrative’ in popular media culture indicates the tremendous cultural ambivalence demonstrated towards the figure of the girl, who is simultaneously loved and held in contempt (ibid., p. 4). Indeed, Projansky asserts that this felt ambivalence results in an intense surveillance of girls, which amounts to an out-right moral panic ‘about the threat to all girls of at-risk status,’ as exemplified by a series of books and newspaper articles about how to ‘save-your-daughter’ (2014, p. 4). Ironically, writes Projansky, in the very process of worrying about these at-risk girls, the ‘media further perpetuate the at-risk narrative, reproducing and reifying images of girls as hyper-sexualized and miserable’ (2014, p. 5). Going hand in hand with this moral panic is the intensification of the ‘celebration of the can-do girl,’ who, if she works hard enough, can avoid ‘becoming at-risk’ and ‘achieve anything’ she so desires (Projansky 2014, p. 5). Part of the reason why the lost girl fantasy resonates so strongly is that it plays out this ambivalent tension between the ‘at risk’ and ‘can do girl’ in a very dramatically charged, life or death way. What demands further analysis, though, is how the troubling deployment of this ‘at risk’/ ‘can do’ girl dichotomy in *The Killing* gets harnessed to the pleasures of the ‘must-click’ model of televisual viewership in the post-network era.

Bullet’s Phone

If it is possible to detect a certain unease underlying the pristine vision of the lost girl at the end of season 2 of the American version of *The Killing*, then that anxiety resurfaces quite dramatically in season 3, when it returns with another lost girl storyline, original to the US version. This time, though, instead of one lost girl, Sarah Linden stumbles across a lake full of seventeen young female corpses. As the AMC website tallies it up for us, this body count eventually turns into 21 as the killer murders more girls as the season goes on. ‘Why so many

girls?’ Detective Holder (Joel Kinnaman) asks, while staring at a wall of photos of missing (presumed) dead girls. It is a meaningful question, one that viewers might ask of the show itself. In order to unpack the implications of this magnification of the lost girl fantasy, it is essential to consider the proliferation of digital screens and frames in this third season, both on the TV drama and on the revamped AMC website, for the lost girl crime narrative ties cultural anxieties about the ‘at risk girl’ to the digital technology that retrospectively frames her as an ‘object of pathos and grief’ (Dillman 2014, p. 13).

The marketing campaign for season 3 consists of a tally of dead (female) bodies superimposed over the shadowed image of one of the main lost girls of the series, named Kallie (Cate Sproule). The tagline of ‘17 and counting’ continues the promotional campaign begun with the first season, with its central question of ‘Who Killed Rosie Larsen?’ (where ‘every hour counts’). [insert fig.] Kallie, a troubled teenaged runaway, vanishes in the second episode of the season and thereafter only appears in video footage made by one of the male suspects for pornographic purposes. The portion of the video viewers see shows Kallie’s plaintive, frightened face. Initially, police discover the video and accordingly consider it within the context of investigative work as they attempt to find out what happened to the missing girl. It then shifts contexts, as does the ‘trajectory of its affect’ (Butler 2014, p. 11), as it circulates across the text. In one crucial scene, Sarah Linden actually brings the tape of the girl to the house of Kallie’s disaffected mother and plays it on the television set in the living room while she is interrogating her. The video is screened to the mother as part of Linden’s investigative work – she wants to find out if the girl’s mother recognizes the man’s voice and if her daughter had a pimp – but it is clear that she is also trying to provoke an emotional reaction from the mother, who in the next episode she chastises for not caring enough about her daughter. The scene ends with a zoom in on the frozen image of Kallie’s anguished face entombed in the television screen. Here, the missing, presumed dead girl is

looking mournfully at the camera, and by extension, the viewers of *The Killing*; the shot holds uncomfortably long enough to draw pointed attention to the activity of our looking at the suffering girl.

The lost girl fantasy manifests itself in other ways in this penultimate season of *The Killing*; significantly, it is the animating force of a central storyline involving the group of teenage runaways who were Kallie's friends. Amongst this group of run aways the central character is Bullet (Bex Taylor-Klaus),⁹ a young gay woman – the AMC website describes her as a 'tough scrappy lesbian' – who is in love with another one of the homeless girls, Lyric (Julia Sarah Stone). Bullet forms a close relationship with Detective Stephen Holder, and indeed her 'unlikely alliance' with him – as 'the one person in the world who completely understands her, and she him' ('The Killing – Bullet') according to AMC's website-- produces one of the most affecting moments of the whole series when he discovers her dead body. The group also includes a feminized young man called Twitch (Max Fowler), Lyric's boyfriend. This group of homeless young people serves to articulate the central dynamics of the lost girl fantasy. Bullet, in particular, embodies the tropes of the 'can-do/at-risk girl' simultaneously: she comes across as a strong and feisty girl, 'the self-appointed protector of all the street girls' ('The Killing – Bullet'), but at the same time she proves to be vulnerable and at risk.

In Episode 3, 'Seventeen' (#3.3, 9 June 2013), a male pimp named Goldie rapes Bullet. This rape serves as narrative shorthand for establishing her female vulnerability and

⁹ Bullet is interesting in so far as she is different to the typical depiction of 'lost girls' on the news and TV crime dramas. Although she is white, she has short, dark hair and does not fit the physical type of 'lost girl' that tends to get the most media coverage; as Projansky notes in her analysis of magazine covers of 'girls in peril', 'the girls are overwhelmingly not just white, but blonde-white. Their whiteness is definitive' (2014, p. 85). Her gender is also curiously overdetermined on the AMC website, which describes her as follows: 'Bullet looks like a boy, but is in fact a girl, a tough scrappy lesbian who's lived on the streets of Seattle since she was 13 years old' ('The Killing – Bullet').

violability.¹⁰ In the next episode, ‘Head Shots’ (#3.4, 16 June 2013), the male Twitch, whom the AMC website describes as a ‘charming, streetwise runaway whose dream is to move to Hollywood and become a model and actor’ (‘The Killing – Twitch’), is also raped, by his male parole officer. As with Bullet’s, the rape occurs off screen and the show appears to utilize it mainly as a means of establishing the vulnerability of the character; it thus draws a correlation between the characters of Twitch (the feminized male who, while straight, is often singled out and bullied for his queer appearance) and Bullet (the ‘tom boy’ who, while tough and strong, is nonetheless shown to be at risk and in need of protection as much as any other girl). Scenes of gendered violence in *The Killing* are thus used to support the ‘at-risk narrative,’ which produces and reifies the idea of the girl as endangered/already lost and which ‘perpetuates – rather than helps to overcome – the discursive condition of her existence’ (Projansky 2014, p. 5).

The companion website for *The Killing* exposes the dynamics of the ‘at-risk narrative’ most acutely, revealing how the producers and distributors ‘want us to make sense of their characters and their plots’ (Gray 2010, p. 72). In season three, AMC built on the interactivity of its previous season through its addition of ‘Story Sync,’ which it describes as a ‘second screen experience’ that ‘allows viewers to deepen their experience of the story, while interacting with the series and each other, offering an enhanced experience with well-curated content’ (‘*The Killing* Premieres’). This notion of ‘Story Sync’ is a digital upgrade of tabloid journalism’s longstanding exploitation of maps, photographs, and first-person eye-witness accounts to give readers/viewers a sense of interactivity in crime solving. To be accessed on ‘computers, tablets and mobile devices,’ Story Sync was said to ‘supplement the story playing out on the primary screen’ and ‘offer the best experience possible with authentic

¹⁰ Bullet’s rape is largely contained within the episode itself. As Susan Berridge writes, in most teen drama series, ‘the sexual violence storyline is introduced, explored and resolved: all within the episode’s timeslot, without extending into subsequent installments’ (467).

elements carefully integrated with the creative on television' (*The Killing Premieres*). Story Sync ran simultaneously with the live telecast of each episode of *The Killing*. Among the features included on Story Sync is a countdown to the death row execution of one of the new central characters, a tally of the number of dead bodies discovered by Sarah Linden, numerous photographs of 'identified victims,' all of whom are female, and interactive quizzes. One of these multiple-choice quizzes includes a photo of a bruised and beaten Bullet, post-rape, and asks, 'How did Bullet get her bruises?' Potential answers include 'falling off her skateboard,' getting into a 'fight,' getting 'roughed up by Holder,' or, the correct answer, which is: 'She was assaulted by Goldie.' Here, viewers are asked to engage with a sexual abuse storyline through the activity of 'clicking' on a digital screen; disturbingly, the image of the abused girl's body and her loss of agency becomes the occasion for constructing a sense of viewer 'choice' and activity.

The role of Bullet as the main site of viewer interaction on Story Sync is epitomized by its stand out feature, which is access to her smartphone (*The Killing Premieres*). The temporality of this carefully crafted 'authentic' smartphone footage powerfully demarcates Bullet as an already dead girl. The footage both anticipates and reifies Bullet's death, which occurs in episode 9, 'The Reckoning' (#3.9, 21 July 2013), when the serial killer murders her. The phone videos, which are very short – between 30 seconds and a minute – feature episodes from the daily lives of Bullet and her homeless friends and call on modes of spectatorship initiated by new media technologies. The short and simple titles of these smartphone videos describe everyday incidents in the lives of the street kids. Examples include 'Twitch's Birthday video,' in which 'Bullet and Kallie plan a birthday surprise for Twitch, on a day that wasn't so painful'; 'Break-in video,' in which 'Sometime before Kallie disappeared, Kallie, Bullet and Lyric discuss finding a place to sleep'; and 'The Ritz,' in

which ‘Bullet, Lyric and Twitch figure out where to spend the night when the streets were safer.’

The wording of their titles, like ‘Before the streets got even more dangerous’ and ‘Before the murders,’ generates a striking temporal ambiguity in these documentary style videos. I would suggest that they encourage viewers to watch the videos in terms of the ‘lost girl time’ discussed earlier, which fragments the girl into ‘before and after’ and reads her ‘in relationship to [her] murder and the aftermath’ (Wanzo 2008, p.105). In its use of smartphone footage as an interactive feature for audiences, AMC is playing on the affective familiarity with this kind of digital technology and the role it plays in everyday lives. It is not the content of the videos so much as the framing that produces their affective power. It is almost all the more affecting that the content *is* banal, because it generates a sense of the uncanny, drawing attention to the fact that it is the medium and not the content that viewers are responding to. These smartphone videos of Bullet work on the same banal level as ‘Rosie’s Room,’ but, as with that example, they are working to pre-mediate Bullet’s death and to commodify her as a lost girl.

To consider the ideological work of the lost-girl-as-digital-interface-object, it is instructive to look closely at the smartphone video that accompanies the episode in which Bullet dies. Called ‘I Am Strong,’ it features all three of the young teenage girl characters, Kallie, Lyric, and Bullet. It begins with Kallie briefly explaining how a scar on her hand came from catching it on a fence; a proud Bullet then itemizes her various scars for her female audience, including one on her shoulder inflicted by a man with a broken bottle: ‘I’ve been in lots of fights. The only thing that hurts is being afraid...It doesn’t hurt if you’re not afraid.’ When Kallie (off screen and filming) teases her, ‘you’re way tough, Bullet’, she playfully retorts: ‘I *am* tough!’ and grabs for the camera. This video captures the ambivalence at the heart of the lost girl fantasy, and its imaging of the girl as both ‘resilient’ *and* “at-risk.’

Read through the aftermath of Bullet's death, this scene from 'before' reveals how these two narratives of resiliency and risk depend upon and 'in fact support one another' (Projansky 2014, p. 4). [insert fig.]

The realistic aesthetic of 'I Am Strong,' with its shaky unprofessionalism, produces the 'authentic' feel the producers of Story Sync aim for. It extends the story world of the TV crime drama and creates the effect of 'found footage,' in which viewers take pleasure in 'a set of signifying tropes of the real in a fictional context' (Heller-Nicholas 2014, p. 7). But in ways that exemplify my argument throughout this essay, the smartphone video also significantly highlights the ways in which the digital paratext further amplifies the lost girl as a cultural commodity. Writing on the power of the screen, Anne Friedberg notes that, 'how the world is framed may be as important as what is contained within that frame' (1). The persistent framing of the lost (presumed dead) girl through the device of the screen on contemporary TV crime drama is as central to the cultural and affective power of that trope as the content of the narratives themselves. New digital technologies, while ostensibly employed on these shows as means of helping detectives solve crimes and capture criminals, also help to facilitate and proliferate the disturbing cultural investment in dead girls . Significantly, both 'Rosie's Room' and 'Bullet's Phone' are interface-objects designed to sustain viewing figures across digital platforms.

Conclusion: 'The Dead Girl Show'

In her recent essay collection, *Dead Girls*, Alice Bolin identifies a category of TV she refers to as the 'Dead Girl Show.' TV shows ranging from *Twin Peaks* to *True Detective* to *The Killing* are preoccupied with dead girls, Bolin argues, because they 'help us to work out our complicated feelings about the privileged status of white women in our culture' (2018, p. 22). Venerated as the 'perfect victim' (Bolin 2018, p. 22) the figure of the dead white girl on these

shows obfuscates the violence done to other, more marginalized bodies. It is therefore important to interrogate the obsessive emphasis on lost white girls, in order, as Wanzo suggests, to expose the 'ideological underpinning' of a narrative of 'collective harm,' which encodes victimization according to certain raced and gendered constructions that privilege 'golden girl stories' to the exclusion of stories involving brown and black boys and girls (2008, p. 103, p. 114).

In *The Killing*, the figure of the idealized dead white girl is reanimated for viewers through the narrative deployment of new media technologies. This trope then extends beyond the shows themselves to the paratexts of 'Rosie's Room' and 'Bullet's Phone,' where viewers/consumers are encouraged to extend their interactive engagement with the reanimated dead girl online. The visibility of what Joanne Clarke Dillman calls the trope of the 'dead-but-not-gone' girl on these sites relates to wider questions about gender and media consumption in neoliberal capitalism. As Sarah Banet-Weiser argues, in today's 'platform capitalism,' the girls who become most visible are those who are seen to support socially valued forms of femininity and empowerment. Noting that 'can-do' and 'at-risk girls can be conflated in the same girl,' Banet-Weiser argues that 'the markets for girls, where girls are recognized as a key consumer demographic, exist alongside literal, much more malicious markets *in* girls, such as increasing numbers of girls and women who are sexually trafficked. These components are not discrete but rather inform and constitute each other' (2018, p. 31). Taking into consideration the imbrication of networked media technologies and the lost girl trope in TV crime drama, my essay has looked at the disturbing ways in which the 'lost girls' of *The Killing* are positioned as empowered agents only at the moment of their disempowerment. Their agency, in other words, comes only through their deaths, as viewers/consumers are invited to engage with them affectively through the technical apparatus that resurrects them as digitally commodified objects on interactive 'second story'

websites. This curious ‘linkage between *death* and *agency*’ begs the question, as asked by Clarke Dillman: ‘what good is agency if it is only gained after physical death?’ (2014, p. 4, and p. 13)

My analysis has pointed to the ways in which the narratives of gendered violence found on TV crime dramas such as *The Killing* are increasingly relayed via the new digital technologies of advanced capitalism. The computer screens and smartphones that appear in the diegesis of *The Killing* are then retooled and fed back into the wider circuits of networked media culture, where they are used as interactive games for consumer/fan pleasure and where, for example, a plot about a young girl getting beaten up and raped by a male pimp, can be turned into a BuzzFeed style multiple choice quiz. What is significant is the extent to which the forms of new media deployed on *The Killing* and its interactive paratexts intensify and obscure the terms of a troubling cultural and commercial investment in the figure of the victimized ‘lost’ white girl – who is simultaneously alive and dead, resilient and at-risk, chaste and hyper-sexualized. Moving beyond the outcry over the content of TV crime drama that features stories of violence against women, it is imperative for feminist media theorists to think further about how violence also operates at the level of the interface in a 21st century networked media economy. While the trope of the lost white girl might be longstanding and familiar, the screens and devices of digital media are reshaping the value and affective meanings assigned to it, in ways that too often consolidate and normalize the broader structures, systems, and logics of misogynistic violence.

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