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Sense8's Wolfgang Bogdanow: The Epitome of the Process of Deconstruction

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Abstract

Many people fail to acknowledge the need to defy the hegemonic discourse because of their privileged position inside of it. That is why cultural products like *Sense8* (2015-2018), directed by the Wachowski sisters, constitutes the sector of the media that inspires these people to become competing forces. The series depicts a cluster, a group of people psychically connected. Relevantly, the character of Wolfgang, a German mafia gangster, portrays how a person is able to consciously dismantle behaviours that directly or indirectly contribute to the reinforcement of damaging hegemonic discourses. This conscious process was first introduced by Jacques Derrida as a result to post-structuralism and it was named deconstruction. Without many studies on the series, significant works by scholars such as Raewyn Connell, Michel Foucault, Susan Bordo, Nancy Chodorow or Nel Noddings prove relevant to depict cultural issues related to this character's deconstruction. To argue the relevance of Derrida's process and how it works and intersects with several aspects, this paper will analyse Wolfgang taking into account significant concerns such as transnationalism, hegemonic masculinity, heteropatriarchy, white privilege, individualism and inclusion. Therefore, this essay will aim at investigating how deconstruction dismantles dichotomising and exclusive discourses embedded in our culture by focusing on Wolfgang Bogdanow as the epitome of this process. The study of this character will shed some light on the importance of portraying an empowering representation of deconstruction as a means to achieve a more equal system.

Key words: Hegemonic masculinity, deconstruction, transnationalism, heteropatriarchy, white privilege

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1. Introduction

Human beings tend to take for granted notions of privilege. Having been born cisgender, heterosexual, male and Caucasian definitely makes a difference in terms of benefiting from hegemonic discourses. Historically, a patriarchal order was imposed as a consequence of the European civil wars, when male power increased more than it had ever done formerly (Connell 2005, 189). This order was also influenced hierarchically, with ethnic minorities subjugated to the Caucasian race, ultimately contributing to a lack of white privilege acknowledgement (Canlas et al. 2015, 310). As a result, these cultural processes generated certain prejudices that have become embedded in society, reinforced by the ideological state apparatuses that legitimise them (Althusser, 2014). Benefitting from positions of privilege inside the hegemonic discourse, many people fail to acknowledge the necessity of defying it. According to Jacques Derrida and his notion of “deconstruction”, first introduced in Linguistics, humans could cease to legitimise binary oppositions that portray certain determinations of culture (2000, 17; 34). Even the author recognised that it was challenging to explain this concept and rejected offering a clear definition (31); however, its relevance in the cultural sphere transcended the French philosopher’s studies. As a consequence of a new post-structuralist view of the world which defied the established order of structuralism, deconstruction began to take place (Derrida, 2001). Culture started to be flexible because of the post-structuralists who eliminated the barriers that limited societies. Therefore, if people opt for equality, they should deconstruct the notions that contribute to the legitimisation of damaging and enclosing discourses (Scott 1988, 38), such as white privilege, racism, sexism, ableism or LGTB-phobia, as well as the frequently undetected micro-behaviours that reinforce them. Self-awareness is thus pivotal to dismantle these discourses and, in the long run, to develop equality and respect in any social system.

A much fairer society is what *Sense8* (2015-2018) deconstructs and promotes. As a transcultural TV series, it “emphasis[es] [...] the problematics of contemporary culture” dealing with dissonance, tension, instability, meaning-making, interaction and, most importantly, the power of transformation (Lewis 2002, 24). It was created by Lily and Lana Wachowski, two renowned film directors trans women. By creating this science-fiction product, they have taken an active role as competing forces in the defiance of the hegemonic discourse. *Sense8* deals with a cluster, eight characters who share a fictional empathic bond: they are psychically connected. Lito, a closeted gay Latino actor, Sun, a Korean businesswoman suffering from patriarchal oppression, Will, an American policeman, Riley, a female DJ from England, Kala,

an Indian scientist, Wolfgang, a German mafia gangster, Nomi, an American trans activist, and Capheus, an African bus driver, belong to this group of people who are much more than homo sapiens: *homo sensorium* (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015d, 28:34). With their minds united as a consequence of their psychic bond, they introduce the importance of dismantling disunion, barriers and prejudice, which is precisely what post-structuralism and deconstruction intend to accomplish. This cultural product, then, is the science-fiction result of the portrayal of what these notions mean. *Sense8* aims at increasing visibility, which directly contributes to the defiance of identity “invisibili[s]ation” (Bourdieu 2002, 119). Homosexual and bisexual or heterosexual, cisgender or transgender, male or female, WASP or minority... the sensates exemplify the necessity of deconstructing binary and relational oppositions to create equality.

Even if all of the characters are worth analysing to discover cultural issues, Wolfgang Bogdanow constitutes a very symbolic subject of study since he undergoes one of the most impressive character developments in the series. There is no previous literature on him particularly. Nevertheless, *Sense8* has been studied in a limited number of academic researches, such as those of Alex Lothian (2016) or Silvio Anaz (2017), but it has mostly been assessed in reviews. However, this paper will focus on a study about the series’ relevance regarding community and responsibility (Zilonka and Job, 2017) since the analysis on the cultural product can be associated with Derrida’s process. Connected to the French philosopher, two of his works dealing with deconstruction prove useful to define the concept and its cultural importance (Derrida and Caputo 2000; Derrida, 2001). In addition, investigations by relevant researchers on cultural studies depict some of the issues found in the series (Foucault, 1976; Bordo, 1993; Chodorow, 1995; Bourdieu, 2002; Noddings, 2017). Finally, the study on masculinity by the transgender sociologist Raewyn Connell proves relevant because of its possible connection to the series and deconstruction (2005). Even if these constitute the most significant names inside the paper’s previous literature, more recent studies will also prove valuable in order to depict concerns connected to the character. Indeed, the Wachowskis’ production exemplifies fundamental cultural issues which offer the possibility to observe an underrepresented process: deconstruction. As stated, Wolfgang constitutes a symbolic element in the series because, despite his hegemonically accepted position, he chooses to become a competing force. Wolfgang Bogdanow, then, is able, through the dismantling of damaging discourses, to become an epitome of the process of deconstruction and the cultural aspects that affect this process.

This essay will aim at investigating Wolfgang's deconstruction by focusing on twenty *Sense8* episodes where this character's presence becomes worth analysing. When studying Wolfgang, his connection to Kala ought to be highlighted. She represents his romantic interest in the series, yet her marriage to Rajan, an Indian scientist with kind and understanding traits, poses conflicts to the relationship. Bogdanow's bond with Kala, as well as his psychic connection to the other sensates, greatly contribute to his development and, therefore, the development of the analysis. First, this study will focus on Wolfgang's connection to the hegemonic discourse and its cultural practices, consequently portraying why this character realises the need for deconstruction and the importance of transnationalism in this process. To understand his background, his familial situation will be reviewed, in terms of education, social class related to hegemonic masculinity, and the acquisition of feminine cultural practices. As a contrast, the friendship of Wolfgang and his best friend Felix will exemplify how the character already performed deconstructed behaviours. Following the analysis of this friendship, Wolfgang's deconstruction of hegemonic masculinity, white privilege and heteropatriarchy will be depicted, connected to the topic of psychic sexual encounters, interracial relationships and polyamory. Then, this essay will attempt to reveal how the character also deconstructs sexist behaviours. Finally, the dismantling of individuality will be exposed as crucial to this character's development, as well as how he fosters social inclusion and support, which prove pivotal in this character's development.

2. The Beginning of Deconstruction and the Role of Transnationalism

Before his rebirth as a sensate, Wolfgang Bogdanow proves to be the epitome of the coexistence of some of the hegemonic discourses that require deconstruction. Because of the necessity of portraying masculine hegemonic features, most men turn to aggression (Gebhard et al. 2018, 1). This violence, which arises from their male body, guarantees their dominance and superiority over females, resulting in masculinist behaviours (Connell 2005, 45). Wolfgang's position regarding relationships reflects that. He states he does not want a relationship, which may convey that being single offers him the possibility of exercising his hegemony over several women (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015b, 27:40). Additionally, this reinforces his masculine capital since the opposite, showing indifference about sexual conquest, depicts an unmasculine person (Connell 2005, 67). Considering homosexuality goes against the hegemonic, this character's heterosexuality reinforces his privileged position in society and increases his masculine capital as well (Ravenhill and de Visser 2017, 322). When his cousin mentions the male reproductive organ in the first episode of the series, it becomes established

that hegemonic virility is inevitably attached to one's sexual life and, therefore, one's sexuality (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015a, 19:41). His relative's discourse on a man's value according to the length of his male reproductive organ clearly exemplifies the pressure of portraying masculinity in all of its capital: both psychological and physical. As a consequence, many men turn to highly toxic environments and occupations to prove their virility (Connell 2005, 247). Wolfgang, for instance, works as a safecracker and thief, the cracker of locks, as a way of overcoming difficult deeds and fulfilling them (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015a, 36:00). Indeed, his profession becomes worth observing because of the metaphor it could imply. Derrida used the word "crack" several times in his work on deconstruction (2000), and Wolfgang's criminal profession involves this action. Therefore, considering this metaphor and the character's connection to hegemonic discourses, it becomes observable that he ought to undergo deconstruction to eliminate behaviours that prove damaging to himself.

As soon as Wolfgang becomes part of the psychic union, he begins to acknowledge why he should deconstruct himself. Bogdanow is reborn as a sensate in the first episode (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015a, 2:20). By portraying this fictional union, the Wachowskis create a means to observe how feeling empathy allows societal progress. Nevertheless, "it seems that issues about changing men and masculinities [...] have arrived [...] at a moment when neo-conservative politics [...] is certain to oppose any widespread moves towards [...] equality" (Connell 2005, 266). Depicting the current hyper-violent world we live in, *Sense8* exemplifies how these conservative mechanisms of oppression "attack the weakest individuals and hurt the core of our communities" (Zilonka and Job 2017, 393; 398). State apparatuses possess legitimising power, which creates nonegalitarian relations between individuals (Foucault 1976, 94). However, Wolfgang ultimately favours a counter-hegemonic discourse instead. In a very relevant scene in the first season finale, he witnesses the discrimination that his cluster suffers at the same time he observes a common prejudice against German citizens (Wachowski and Straczynski 2016, 26:10). He also experiences societal bias, which might imply that everybody endures the consequences of hegemony, regardless of their privileged position inside of it. What is more, the "Who Am I?" speech relevantly portrays how labels, and thus prejudices, are the opposite of understanding (Wachowski and Straczynski 2017a, 11:30). As a result, it becomes established that creating dichotomies encloses one's freedom, yet people standing in privileged positions tend to fail to realise the importance of deconstructing these dichotomies (Pease 1999, 100). Nonetheless, the fictional empathic bond

allows the character to face that binary biased oppositions cause discrimination. Wolfgang acknowledges that self-normalisation to Caucasian heterosexual male dominance exists and that it ought to be deconstructed (Bordo 1993, 191). As a result, once this character unites his mind with the minds of his cluster, his direct contact with injustice and discrimination allows him to realise that one must deconstruct discriminatory discourses to achieve equality.

The role of transnationalism in Wolfgang's deconstruction can not be disregarded. As a challenger of the classical structural view of nations (Kuti 2017, 35), transnationalism seeks the elimination of barriers between cultures. Like post-structuralism and deconstruction, it conveys a direct act of defiance against hegemonic discourses on separation, and *Sense8* portrays that. The series depicts how multiple bonds and interactions unite people and institutions through the barriers that limiting discourses create (Zilonka and Job 2017, 393). Indeed, being part of the cluster enhances Wolfgang's multicultural awareness and therefore implements the idea of transnationalism in his deconstructive process. For instance, the character trades languages with Kala without acknowledging it (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015d, 37:40). In this relevant scene, both of them realise that even if they belong to different cultures, they have the ability to understand each other because their telepathic connection allows it. This fictional unity exemplifies the utopic idea that people's differences would diminish if humans eliminated the barriers that belonging to different cultures create. By focusing on communion, transnationalism extends nations, rather than undermine them (Mirdal and Rynnen-Karjalainen 2004, 7). Representatively, Wolfgang's ideas on religion differ from those of Kala (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015f, 26:06). Nevertheless, he attempts to understand her faith (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015f, 27:32), actively crossing the barrier between atheism and Hinduism. Furthermore, when discussing their atypical bond, Kala and Wolfgang conclude that the most appropriate way of describing it would be as miraculous (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015f, 28:00). This becomes reinforced in the ending of the first season, when all of their cultures combine together the day of the sensates' birthdays (Wachowski and Straczynski 2016, 43:00). Like a miracle, the *homo sensorium* connection that Wolfgang shares allows him to fictionally cross nations, portraying how transnationalism contributes to the dismantling of barriers.

3. Past Life in Deconstruction: Education, Social Class and Cultural Practices

Wolfgang's deconstruction portrays the possibility of distancing oneself from damaging discourses embedded in education. Having grown up in a supremacist, violent and sexist household, he could have decided to legitimise these values instead of dismantling them. He was forced to witness from a young age how male fixation with procreation as normative heterosexuality conveyed values of control over weaker people (Kersten 1996, 383). In fact, his father was a violent man who sexually assaulted his own daughter (Wachowski, Mitchell and Hermon 2018, 26:51). Even before a person develops his or her own ability to speak, emotions and personalities are created as a result of what this person has experienced as an infant (Chodorow 1995, 521). Consequently, Wolfgang would have developed abusive masculine traits. He cultivated violent mannerisms indeed (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015j, 38:30), yet he did not become an abuser or violent masculinist as his father was. Not only does this character eventually learn that his mother is also his sister, but he also experiences the restraints of hegemonic masculinity. His father, as the greatest legitimiser of this discourse, taught him that he had to reject feminine cultural practices, such as singing, which Wolfgang loved (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015c, 42:05). These values educated Bogdanow and his best friend to believe that obedience unites people, and not values such as respect or inclusion (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015c, 2:20). By acknowledging that limitations are created by restricting legitimisers, they harvested the power to defy impositions, as Wolfgang does when he sings with Kala (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015c, 42:05). Hence, the character manages to rupture familial determinism by embracing his own personality and deconstructing what was embedded in his education.

Apart from this learning, the social class of Wolfgang's family influences their hegemonic masculinity, which the character deconstructs. He grew up belonging to a lower social class, portrayed in the series in how he began drinking alcohol as a kid (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015g, 11:00). However, his family managed to climb up the social ladder by entering the German mafia (Wachowski and Straczynski 2016, 1:00:05). People expect the ideology of upward mobility to be fair, yet it proves to be psychologically detrimental to the lower social classes (Liu 2017, 353). As a result, and affected by the economic competition that men suffer to legitimise their hegemonic position in the ladder (Connell 2005, 246), Wolfgang's social class directly affects his upbringing in a violent environment. In this atmosphere, hierarchical structures are treated as sacred. Blood is not

expected to betray blood (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015j, 23:00), which correlates family with genes, and not with respect or meritocracy. As part of a lower social class, Wolfgang presumably found impediments to learn outside the hegemonic discourses that his family legitimised. Coming from a violent unhealthy background, he was taught inside masculine cultural practices that reject, for instance, the expression of male emotions (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015g, 13:25). Despite their status, Wolfgang's male relatives were able to exercise their power because of their dominant position in the hegemonic order (Liu 2017, 352). Nevertheless, their pursuit of a superior rank in the ladder doomed their destinies (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015h, 26:19; Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015j, 25:17). Bogdanow realised that pride and vengeance, qualities intrinsic in his hegemonically masculine relatives, proved detrimental (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015g, 3:53). He embraced a counter-hegemonic discourse rooted in the dichotomous equivalents of domination, fear and the necessity of upward mobility.

Whereas Wolfgang's male side of the family established the need for deconstruction, his mother potentiated deconstructed attitudes. She constituted the first direct contact with cultural practices commonly associated with femininity. Nevertheless, his father's violent actions towards her left Wolfgang with a trauma that turned him into an isolated man who rejected affection (Wachowski and Straczynski 2017b, 10:07). Bogdanow suffers from the determinist belief of having inherited his father's "monstrosity" (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015j, 25:17). Traumas created during childhood regarding male strength and authority opposed to female submission and weakness have been proved to develop into children who are unable to progress and have fulfilling relationships of their own (Chodorow 1995, 540). As a result of their experience, these children develop guilt and the thought that they have something to repair (540). In fact, it is not until Wolfgang frees his mother by killing his father that he frees a part of himself (Wachowski, Mitchell and Hermon 2018, 05:12). However, he inherits his mother's feeling of unworthiness (Wachowski, Mitchell and Hermon 2018, 6:45). His memories of her are tainted by desolation, yet some of them bring peace into his life. For instance, Wolfgang values music because of her (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015a, 46:05), a trait that leads to one of the most important and musical scenes in the series. "What's Up" by 4 Non Blondes could be considered *Sense8's* hymn. As a song that has evolved to convey inclusion and unity, Wolfgang passionately sings it (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015c, 42:05), and rejects the idea that admiring music defies masculine cultural practices (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015a, 46:50). Despite

his trauma as a child, he eventually learns that femininity does not imply weakness. In fact, women are usually expected to be weak just “because of the fear and fantasy that [...] because of their bodies” they can not reach success or competence (Chodorow 1995, 531). By observing the powerful women in his cluster and separating from his childhood trauma as he embraces companionship, Wolfgang acknowledges that men and women feel the same despite the binary oppositions of their gender’s cultural practices (Wachowski and Straczynski 2017a, 47:40). He learns that dichotomies restrain the performance of one’s gender because of his mother’s influence in the development of a hegemonically feminine sensitivity.

4. Deconstructing Heteropatriarchy, Hegemonic Masculinity and White Privilege

One of the most remarkable aspects of this character’s personality is how he portrays intrinsic and already deconstructed behaviours in his friendship with Felix, his best friend. He considers him his brother “not by something as accidental as blood, by something much stronger, [...] by choice” (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015g, 09:45). Having met as children and having bonded over problems and misbehaviours (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015g, 09:45), they became the kind of friendship that might be regarded as homosexual. This belief is reinforced in how Felix acknowledges his role as Wolfgang’s sidekick, which would confer him a sidekick or temperate masculinity (Wachowski and Straczynski 2016, 1:16:36). Nevertheless, Wolfgang considers him his equal (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015i, 34:10). They share a solid bond, also depicted in their physical affection towards each other (Wachowski and Straczynski 2016, 1:00:26). In most hegemonic societies, this physical closeness between men would require *heteroclarification*: when a man is forced to assert his heterosexuality when showing affection for other men. Considering homosexual masculinities are excluded from the dominative hegemonic view of masculinity, the need to establish a distance from discourses of femininity becomes observable (Lusher and Robins 2010, 23). This implies “homonegativity”, the fear of being perceived as other than purely heterosexual, a fear commonly rooted in the German culture (Kachel, Simpson and Steffens 2018, 1560). Even if their society legitimises the view that male closeness differs from hegemonic masculinity, these best friends reject heteronormative cultural practices and homophobic judgement, proving that masculinity should move towards deconstructing these discourses.

This character’s deconstruction is not only intrinsic and rooted in his friendship with Felix, but also in his personal developments that separate him from hegemonic masculinity.

From being the stern masculine and emotionless figure, he becomes a sensitive man who defies hegemonic discourses. Since “masculinity” dichotomises with “femininity”, developing heterosexual sensibility constitutes deconstructing this binary opposition (Connell 2005, 68; 123). Men are expected to contain their emotions, especially vulnerability (247), criticised in the series when a character utters that “tears [in a man] are not hot” (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015d, 13:46). However, Wolfgang chooses to learn from his cluster’s experiences and separates himself from a discourse that restrains his freedom. In a very relevant scene in the last episode of the series, he is shown crying (Wachowski, Mitchell and Hermon 2018, 1:52:09) and fighting with a gun in his hand and a pink jacket on his body (1:41:20). Indeed, that might not appear symbolic; however, considering this character grew up in a society which legitimises ideas of hegemonic masculinity, the fact that he decides to deconstruct them, even if just with minor actions, proves significant. Furthermore, his acquired deconstructive awareness inspires his cluster to prosper. By expressing that mistakes can be fixed (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015h, 27:00), it could be implied that he is aware that all the damaging discourses intrinsic in his personality can be deconstructed. He manages to improve himself, but he also actively participates in the deconstruction of one of his sensates: Lito (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015h, 45:42), who was too scared of embracing his own sexuality. Therefore, Wolfgang’s development proves crucial; not only does he deconstruct himself, but he also inspires others, and the audience, to do so.

Bogdanow’s deconstruction of hegemonic fragile masculinity becomes even more relevant if observed alongside the role of heteropatriarchy. From being sexually involved with several women (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015a, 21:34), he suddenly begins to engage in psychic orgies with his cluster (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015e, 35:00; Wachowski and Straczynski 2016, 52:00; Wachowski, Mitchell and Hermon 2018, 2:26:16). With different genders, nationalities and sexualities, these intimate encounters defy the notion that sex should be repressed (Foucault 1976, 78). Alternately, *Sense8* celebrates its existence (Wachowski and Straczynski 2016, 48:00) in a society that is gradually providing more visibility to gay right successes (McCaskell 2016, 411). In their first complete psychic orgy, the song “I’d Love to Change the World” is playing (Wachowski and Straczynski 2016, 51:00). With a symbolic title, the scene represents how erasing inhibitions and prejudices against something as natural as sex may develop into the acknowledgement that differences should not mean distance. Wolfgang does not question his first involvement in a psychic orgy, regardless of the fact that his awareness of belonging to the cluster was not completely

developed yet (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015e, 36:50). Bogdanow, then, appears to be open-minded to experimenting with his sexuality, which contradicts the essence of hegemonic masculinity. He is shown particularly close to his male sensates in the sexual encounters in which all of them participate (Wachowski and Straczynski 2016, 52:00). Therefore, Wolfgang becomes symbolic in the sense that he defies that hegemonic masculinity implies heterosexuality (Connell 2005, 162). By contrast, he legitimises that homosexuality and bisexuality should not define one's gender performance (154), which deconstructs a primary binary opposition regarding sexuality. The series distances from the taboo of sex and portrays it as the most natural and intimate way of unifying a group of people who seem different on the outside but, in the end, are all the same in how they act as competing forces. Consequently, Wolfgang's deconstruction develops as he empowers himself to dismantle fragile masculinity and heteropatriarchy.

White privilege and hegemonic masculinity share a connection that ought to be scrutinised. As half of an interracial couple and an eighth of a multicultural cluster, Wolfgang experiences what it symbolises to belong to diversity, but also to discriminated minorities. In a society led by hegemonic discourses, being Caucasian would imply superiority and supremacy; however, Wolfgang rejects these ideas. Considering the German belongs to the hegemonic ethnicity, the fact that he rejects ideologies of legitimacy over minorities contributes to eliminating inequality (Liu 2017, 350). For example, when he acknowledges Rajan's role in his rescue, not only does he defy hegemonic masculinity in how he recognises that another man saved him, but also ethnic differentiation (Wachowski, Mitchell and Hermon 2018, 1:16:39). The system of hierarchies is embedded in a structuralist view of the world, and deconstruction erases this order, resulting in the breaking of the barriers that establish limitations between humans because of their skin colour. Since Bogdanow does not portray racist behaviours, it becomes clear that he has not embraced discourses of white privilege. Furthermore, Wolfgang eventually initiates a relationship with Kala, and later with both her and Rajan, a polyamorous interracial bond that will be analysed in this essay (Wachowski, Mitchell and Hermon 2018, 2:19:20). As opposed to the suggestion that couples from diverse ethnicities tend to be unstable, evidence demonstrates that interracial couples have either similar or better outcomes (Canlas et al. 2015, 309). In all likelihood, as a *homo sensorium*, his awareness of multiculturalism enhances his deconstruction of binary oppositions regarding ethnicity. Hegemonically, a white man ought to be in a relationship with a white woman, and by portraying a different union, *Sense8* uses the media constructively by providing exposure to interracial relationships, which

promotes acceptance (Lienemann and Stopp 2013, 398). The relevance of this exposure becomes emphasised in Wolfgang's incestuous birth, which might remind the audience of the practice in which purity is achieved by producing offspring inside the family. Contrasted to his origin and familial education, the character's separation from discourses of privilege and racial discrimination establishes itself as a crucial moment of his deconstruction as a Caucasian man.

Wolfgang contributes to the deconstruction of heteropatriarchy the moment he initiates a polyamorous relationship. As opposed to "promiscuity", which "implies that a person has an 'unreasonable' number of sexual partners", the word "polyamory" comes from Latin and Greek and it means "'many loves' or 'more than one love'" (Klesse 2006, 568; 577). People in these relationships are considered to be "cheating the system" (Zhu 2018, 74). Indeed, they are challenging the established organisation as they reject monogamy, the hegemonic approach to a relationship. Deconstruction also challenges the system in a similar way, since it defies the established order that structuralism poses. Even though Wolfgang and Rajan share a first affectionate interaction through Kala and their sensate connection (Wachowski and Straczynski 2017d, 19:27), it is not until they meet in person that they seem to start a relationship. Not clearly stated in the series, their polyamorous bond is hinted by themselves and those who surround them (Wachowski, Mitchell and Hermon 2018, 1:30:03; Wachowski, Mitchell and Hermon 2018, 1:54:15), as well as in their sexual encounter in the conclusion of the series (Wachowski, Mitchell and Hermon 2018, 2:25:02). It is not specified whether they are bisexual or, as some frequently denominate in order to reject bisexuality, "heteroflexible" (Klesse 2006, 566). Wolfgang, Kala and Rajan fail to address or define their counter-hegemonic union, yet polyamory does not necessarily imply verbal confirmation (Iwanowska 2018, 107). When confronted with the prospect of a polyamorous relationship, Wolfgang clearly states that the future remains unknown to him; however, he appears to rejoice in the possibility of what it could represent for them (Wachowski, Mitchell and Hermon 2018, 2:05:18). This relationship becomes crucial to his deconstruction because of Kala's position in it. Hegemonically, her decision to maintain both her marriage to her husband and her relationship to Wolfgang would establish her as a promiscuous and selfish woman, while these same actions would be acclaimed in a man (Lazar 2017, 584). Nevertheless, the series portrays this decision as Kala's agency and empowerment, something that both her husband and Bogdanow legitimise. They eliminate the boundaries that restrain Kala's expression of her sexual and affective desires. As a result, Wolfgang purges the discourse of possessive and dominative masculinity at the same time he embraces sexual openness, erasing the heteropatriarchal discourse altogether.

Wolfgang's deconstruction increases his acknowledgement of feminism and the need to legitimise women empowerment in a society in which patriarchy leads. Whereas women ought to fight hard to possess privileges, men's situation is less complicated (Kuti 2017, 36). In fact, patriarchy arose from the gender order that subordinated women by giving dominance to men, developing into the need for Women's Liberation (Connell 2005, 74). Both Wolfgang and Will disregard Kala's plans and opinion because they are used to being the ones who make the decisions (Wachowski and Straczynski 2017h, 08:38). Neither of these characters disrespects women, yet their inherent perception of decision-making rooted in their masculine traits directly questions Kala's agency. However, *Sense8* also attempts to portray how women can be empowered. Not only do Kala's scientific abilities save them several times (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015j, 20:44; Wachowski and Straczynski 2017f, 51:10; Wachowski and Straczynski 2017h, 09:00), proving a positive representation of female agency in the TV series, but also in the first season finale, a female character saves them all while battling a complicated psychological moment for her (Wachowski, Wachowski and Straczynski 2015j, 50:11). *Sense8* dismantles the discourse of emotional and irrational women by portraying how emotions do not imply lack of strength, and Wolfgang experiences that as part of the cluster. Therefore, his deconstruction progresses as he perceives that the core of patriarchy contains these sexist attitudes and that "the main contribution a man can make is to hold back from any sexist action or utterance" (Connell 2005, 131). Not only is he able to recognise Kala's power (Wachowski and Straczynski 2017h, 09:50), but he also changes dominant masculinist discourses in one of the most basic aspects of human nature: sex. Used to having aggressive and male-centred sex with women (Wachowski and Straczynski 2016, 55:21), he develops a sensibility that breaks with cultural practices of male toughness and selfishness during sexual intercourse. While sleeping with Kala, he shows tenderness and generosity, a devotion which is emphasised by how delicately the scene is shot (Wachowski and Straczynski 2017d, 14:20). Consequently, having experienced the other side of patriarchy in his connection, Wolfgang fosters awareness of sexist discourses and is thus able to deconstruct them.

5. Deconstruction: From Individualism to Inclusion and Support

Bogdanow goes from embracing individual masculinity to discovering how communion benefits him. One of the most damaging discourses inside hegemonic masculinity is that of dominance and therefore the fear of having to be under someone's advice (Connell 2005, 82). Rooted in his view of how people are better united by secrets (Wachowski and Straczynski 2016, 1:05:38), this character misunderstands unity and how it can benefit him. Masculinity is

threatened because of the shaming that men suffer when they dismiss patriarchal portrayals of their gender (Gebhard et al. 2018, 9). Nevertheless, Wolfgang defies this notion when he rejects individuality to seek the help of his cluster in a moment of danger (Wachowski and Straczynski 2017f, 40:30), a deconstructive action highlighted in their astonishment (Wachowski and Straczynski 2017f, 44:30). Presumably, he acquired the courage to do so because of the role he had in Sun's deconstruction of her individual traits, a result of her need to defy patriarchal impositions (Wachowski and Straczynski 2017e, 32:02). He ultimately discovers that belonging to a community offers guidance and comfort (Wachowski, Mitchell and Hermon 2018, 1:20:11), values usually rooted in people who act as competing forces. Learning to collaborate in a society proves crucial to develop care (Noddings 2017, 2). By doing so, a connection arises, which allows a person to feel that he or she belongs (1). In fact, Wolfgang goes from being trapped in gang wars to having a war fought for him (Wachowski and Straczynski 2017i, 54:00), an experience which allows him to foster the knowledge that there is an individualistic discourse to deconstruct. Consequently, he discovers that power can be found in communion, as well as the implications that this conveys: unity does not diminish his worth; it empowers him.

By embracing belonging to the cluster, and therefore to a transnational community, the deconstruction of this character appears both influenced by and developed into social inclusion and support. As opposed to the social exclusion and marginalisation that he suffered, Wolfgang becomes part of a community, which allows him to develop cultural awareness because of his newly acquired multicultural competence. The sensates exemplify "the most intimate connection a human imaginable", which offers them the possibility of escaping social isolation by creating telepathic bonds and empathy (Zilonka and Job 2017, 393). Therefore, the series tries to convey that as long as people remain together, there is nothing they can not achieve (Wachowski and Straczynski 2017c, 45:43). Indeed, this message is significant since the character is able to consciously undergo the process of deconstruction because of the people who offer him the possibility and support to do so. By portraying unity in opposition to segregation, the Wachowskis use *Sense8* to transmit the message that love, synonymous with support and inclusion, is a bridge, and not a wall, if people decide to legitimise this discourse by becoming competing forces (Wachowski and Straczynski 2017g, 34:00). Wolfgang becomes this competing force in his process of deconstruction and rapidly discovers that the notion of love rooted in support and inclusion conquers everything (Wachowski, Mitchell and Hermon 2018, 1:38:20). Having acquired this awareness, Wolfgang enters the minority, the counter-

hegemonic discourse. Belonging to the group of marginalised competing forces, he discovers how the deconstruction he is going through is rooted in support and involvement in the sector of society which celebrates respect, equality and freedom.

6. Conclusion

Even if Derrida rejected defining deconstruction, analysing its representation in *Sense8* allows the exploration of its mechanism. Wolfgang, as a Caucasian and heterosexual man, belongs to the hegemonic section of society which benefits from that privileged position. Therefore, by observing his development as a character, it is possible to discover how, through the dismantling of discourses that prove detrimental to the self and society, he becomes the epitome of the process of deconstruction along with the factors that affect it. Wolfgang failed to question his hegemonic privilege until his rebirth as a sensate, when *homo sensorium* empathy allowed him to experience injustice and violence as if he was the one suffering them. As a result, the character realised the need for deconstruction and the correlation between this process and transnationalism: they both seek to demolish the barriers and impositions that divide people. This character's tormented past could have contributed to the disregard of damaging discourses. Nevertheless, Wolfgang rejected the values in which he was educated, as well as the violence that searching upward mobility caused to his family. By contrast, he benefitted from his mother's role, who offered him the possibility of developing cultural practices commonly associated with femininity, enhancing the character's sensitivity. Even if his female progenitor represented the first direct contact with a counter-hegemonic discourse, his friendship with Felix contributed to the deconstruction of homonegativity and hegemonic masculinity as well. In addition, his connection to the sensates allowed him to undergo a personal development that distanced him from an enclosing performance of virility. Heteropatriarchy and white privilege were deconstructed alongside hegemonic masculinity in his psychic sexual encounters with his multicultural sensates and his interracial and polyamorous relationship. These experiences allowed him to understand male dominance and dismantle sexism. Finally, having deconstructed all these behaviours, he challenged the discourse of individual masculinity and embraced inclusion and support, factors which proved crucial in his deconstruction.

The series ends with a joyful finale very typical of *Sense8*, showing the sensates and many secondary characters, for the last time, in an intimate and natural moment of unity. What it fails to depict, of course, is what happens after this scene. Since *Sense8* ended, the audience can only imagine what happened to these characters. Did Wolfgang really find inclusion in

exclusion? Was the polyamorous relationship successful? Were the sensates able to continue deconstructing damaging notions embedded in our culture? The audience will never know. Nevertheless, this cultural product taught that, many times, relevant processes start in one's mind. *Homo sensoriums* may be fictional, yet attempting to transform our current society into a place that legitimises discourses of respect, unity, equality, diversity and freedom is not. Therefore, by creating characters that the audience might empathise with, like Wolfgang, or any of the other sensates, the Wachowski sisters attempt to articulate that such a community may exist one day. As the series portrays, revolutions begin with people, since they possess the power to dismantle damaging discourses by becoming competing forces. Sometimes these discourses appear insignificant, yet fostering awareness on even the minutest harmful behaviours allows an active change, because humans can legitimise prejudice, but they can also legitimise empathy. Societies constantly develop, so portraying a positive and empowering representation of how this change starts with deconstruction not only proves crucial, but also inspiring.

7. Works Cited

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