



## “Free Culture” Lost in Translation

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Analyzing groups such as the Brazilian fans of the television series “Lost” and their independent streaming and subtitling activities, this article discusses the relationships among virtual communities of fans and the implications for distribution, access, and exchange of content produced by cultural industries. It defends the view that the flexibility of a worldwide network of fans, fragmented and disseminated on a global scale, allows their actions to operate not only as catalysts of the discussion around access and distribution of cultural products, but to challenge power levels, compressing hierarchies through as-yet-unimaginable forms of participation. It argues that the activities examined are part of a new design of interdependence of media such as TV and the Internet and that the role of groups such as the “Lost” fans studied are fundamental to the discussion of the flow of media products in a globalized society.

*El sentido común, el sentido comunitario, es un bichito duro de matar.  
(Common sense, sense of community, is a tough bug to kill.)  
~Eduardo Galeano*

*Em princípio o consumo não é mal, o mal é não poder consumir.  
(In principle the consumer is not evil, evil is not able to consume.)  
~Néstor García Canclini*

It is Wednesday evening, a little after 9 in Los Angeles. A group of “Lost” fans has already transferred a file from the latest episode of the television series, which was broadcast on ABC, to a torrent website. Although the activity is not paid for and it is already past 3 o'clock in the morning, in Sao Paulo, Curitiba, Salvador, Florianopolis, and elsewhere in Brazil, another group of fans is getting ready to watch, using software such as Subtitle Workshop and Note Pad, and to make the episode available to other fans.

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"Lost" debuted on American television in 2004 and a few months later was already being downloaded through the Web, legally or not, in several countries. Soon accessible worldwide, though in an informal way, the program dissolved the limits of territorialization of open television.

The series is characterized by a fragmented narrative that begins with the crash of fictitious Ocean Airlines Flight 805 on a Pacific island. "The program offers such a complex apparatus of conspiracy and mystery that online fandom has embraced the show to demonstrate their collective intelligence in action, charting relationships, creating maps, and decoding minute clues on discussion boards, wikis, and blogs" (Gray & Mittell, 2007, p. 2).

The diverse standpoints of each of the survivors define every episode, the story being set up based on frequent journeys through the time of the narrative. The fragmented narrative is also associated with a series of products developed for other types of media. These byproducts help the viewer unveil the information in the plot. One such example is the "mobisodes," accessible through the website of ABC (producer of the series) in cell-phone format.

From a theoretical standpoint, this article takes a cross-disciplinary approach. The globalized scenario is observed starting with its complexity, in which fictional TV narratives anchor the creation and materialization of new shared cultural identities. However, it is not a matter of defending a cyber perspective. The groups analyzed point to trends and pathways, but it is necessary to keep in perspective the strength of the industry involved. The Association on Intellectual Property Firms estimates that the value of copyrights and patents reaches US\$360 billion a year in the United States, ahead of industries such as aerospace and agriculture in real value. A further point also has to be considered: The use of the information appropriated by the "Lost" fans is subjected to cognitive access and competences that are usually unequal.

Analysis of the television series allows examination of a myriad of research issues: Its format brings together TV, Internet and cell-phone technology. The countless downloads in different parts of the world challenge the frontiers of open TV territory. "Lost" is an object of praise among fans in several countries and its framework fulfills Murray's (2003) concept of a "hyper series" in which all minor characters would be leading actors of their own stories, thus allowing for alternative plots within the greater story. The viewer would take pleasure from the overlapping tales, the intertwining of several different lives and the presentation of the same event from diverse perspectives and sensitivities. Among the studies that have used "Lost" as a case study to explore fandom and contemporary television, the works of Booth (2011), Johnson (2007, 2011) and Gray & Mittell (2007) can be highlighted. The issue of fans downloading television outside of the United States is due, in part, to the success of the promotion of American television in the global arena, as well as the role of mobile and online mini-episodes (Leaver, 2008). And, of course, these days the configuration of communication flows has made physical borders far less important:

Many existing policies and practices still operate as if centered on moving goods at the speed of physical shipping rather than allowing for information moving at almost the speed of light down an optical cable. In an era when the tyranny of distance should be

meaningless, certainly in terms of digital products, I will argue instead that the Australian media landscape is marked by a prevailing tyranny of digital distance which occurs when the potential and, indeed, expectation of near synchronous global distribution of media is not fulfilled due to arbitrary boundaries which began as geographic but are now entirely in the economic and political domain. (Leaver, 2008, p. 147)

This article discusses the relationships among virtual communities of fans and their implications on the distribution, access and exchange of content produced by cultural industries. The term "virtual community" indicates frequent computer-mediated communication among people with similar interests (Hiltz & Wellman, 1997), persistently interacting and creating "social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (Rheingold, 1993). Virtual communities can also be characterized as groups of people with shared interests or goals for whom electronic communication is a primary form of interaction (Dennis, Pootheri, & Natarajan, 1998). Figallo (1998) advocates that virtual communities are those in which the elements feel part of a larger social group maintaining ongoing exchanges of commonly valued things with other members. This is the definition used in this research.

The empowerment of groups such as the "Lost" fans in the face of agencies and institutions that operate in the real world is the main aspect of this paper, and it argues that the flexibility of a worldwide network of fans, fragmented and disseminated on a global scale (in this particular case we will deal with the Brazilian production of fan-made subtitles), allows for its actions and the reflections resulting from fans to operate not only as catalysts of the discussion around access and distribution of cultural products, but to challenge power levels, compressing hierarchies through as-yet-unimagined forms of participation.

From a methodological standpoint, this project takes on an exploratory form in its descriptive, qualitative, and interpretive dimensions. To discuss the organization of "Lost" fan groups in virtual communities in Brazil, the elaboration of subtitles and distribution of "Lost" episodes, as well as the possible meanings of such activities, it first becomes necessary to enter the world of these fans. Participants in the analyzed communities usually introduce themselves using fictitious names. There are no selection criteria for inclusion of a member in a community except for his or her passion for "Lost", and the willingness to share personal observations about each episode. The admiration for the television series, therefore, seems to be the main criteria for the establishment of a fandom.

To enter this universe, I visited Brazilian Internet forums dedicated to the series. The first contact was made with the managers of the LostBrasil forum, and after the first interviews, continued via e-mail with open questions, it was possible to reach "Lost" fans of other communities related to the topic and analyzed during the research: "Legendas.TV," "Sci Fi Team," "IsFree.TV" and "Séries Etc." In these communities, I scanned fans engaged in the downloading and subtitling of the series and invited them to participate in an online interview, also with open questions, explaining the academic purpose of the work. The survey attracted the interest of many fans. Within two weeks, 42 of the 68 invited fans completed the interview. Respondents were ages 17 to 35, and 58% of them were female. The topics ranged from the particular satisfaction offered by being part of the process to the ethical implications of it. The interviews

were done in October 2009, as part of post-doctoral research I was doing at the University of California, Riverside. I also use a quantitative perspective and offer a table comparing real audiences versus downloads in the section under the heading "Why Don't They Just Wait?"

### **A Missionary Zeal in the Community of Fans**

The informal elaboration of "Lost" subtitles into Brazilian Portuguese is organized, distributed, and discussed in several virtual communities, among them Legendas.com and In Subs. Many such communities were created after November 2006, when the Association for the Defense of Intellectual Property Rights (ADEPI) threatened to sue the LOSTBrasil fan forum if the activity of subtitling the series were not halted.

In spite of the initiatives by ADEPI and other organizations, the number of Brazilian "Lost" fans willing to download the episodes has only expanded since then. One of the shared websites investigated recorded, by August 2009, a total of 962,421 downloads of files with Brazilian Portuguese subtitles for the fifth season episodes of the series, an average of 60,000 downloads per episode. The average for the fourth season was 50,000 downloads per episode.

This research does not intend to defend the illegal distribution of material on the Web, but to call attention to a scenario that defies the current model of content distribution—especially from television.

To give an idea of the "Lost" calendar in Brazil, it is necessary to bear in mind that in the beginning of 2009, fans who watched the series in the United States or via the Web began to follow the fifth season of the series. Those who followed "Lost" through Brazilian cable television had access to that season in the second half of 2009, whereas Brazilian fans in early 2009 could watch only fourth-season episodes.

The distribution of a North American TV series outside the United States is associated with the purchase of broadcasting rights. Upon signing a purchase agreement, it is necessary to determine whether the content will be distributed free-of-charge or not. In Brazil, for example, the Terra website distributes the series free via the Web, but could not do so before Globo Network Television broadcast the series on open television. The delay of cable TV broadcasting as compared to broadcasting in the United States is also due to broadcasting rights. In Brazil in 2009, this meant that the "Lost" series was broadcast on closed TV first, then released on DVD, and finally shown on open TV. Using informal organization models, this Brazilian example of virtual community defies such chronology, distributing the episodes a few hours after the ABC open channel in the United States, and way ahead of the Brazilian broadcast on the AXN cable channel.

Abigail De Kosnik (2009) discusses a number of other reasons why a user might find pirate downloading superior to legal downloading and streaming: (a) pirate-downloading websites offer every popular television program from every network for download, (b) the TV pirate is able to discern which new episodes have become available quickly and easily, (c) the software and interfaces used are uniform on pirate sites, (d) pirated files are portable and users need not purchase any specially configured devices,

(e) television pirates are able to access a complete version of any television show, regardless of whether it has been preempted or otherwise unaired in certain regions, (f) low cost, and (h) the possibility of collecting television programs and organizing and sharing personal archives of favorites. De Kosnik (2010) also discusses pirates' access to global programming:

While most legal services for downloading or streaming TV currently make available some British television programs, and iTunes also offers some Japanese television content (through agreements with distribution companies like Anime Network), the vast majority of non-U.S. television shows cannot be accessed legally by television viewers in the U.S. Conversely, TV viewers outside the U.S. cannot legally access U.S. television programs as they air, but must wait, often a year or more, for popular U.S. shows to be broadcast in their own countries. (p. 10)

"Lost" is an interesting example of how to present evidence that new viewers- and new technologies-are reshaping television production practices and that the viewer's participation is shifting from "sequential activities (watching and then interacting), to simultaneous though separate activities (interacting while watching), to a combined experience (watching and interacting in a single environment)" (Murray, 2003). Regarding the narrative structure and the interdependence of media such as TV and the Internet, Murray had already forecast that "all such digital artifacts would be available upon demand, between one episode and another, in such a way that viewers could experience an on-going sensation of lives under way."

The global hit series "Lost" debuting in 2004 may be the most elaborated example of the complex narrative strategies that Jeffrey Sconce (2004), Glen Creeber (2004), and Jason Mittell (2006) argue have emerged over the past decade. "(...) Watching a serial television drama is a huge time investment, especially with a show like "Lost," which seems to demand a degree of "processing time" outside the actual viewing experience to research, theorize, and discuss its mysteries (Gray & Mittell, 2007, p. 2)."

To subtitle "Lost" episodes is also a huge time investment, and it is absorbing and intricate work. The subtitle team groups analyzed have between five and nine members ranging in age from 17 to 35 years. They share the tasks of translating, synchronizing, and revising each episode, usually within a period of four hours. Usually the assignment is done with the help of the text file in English (closed caption), but sometimes the translation is done with only the episode's audio file in AVI (Audio Video Interleave) format. After the translation, the document with the subtitles is saved in SRT (SubRip) format and made available in the network. The RMVB (RealMedia Variable Bitrate) files, somewhat lighter, with images and subtitles, are usually made available on the Web the next day.

When discussing the culture of fans, copywriting, and manga, Lee (2009) states that one of the things that manga scanners usually have in common is a strong missionary zealotness for the act of promoting the manga. And like the manga fans, the "Lost" fans we studied place a major emphasis on the appeal of sharing their favorite television series. Such interest in the circulation of an object of praise seems to be a new phenomenon when we take into consideration the traditional portrait of fan groups, which is based on segregation (Fiske, 1992).

The same missionary zeal is found among American fans of Japanese anime who undertake a similar process, producing fan-made subtitles for Japanese TV products. Denison (2011) explains that "fan subtitlers' distribution of anime is in many ways not unlike the work of other active fan-producers, who create ancillary texts ranging from fan fiction to fan art":

These fan texts are at the liminal edge between fan creativity and piracy. Essentially, this is because fan subtitled anime are texts augmented by, rather than created by, fans. These are the industry's own texts, re-translated and distributed for free by fans, and they are shaping the discourse between anime's most active set of fan-producers and the companies that originate their objects of fandom. . . . The argument here is that the notion of the "fan subtitler" contains within it a range of positions in relation to the fan community that indicate everything from new kinds of fandom within anime to a slide into the most overt forms of piracy. (p. 450)

In several respects, fan-subbed products provide an acute research *corpus* for the debate over the legitimacy of fan practices. Denison also points out that the current picture of the fan subtitler is an increasingly negative one, whereas even 10 years ago the impression of anime fan-subbing was actually positive. The group we have been observing sees the actions of downloading, translating, subtitling, and distributing as the only way to make these episodes available to their peers in the universe of fans. E. G., one of those interviewed, told me that he "found gratification in posting a new episode and observing the debate that it generated in the forum." To V. A., "Belonging to a community with similar interests and learning to make subtitles and edit them are some of the benefits of being part of the community."

To many subtitlers, it is the quality challenge that motivates participation: "The feeling of releasing the episode in record time, placing it on the Web in less than 12 hours, and then seeing that our subtitles turned out to be much better than the official ones is great," says F. S. "I use money from my own pocket just to see my Web page on the air," said B. L., coordinator of one of the groups analyzed. The idea of giving non-English-speaking fans the opportunity to watch the episodes of their favorite series is recurrent in the interviews. "I like to see that I helped people and I always read the acknowledgements that are sent to me. That is what moves me to keep working on subtitles," said E. B.: "It is very gratifying indeed."

D. M. is the designer in charge of the LOSTBrasil group. Until 2006, the fan group subtitled and made available the subtitled episodes on their website. The activity was interrupted after threats from ADEPI. According to D. M., the greatest motivation obtained from the activity was to observe the large numbers of downloads and receive comments on the quality of the subtitles. D. M. added that when the episodes were finally shown on television, the group pointed to translation mistakes and missing words that were fundamental for the understanding of the story.

The discussion on the activities and nature of fan subtitlers includes not only the question of fandom, but also new technologies and the struggle for access to favored texts (Jenkins, 1992). As in anime texts, fan awareness, the nature of online fandom and "subcultural capital" (Napier, 2007) are at the heart of this discussion. I perceive these groups' activities as a channel of participation and a way to

subjectively challenge a semi-democratic global culture. In some forms, this challenge has been referred to as "free culture." My argument is that the elaboration of subtitles and the distribution of "Lost" TV episodes are an answer given by an organized group of people to a specific problem—access to popular culture produced and distributed by U.S. television—and a certain level of power vis-à-vis the large entertainment corporations and their broadcasting rights.

This group of fans makes every effort to allow other groups organized around their passion for a television series produced in the United States to have more control over decisions that affect their lives as consumers. Their actions can be seen as a symbolic challenge to established codes.

The idea that the concept of broadcasting rights must evolve, for example, is already discussed in spaces which go beyond the fan community websites. A quick search through the files of the two largest newspapers in Brazil, *O Estado de São Paulo* and *Folha de São Paulo*, and in the two largest news portals, Terra and UOL, turned up 34 articles in which the issue is discussed. In one of the articles, Paulo Castro, general director of the Terra portal, declares that "The viewer today decides what to watch and when to watch it," the control being in his hands..

As Henry Jenkins (2009) points out, "Piracy often reflects market failures on the part of producers rather than moral failures on the part of consumers." I see two unmistakable results from this link between TV and the Internet, both connected to the information/power relationship. First, the group shows that it is possible to make politics internally in cyberspace, through acts of disobedience such as the maintenance and expansion of the translation and distribution activities. And second, the virtual community can influence politics in the real world, fostering discussion around the need to change the way communication products are distributed.

It is true that other issues, parallel and interrelated, ought to be considered, especially the narrative structure of "Lost," which Clarke (2009) describes as densely serialized, intimately connected from episode to episode, as well as being narratively connected to a number of off-broadcast interactions which range from printed material to video games and online communities. The relationship between this new narrative and the series as a praised object is noteworthy.

### **"Why Don't They Just Wait?"**

When I was preparing this paper, a young lady asked me, at a party in Los Angeles, what I was writing about. When I tried to explain, she looked at me with an expression of awe and asked: "Why don't they just wait?" The question is pertinent, and the possible answers justify this work. The truth is that many consumers of popular culture in countries that traditionally purchase North American TV shows are no longer willing to wait. But is that good or bad? And do the actions of this "not waiting" group obliterate the idea of a free culture, or do they inspire changes in the way we understand television today?

Lessig (2004) argues that piracy, though used as a pejorative when describing file-sharing networks, is the basis of all creative work:

If "piracy" means using the creative property of others without their permission . . . then the history of the content industry is a history of piracy. Every important sector of "big media" today—film, records, radio, and cable TV—was born of a kind of piracy so defined. (p. 53)

Sharing and blending is becoming a more and more widely held way of circulating cultural texts. This reality is influencing the discussion around notions of intellectual property. In relation to Web content, for example, Leaver (2008) states that

. . . similar to the arbitrary [regional] locking of DVDs along national lines, but effectively carving the globe up into differentially manageable sales opportunities of interest only to media conglomerates, the geographic locking of the webisodes and similar online content illustrates distribution practices of only historical value, desperately ignoring the possibilities afforded by networks and technologies in the 21st century. (p. 150)

This paper proposes that instead of an area defined by *property*, we acknowledge the Web as a *commons*. The idea of the transition from a "permission culture" to a "free culture" is discussed by Lessig (2004) and Brown (2008), among others. It supports the idea that the way in which transformative digital copyright violation has come to operate is a redesigned cultural practice. A free culture would not mean that cultural products cost nothing, but rather that cultural producers and consumers could make use of the Web's millions of texts without having to worry about being sued (Brown, 2008).

Van Dijk (2009) calls attention to the need to observe the multiple roles of the user in a media environment in which the boundaries between commerce, content, and information are being redesigned. Both from the cultural and the communication point of view, an interesting aspect in this process is the fact that it combines both the fragility as well as the strength of the old media institutional system. Traditional television continues to be the fastest tool to reach a mass audience. Investments in online publicity, through growing, accounted for only US\$1 billion in 2009 (Salter, 2009). In contrast, about US\$46 billion was spent on TV publicity in the same period. On the other hand, online alternatives allow viewers to control not only the time they spend watching TV, but also part of their exposure to commercials. On the Hulu.com website, for example, viewers can choose the commercials they want to watch.

Although "Lost" is the most evident and frequent example on Torrent websites, there is an ever-growing number of viewers who watch television with the help of such sites. On the "IsFree.TV" group website, each of the subtitled series has at least 40,000 downloads per episode. Aside from "Lost," there are frequent downloads of "Heroes" and "House." The website makes available 65 other series, with 189 seasons and 3,592 episodes, more than any cable TV channel in Brazil. There are more than 280,000 registered users on the Legendas.TV website and 137,000 on IsLife.corp.

Television developed into a mass medium in Brazil earlier than in most developing countries, mostly because of an effective government policy during the authoritarian regime. In the early 1970s,

government invested in the development of Brazilian programming by commercial television, with the goal of reducing reliance on imported programs. Today the concentration of ownership remains solid, but the concentration of audience supremacy that was held for decades by TV Globo is gradually declining, due both to broadcast rivals and the steady increase of national and regional multichannel television. In 2002, TV Globo effectively encouraged the legalization of foreign investment in broadcast media (up to the level of 30%), a significant deregulation of previous protection of national ownership (Sinclair, 1999).

Since the 1980s, Latin American producers have moved aggressively into the international arena. Brazil's TV Globo began exporting telenovelas to Europe in 1975, and its annual profits on telenovela sales to nearly 100 countries have reached US\$20 million (Sinclair, 1997). The United States continues to have an advantage in genres such as feature films, cartoons, and action-adventure TV series, genres that even large networks like Globo cannot afford to produce. Historically, in the field of television programs, the United States exports more than three times the combined total of the next three largest-exporting countries; in other words, it is responsible for an estimated 75% of all television program exports (Sinclair, 1997). Regional satellite television has developed as a partnership between dominant global firms, like Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, and dominant regional networks, like TV Globo.

According to poll ratings by the Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistics (IBOPE), published in *Folha de Sao Paulo*, "Lost" was watched by 217,903 viewers on paid TV in 2007. The ratings leadership is shared between the series and "Heroes" (Castro, 2007). In Brazil, interpreting the published figures for paid TV audiences is a complex issue. Measurements done by IBOPE since 2001 show that cable TV is present in only 4.54 million households in the country (less than 10% of the total), with an average of 14.5 million viewers throughout Brazil. Even in the households with cable TV, more than 70% of the subscribers' audience goes to open channels such as Globo, Record, SBT and Band. The "Lost" showings on open TV on the Globo network have on average 11 points in the IBOPE ratings, equivalent to 660,000 viewers. The soap operas with the best audience ratings were "Roque Santeiro" (1985), with 67 points or 4 million viewers, and "Tieta" (1989), with 63 points or 3.7 million viewers.

A comparison between IBOPE data and an estimate made by the Séries Etc portal shows that the number of fans who watch "Lost" through the AXN cable channel is close to the number of fans who watch the episodes via the Internet. The research, based on data from Brazilian websites that share subtitles and subtitled episodes, shows that almost 190,000 fans watch "Lost" at about the same time as American viewers, against 217,903 viewers of the AXN channel.

As indicated by Pew Internet & American Life Project (Madden, 2007), video files account for 10% of file-sharing activity on peer-to-peer networks. ABC's "Lost" and "Desperate Housewives" were among the first free offerings of full-length episodes of primetime television shows online. Data compiled by Nielsen Online shows that in April 2009, users streamed more than 373 million videos on Huly.com, a massive 490% increase over the same period in 2008. Thus Hulu has become the second-most-popular online streaming video repository; only YouTube (which displays both studio and user-generated videos) eclipses it. Madden (2007) also shows that 29% of Hulu's audience is made up of adults—ages 35 to 49—who are looking for long-form content.

According to the Envisional technical report "An Estimate of Infringing Use of the Internet" (2011), BitTorrent is the most used file-sharing protocol worldwide with more than 100 million regular users. Of all Internet traffic in the United States in 2010, 17.53% was estimated to be infringing, excluding all pornography. Peer-to-peer networks were 20% of all Internet traffic. The study found that of the most popular 10,000 pieces of content managed by PublicBT, 14.5% was television content—all of which was copyrighted and shared illegitimately. Of this, 1.5% of content was Japanese anime and 0.3% was sports content.

The chart below compares data from the TorrentFreak website, with an average of downloads per episode on Torrent websites worldwide, and data from Nielsen (which is the U.S. equivalent to IBOPE) with an average of viewers per episode in 10 TV series. There are no official numbers for the average downloads of specific TV series, and the table was quoted on several news pieces on piracy (see TV.com, a CBS news service, and broadbandnews.com, for example). Data point toward an increment of up to 50% in the viewing audience of some TV series when downloads via BitTorrent are computed. According to the website, more than 90% of registered downloads are made outside the United States.

**Table 1. Most Downloaded TV Shows on BitTorrent 2009<sup>1</sup>**

DOWNLOAD X BROADCAST

Series	Average downloads per episode worldwide (Data from TorrentFreak website)	Average audience in U.S per episode (based on data from Nielsen)
Heroes	6,580,000	5,900,000
Lost	6,310,000	11,050,000
Prison Break	3,450,000	5,300,000
Dexter	2,780,000	2,300,000
House	2,590,000	15,600,000
24	2,440,000	12,620,000
Desperate Housewives	2,180,000	15,500,000
Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles	1,960,000	6,340,000
Grey's Anatomy	1,740,000	15,640,000
True Blood	1,600,000	12,400,000

<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from <http://torrentfreak.com/top-10-most-pirated-tv-shows-of-2009-091231>

The volume of digital reproduction says a great deal about piracy, mainly about how regular people's actions call into question conventional assumptions about control over textual circulation forms. Debates over how and who should be allowed to distribute and profit from media texts are being held on mainstream media such as *Folha de São Paulo*, *The Guardian*, BBC News and *The Independent*. Much of the debate focuses on American media products and their fandom outside the United States. The data analyzed also highlights the fact that technology and audience craving for near-synchronous circulation of television content in digital formats is currently at odds with most models of broadcast, which were shaped in the pre-digital era.

Online fandoms cannot merely be viewed as a version or reflection of "offline" fandoms. The mediation of "new media" must be addressed rather than treated as an invisible term within the romanticized "new." Furthermore, this particular alteration of fan practices through new media technologies also indicates that we cannot consider the dialectic of value purely as a romanticisation of cult media and fans: cult fandom doesn't merely "escape" or "resist" the process of commodification, it also intensifies—and is increasingly caught in these same processes. (Hills, 2002, p. 135).

Actions such as those observed herein rekindle battles over meaning, information, and control. The analyzed groups of fans do not see their activities in economic terms, but their daily activities are challenged by traditional media. As observed by Eco (1989), "Things have simply changed, and even value judgments must be built based on different parameters."

If we want to understand how socioeconomic and social transformations affect power relations among media corporations, publicity, viewers, and fans, it is important to bear in mind that

Media texts and institutions are not only signs to be read, or coefficients of political and economic power, but all of these things. Culture is adaptive, a hybrid monster subjected simultaneously and in a contingent way to text, power and science. (Miller, 2000, p. 5)

I believe that experiences such as those of the Brazilian "Lost" fans can help circumscribe/limit/identify the activity of fans in a new scenario, in which the players are strengthening their role as a collective strategy, an effort to set up communities that represent, in their subcultures, a foreign body within the social body of peripheral capitalism. The actions of such fan groups ought to be interpreted in terms of the enlargement of a new moral guidance, associated with different interpretations of equality and democracy.

Another point to highlight is the role of fans in the transformation of media products such as "Lost." As stated by Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington (2007):

While we moved from an era of "broadcasting" to one of "narrowcasting," a process boosted by the deregulation of media markets and reflected in the arrival of new technologies, the fan as a specialized and dedicated consumer has become the core

element of the media industry marketing strategies. . . . Instead of [being] ridiculed, the audience of fans is now courted and defended by cultural industries, at least so long as their activities do not divert from capitalist trade principles and provided that they acknowledge the property of their object of praise. (p. 4)

The success of "Lost" is largely a result of actions such as those described herein when we analyze this community of subtitlers. What "Lost" brings that is new is the fact that several of its byproducts mimic activities traditionally developed by communities of fans, finding ways to integrate people and products around a specific piece of work and using a system that replicates, in the industry, all levels of the fandom system, in the perspective of a productive and virtual reception.

Another element that must be taken into consideration in this discussion is the broader transformation of television. According to Miller (2000), TV started out as a national broadcasting media, open and dominated by the state, and has been transformed into an international market-dominated media, with closed broadcasting via cables, satellites, and the Internet: "Something like a TV screen, located in a household and in other environments, that is what the future will be. And—who knows?—the word *television* may come to mean that which we now call "the new media" (p. 7).

Martín-Barbero (2009) calls attention to the fact that transformations in the way we watch TV actually have, in their roots, a more profound change, which points toward a crisis in the organization role of temporality:

In only a few years, television will have nothing to do with what it is today. Television with a time schedule is an heir of the radio, which was the first medium that started to organize daily life. In the Middle Ages, the *campanario* was the one telling which time to get up, to eat, to work, to sleep. That's what the radio did too. The radio set a schedule to daily living. The news, the radio soap opera, the advertisement spaces . . . . This relationship that the media had with daily living, organized around time, the morning, the afternoon, the evening, the weekend, the holidays, that is all coming to an end. We will have an offer of contents. The Internet will reconfigure the TV that mimics the radio, the radio that mimics the written press. (p. 1)

The reaction of corporations involved in the production and commercialization of TV series that are objects of downloading to this new reality was not an instant one, but there are signs that the movement of fans has managed to attract the broadcasting companies' attention. Aside from the lawsuits, which so far have seemed to be inefficient, since the downloaders and subtitlers only change their url addresses with each new lawsuit, the TV networks are searching for alternatives in keeping control of their products.

On the ABC Web page, for example, the "Lost" episodes are available in real time. Since the copyrights have been sold to other broadcasting companies throughout the world, the episodes can be watched only on computers whose IP is in the United States. In Asia, the reaction to such limitation was immediate, and it is possible to send a pirate signal from an American IP to anywhere in the world through

services such as SopCast, PPLive, and TVUNetworks.

Another issue for discussion is the scenario that leads to and allows the existence of such new viewers. When we enlarge the field of analysis, we verify that, if on the one hand there is a multiplication of the offer, on the other hand there is a perverse process of centralization of the content broadcasting sources and of acute validation of symbolic goods, so as to feed the standards of accumulation and profitability of the large media, computer, and telecommunication companies.

Yar (2005) presented some interesting figures: The global demand for consumption goods in general increased, in imports, from \$47.8 billion to \$213.7 billion between 1980 and 1998. The arrival of a wealthy middle class in the developing countries has considerably expanded the market for "luxury" consumption goods. As for goods directly related to the media, Yar highlights the fast decline in prices for TV equipment and the explosion in the DVD consumption market. The appetite for media products that reflect Western lifestyles, especially the American one, has also grown (Liebes, 2003; Slater, 1999), allowing for the American cultural industry to be seen, in a certain way, as a "victim of its own success" in "persuading audiences to embrace the American likes" (Yar, 2005).

The reaction and counter-reaction reminds us of Eco's (1989) words in "Falsification and Consensus": "Each new invention triggers a chain reaction of new inventions, producing a kind of common language." Reacting to control their own content, NBC and Fox invest in new initiatives, such as their participation in the Hulu.com Web site. Along with TiVo and the reduction of viewers since the beginning of cable TV in the 1980s, videos on websites such as YouTube and tools like TVUNetworks have served as an indicator of how important digital technology will be for the future of business in the media.

### **Final Considerations**

When this research was coming to an end, Americans were preparing to watch the sixth and final season of "Lost," broadcast by ABC beginning in February 2010. For the first time in the history of Brazilian cable TV, AXN announced in January of that year that it would begin showing the same episodes a week after they aired in the United States. The interval is the shortest in the history of Brazilian paid TV for a fiction series. The strategy, probably aimed at keeping fans from downloading the episodes via the Web, did not get to be part of this research. But, according to some fans interviewed, the subtitling and distribution activity would be continued, partly to avoid the dubbing provided by AXN, and partly because, to fans, one week of waiting is still a considerable time. It will be interesting to observe, nevertheless, if the initiative by AXN reduces the number of downloads and the activity of subtitlers in Brazil.

It is important to highlight still the idea of appropriation of the series by such fans. This discussion refers to the active character and to possible reappropriations and modifications that these consumers can make as subtitlers. To discuss appropriation with more property, in this particular case, would imply analyzing in more detail the original texts and the subtitle texts, and comparing them to the already analyzed texts in the forum and communities that were the object of this survey. We know, however, that although "Lost" episodes serve as a merchandise, objects of sale, purchase, and mercantile

trade operations, they also refer to the needs of these new consumers/viewers/fans and, equally, to their desires.

This paper has sought to discuss, at the same time, the existence of cyberspace as part of a new design of interdependence of media such as TV, the Internet, and the role of groups such as the "Lost" fans studied here. In discussing the complex flow of media products in a globalized society, it is clear that audiences are willing and able to consume culture via a new model of dissemination.

What comes next? I believe the activities analyzed here inspire a change in the way we understand television. "But what if there were another way to assure that artists are paid, without locking down any content? What if, in other words, a different system could assure compensation to artists while also preserving the freedom to move content easily?" The questions proposed by Lessig eight years ago remain open, but more pressing, I believe, because of movements such as the one this article has explored.

As to the "free culture" movement, I hope this research has demonstrated that it is connected to the claims of a utopic globalization and the redefinition of cultural traffic flows. The asymmetries of cultural and intellectual distribution are still in place and, although nations such as the United States still dominate a large part of these structures, initiatives such as this reveal that large systems and subversive groups are often two sides of the same coin, and that one produces the other (Eco, 1989).

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