Getting Immersed in *Star Trek*: Storytelling Between "True" and "False" on the Holodeck

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TELEVISION IS A writer's medium. Especially in serial formats, television enables the writer to narrate large-scale stories spread over several episodes within a season. Although the plots do not need to be narrated in a linear way, watching TV is a mostly linear process. Regardless whether you watch a new episode of your favourite series week by week or rather prefer "binge-watching" an entire season, storylines evolve in a linear way meaning you still have to watch episode after episode to get the whole story presented in the way the authors intended. Gradually you will become *immersed* in the show, diving in the fictional world you are being told of (Rigby and Ryan 81). However, immersion is not restricted to television (Bracken and Skalski). You may become immersed into a book as well as a film. Yet still boundaries are strictly set and visible between the world of the viewer (commonly called the *reality*) and the imaginary world of fiction. You may travel between worlds, but as soon the lights go up in the theatre, the television set is being switched off or you close your book, you immediately return to the real world.

However, what if the level of immersion can be raised to such a high level that the boundaries between reality and fiction become invisible? Beginning with *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (*TNG*; USA 1987–1994), the multi-media franchise *Star Trek* introduced the holodeck. In this article, I want to examine the holodeck as storyteller in the modern world. I want to show that – aside from being a highly immersive medium – the holodeck itself can create imaginary worlds to an extent that the boundaries between reality and fiction are becoming untraceable.

1. A Perfect Simulacrum

Basically, the holodeck is an empty space with a high ceiling and no furniture at all. A yellow grid pattern covers the walls of the room and there is a large doorway with an arch that contains a control panel (fig. 1).

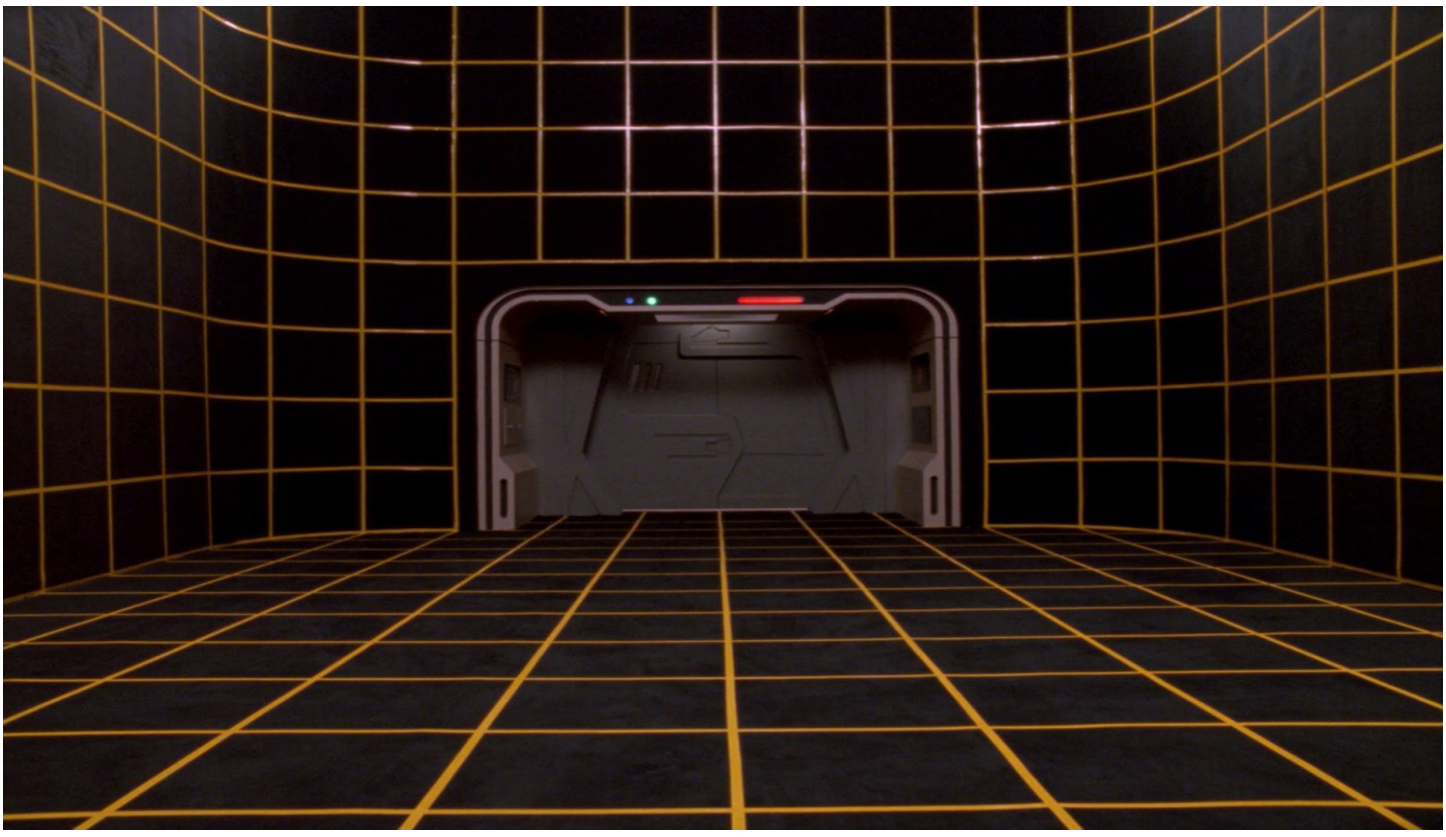

Figure 1: View of an idle holodeck with the arch doorway.

When not in use, the holodeck is like a dark TV screen or a blank page in a book. But once a programme is started, the holodeck comes to life. Holodecks simulate life in its lushest form. It does not matter whether you simply recreate a specific place like Captain Jean-Luc Picard (Patrick Stewart) does in *TNG We'll Always Have Paris* (USA 1988), you set up combat training like Lieutenant Worf (Michael Dorn) does occasionally, or you enter a narrative like the Dixon Hill detective stories or like the adventures of Sherlock Holmes throughout *The Next Generation*. Holodecks are perfect *simulacra*, to borrow a term by French philosopher Jean Baudrillard. Holodecks do not pretend to be another place, they *are* (Stoppe, '"Tee, Earl Grey, heiß"' 105). Like Baudrillard points out, 'to dissimulate is to pretend not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one doesn't have' (3). When simulating, one adds something false to reality which cannot be distinguished from reality objectively. 'Pretending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality intact: the difference is always clear, it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens the difference between the "true" and the "false," the "real" and the "imaginary"' (Baudrillard 3). Baudrillard himself references McLuhan who considers television as a 'cold' medium which presents a simulation of reality that needs to be completed by the viewer. McLuhan sees television primarily as an amplification of touch and not of the visual, as you might think when comparing to radio and the aural (364). For McLuhan, television stresses all human senses, not only the visual one. Baudrillard takes this idea one step further, indicating that television transforms the viewer into a holographic character. 'You bend over the hologram like God over his creature: only God has this power of passing through walls, through people, and finding Himself immaterially in the beyond' (Baudrillard 105). Like God, it seems that we are not only looking into another world while watching TV. It seems as if we are really in this world. For example: While we are watching *Star Trek*, something miraculous does happen. We are being drawn into the story and onto the ship. We follow the narrative and at one point we feel like a crewman of the Enterprise, walking with the others through the corridors, onto the bridge and living with them in their quarters. You may object that we are still able to differentiate between reality and fiction, but are we? What is "true" and "false"? The truth is: all people in the show are actors and not Starfleet personnel, the corridor is a stage set which doubles for all corridors on the ship, no one can fire a photon torpedo by clicking on the bridge controls, and there is no warp core and no constant humming of the ship. However, we see a Starfleet captain, we see the *entire* crew walking through the entire ship, we hear the constant humming and we know the warp core is within normal parameters. The simulation of reality that is presented to us through television becomes reality because we are completing it. 'The hallucination is total and truly fascinating once the hologram is projected in front of the plaque, so that nothing separates you from it [...]' (Baudrillard 105). We are becoming immersed into it, and until the show is over and the screen goes dark, the storytelling *is* reality to us. Without being aware of it, we are getting immersed into a simulacrum. The stories – written by authors – guide us through it. 'We become immersed and present in their worlds, emotionally experiencing them as if they were *really* happening to us' (Rigby and Ryan 82).

Enter the holodeck. Baudrillard argues that a three-dimensional simulacrum would be less close to the real than a two-dimensional (107). Would an added dimension unmask the simulacrum? Baudrillard refers to traditional television and thus his argument that a three-dimensional television would detract us from the real has a certain point. That is, because *we* are the hologram plunged into the simulacrum. By watching 3-D television you are indeed heavily reminded that this world is unreal. Remember McLuhan arguing that television is an extension of touch in terms of interplay of all senses. By watching three-dimensional pictures we are immediately reminded of touching things, of literally grasping things to understand and recognise them. But there is nothing solid to touch, we are still holograms. However, what if we are switching sides? Being the real one in a world made up of holograms that can be touched anyway? The holodeck is able not only to produce a simulated reality, a simulacrum in terms of Baudrillard. It is able to materialise all things the 'viewer' is interacting with. Reprising my example from above, there is not only *one* corridor standing in for all but there are all corridors of the ship, I encounter a Starfleet captain and not an actor pretending to be one, there *is* a warp core and humming throughout the ship and I *can* fire a photon torpedo. I am not the hologram anymore, I am a real person in a simulacrum. Like a video game, the holodeck 'seem[s] to

have the ability to not just *tell* us a story, but to let us actively *live* it' (Rigby and Ryan 2). Seen objectively, I cannot determine whether any of my actions do have an effect on reality or not because I cannot differ between the real and the simulacrum anymore. I am totally immersed into the medium which is the holodeck. Rigby and Ryan define *physical presence* as a state in which 'the video game player feels that they have taken a journey to the world on the screen from their actual location on the couch or wherever they may be in the molecular world' (88). In a way, the holodeck creates a world within the world that is to some degree complete and consistent (Wolf) and we actually do the before-mentioned journey: We *are* present in a most physical way.

Figure 2: A holodeck archway with control panel.

However, the boundaries between the real and the simulacrum still are well-set. Whenever we walk through the holodeck door, we enter another world (as long as a programme is already running). Once inside, the door to the outer world closes and disappears (hence the holodeck places a simulation upon the doorway, too). But like in a video game, one is always able to let the doorway including an arch with a computer terminal re-appear by instructing the computer to do so (fig. 2). In the same way we escape a video game: by summoning the game menu (Stoppe, '"Tee, Earl Grey, heiß"' 106).

2. Games and interactive storytelling

At the beginning of this article, we assumed that television is a writer's medium in the first place. Fictional texts commonly follow a certain narrative in which a story is presented in a certain way, thus forming a plot. As television is a linear medium, it is sometimes supposed that narratives must be presented in a linear way, too. However, this is not true at all. As with books, the plot line does not need to be strictly linear. A writer may present a story by using different techniques such as fragmented narration or flashbacks. Certain plot lines may happen at the same time. Immersion functions in either way because although the story may be non-linear itself, it is always presented linearly in the plot. But can we imagine such a story presented in a holodeck?

While thinking about simulacra and different types of media, McLuhan as well as Baudrillard did not take video games into account. Video games and

television share some similarities due to its audio-visual content and its space-time continuum (Moorstedt 190). McLuhan considers games as a medium, 'dramatic models of our psychological lives' (McLuhan 257).[1] 'Any game […] is an extension of the individual or the group' (McLuhan 263). Furthermore, there are several similarities between McLuhan's definition of television as an extension of touch together with Baudrillard's idea of being transformed to a holographic character within that medium and role-playing games (RPG). RPGs 'offer the player the chance to assume or play a role' (Carr et al. 19), and they do not necessarily need to be set in fantasy worlds but can also be located in contemporary settings or 'on board a Klingon freighter' (Carr et al. 22). Furthermore, 'players make choices about how to develop their characters […] as they progress' (Rigby and Ryan 48). Games, and RPGs in particular, consist of different elements: player, representational signs, coded rules, and a simulated environment (Calleja 11–14). While there are characters who can be played by real persons (and in the case of multiplayer games there can be a huge number of player characters), the simulated environment has to be populated by a number of non-player characters. These characters need to be determined by the computer's artificial intelligence systems and therefore data is needed for characterisation. Like books and television, RPGs also consists of a story and a plot. 'The "what" is the raw material of the story events, and the "how" is the re-presentation of these events in the narrative discourse. Story events are sequenced, arranged in time and space: plotted' (Carr et al. 35). So we have a story (that is a collection of events, actions, and characters), but unlike stories in television and literature, the actual plot line is not pre-determined in detail by the author. 'Thus, the same "story" can give rise to many different narratives, each of which would accentuate, exclude or emphasize different things' (Carr et al. 35). Murray calls this type of story a *multiform story*. In *Star Trek*, we learn that even in the 24th century there are writers (and even publishers) of novels – but as from now they are writing holonovels (Stoppe, 'Unterwegs zu neuen Welten' 118). In the *Star Trek: Voyager* (VOY; USA 1995–2001) episode 'Author, Author' (USA 2001) the Doctor (precisely, the Emergency Medical Holographic; Robert Picardo) writes about the depressing life of a holographic medic aboard a starship. The novel called *Photons Be Free* is directly based upon the crew of the Voyager. The Doctor constructs a story and a rough plot line but the final narration is carried out by the one who consumes the novel: the holodeck user.

We did point out that while viewing television the viewer gets immersed into the story and its presentation. However, although television requires a comparably high amount of viewer participation, the viewer or narratee is not able to interact with the televised programme at any time. On the other hand, today's video games allow players to interact up to a very high level. The narratee becomes his own narrator. Even within the *Star Trek* franchise, there is a number of video games which are directly based on the television series. For example, in *Star Trek: Voyager – Elite Force* (2000) the player takes the role of a security lieutenant aboard the Voyager. Aside from the fact that *Elite Force* is a genuine first-person shooter, the player has to follow a certain storyline but is able to vary the actual plot by walking around large parts of the ship. In a special mode, the player is actually able to walk around the ship while not being involved in any story-specific action but rather as a part of the crew during normal ship operations. This also includes a visit on the bridge and some interaction with the crew. The first-person shooter is a stand-in for the player's vision (Stork 43). The player inevitably becomes the character because he is looking at the mise-en-scène of the game through the eyes of the character.

In a video game, there is much less of a plot that is laid out by the writers than different tasks. Within the limits of the programme the player is now able to lay out his own plot: Where do I walk? With whom am I going to talk? What is next? The less a video game is bound to a linear plot the more it is a sequence of different events which have a narrative quality (Moorstedt 200–201).

The outcome of the subjective point of view, the storytelling of television, and the designing of tasks instead of plots by game designers together with the hyper-reality of a holographic simulator is a powerful simulacrum. Instead of presenting a selection of events like in television the holodeck is able to create a more or less complete imaginary world that is able to fully interact with. The holodeck user sees an entire world just before and with his own eyes and

1 It should still be noted that McLuhan emphasises on sports as games rather than other genres like board games or role-playing games.

up-close (Stork 44).

3. Simulacrum I: Encountering Oneself

In *Star Trek: Voyager*'s third season episode 'Worst Case Scenario' (USA 1997) Chief Engineer B'Elanna Torres (Roxann Dawson) discovers a hidden holonovel by accident. She activates the programme and learns that it is a kind of mutiny story aboard the Voyager. Former Maquis chief Chakotay (Robert Beltran) recruits Torres for his secret plan to get in command of the ship while Captain Janeway (Kate Mulgrew) and Lieutenant Paris (Robert Duncan McNeill) are on an away mission. Torres accepts the offer and the former Maquis crew manage to get the ship under their control. The senior officers are under arrest in the brig while the other crew members are imprisoned in a cargo bay. Here, Chakotay offers them to be part of the mutineers: 'So I'm giving you a choice: you can be put off the ship with your superiors or... you can do what Neelix and some of your other crew members have already done, and join me. If you do, you'll be part of the crew and it's going to do whatever it takes to get us home as fast as possible. Under my command, we won't let almighty Federation principles get in the way of opportunities the way Janeway did when she destroyed the array that could have gotten us home. And we won't be wasting precious time stopping to investigate every insignificant anomaly that we come across. What we will do is use any means necessary to acquire technology that can shorten our journey. To hell with Starfleet regulations. You have fifteen minutes to make up your minds.'

This episode is interesting for the fact that the audience does not know at the beginning of the show that we are in a holofiction. Although there is a little clue (right away in the first shot Torres wears a Starfleet uniform with a regular rank pip instead of the provisional one that the former Maquis crew has), the viewer is not able to distinguish between "true" (the "real" Voyager) and "false" (the holofiction). Right from the start we are placed into a simulacrum.

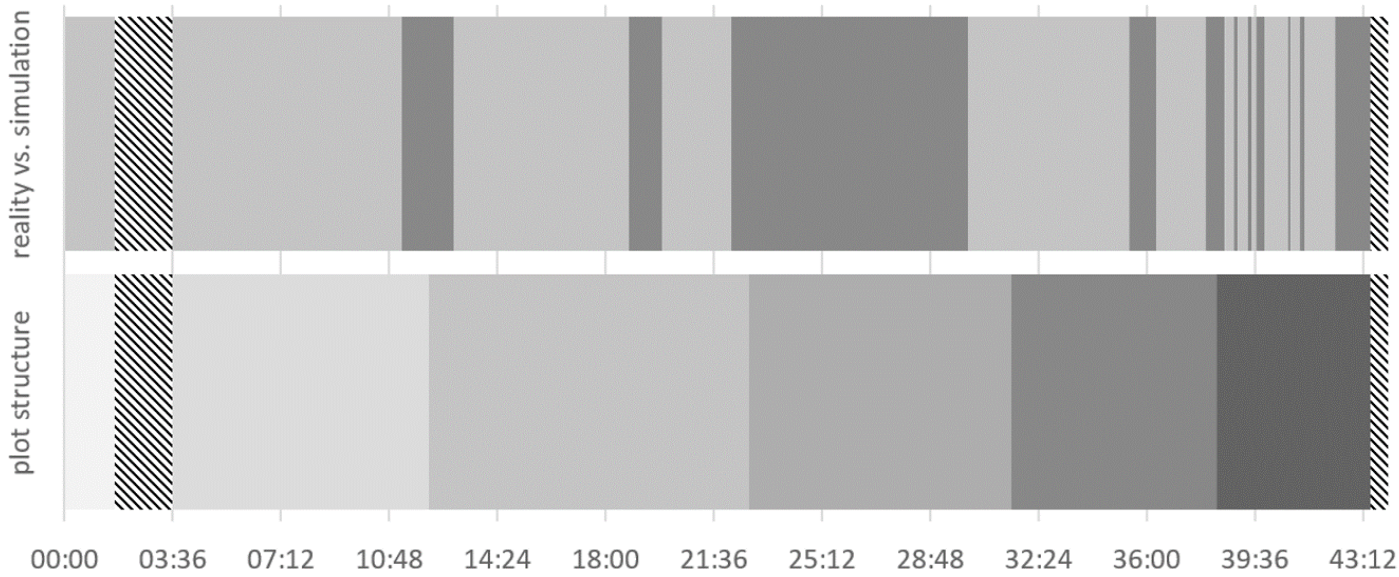

Figure 3: Sequence overview of *VOY* 'Worst Case Scenario'. The lower bar shows the five-act structure of the episode with the cold opening far left. The upper bar indicates whether the plot is set in the simulation (light grey) or the television "reality" (dark grey). Hatching indicates the opening and end credits.

As shown in figure 3, almost the entire first act is completely set in the simulation. It is not until Lieutenant Paris enters the holodeck (because Torres missed an appointment with him) that the illusion is broken. In the second act, the programme is now replayed by Paris. It is worth noting that Paris is slighting altering the plot line:

Original dialogue in act 1

[Walking in corridor.]
Chakotay: Where are you headed?
Torres: The bridge.
Chakotay: Mind if I walk with you?
Torres: Not at all.
Chakotay: So, how's it going?
Torres: Not bad, I guess.
Chakotay: Tuvok still giving you a hard time?
Torres: No more than usual.
Chakotay: I don't know about you, but when I think about spending seventy years on the same ship with that guy, it gives me a headache. I get the impression a lot of the crew agrees with me. Maquis and Starfleet.

[Entering the turbolift.]
Chakotay: Bridge. So, what do you think?
Torres: About what?
Chakotay: About what I've been saying. That a lot of the crew aren't too happy with our Chief of Security. And for that matter, I don't think Captain Janeway's winning any popularity contests either. Don't you agree?
Torres: Why do I get the feeling that you're testing me?
Chakotay: Let's just say I'm interested in your opinion.
Torres: Why?
Chakotay: You're a good officer. I like you. And I wouldn't want to see you get hurt.
Torres: Computer, halt turbolift. Look, what's this all about?

Chakotay: There are going to be some changes around here. All of the Maquis are in line, and about twenty five of the Starfleet crew are with us.
Torres: Are you saying there's going to be a mutiny?
Chakotay: And when the shooting starts, I'm going to need to know which side you're on.

Dialogue in Paris re-play in act 2

[Walking in corridor.]
Chakotay: Where are you headed?
Paris: The bridge.
Chakotay: Mind if I walk with you?
Paris: I was kind of hoping you would.
Chakotay: So, how's it going?
Paris: Couldn't be better.
Chakotay: Tuvok still giving you a hard time?
Paris: Oh, doesn't he always?
Chakotay: I don't know about you, but when I think about spending seventy years on the same ship with that guy, it gives me a headache.

Paris: Not to mention an upset stomach.
[Entering the turbolift.]
Chakotay: Bridge.
Paris: I hear you're planning a mutiny.

Chakotay: Computer, halt turbolift. Who told you that?
Paris: Let's just say there are rumours.
Chakotay: Yeah, well, don't believe everything you hear.
Paris: Of course not. I just wanted you to know that whatever happens, I'm with you.
Chakotay: Computer, resume turbolift.
Paris: I'm serious. Just tell me what you want me to do.
Chakotay: All right, Ensign, here it is. As soon as the Captain leaves to meet the Rukani, I want you to put all crew quarters on lock-down. I'll ask you if you've finished upgrading the internal sensors. If you say yes, I'll know we're ready to go.
Paris: I understand.
Chakotay: I'm watching you. No tricks.

Figure 4: Comparison of the beginning of "Worst Case Scenario."

When we compare the original dialogue with the re-play we notice that the simulation reacts to Paris' different approach (fig. 4). The first part is almost verbatim except for the fact that Chakotay does not mention the Maquis. Apparently, the simulation is aware that Paris is not part of the former Maquis crew. As Paris knows already about the upcoming mutiny (as well as the viewer), he is confronting Chakotay with his knowledge in a very direct way. It is now Chakotay instead of the player who halts the turbolift. As the simulation realises that the player knows already about the secret plan, it adjusts to this new situation. Chakotay does not make any hints as he did with Torres but speaks openly about his plan. On the bridge, the simulation also differs from the first run. In contrast to Torres, who went along with Chakotay during the action on the bridge, Paris tries to warn the other officers. His attempt is unsuccessful and Paris is subsequently arrested with the senior officers in the brig. Afterwards, he is released by Chakotay and has to go to the cargo bay. Chakotay then renews his offer: 'And we won't be wasting precious time stopping to investigate every insignificant anomaly we come across. What we will do is use any means necessary to acquire technology that can shorten our journey. To hell with Starfleet regulations. You have fifteen minutes to make up your minds.' Whereas Paris answers: 'I don't need fifteen minutes. I'm with you right now'.

At this point, the different plot lines converge again. So the simulation does not follow a narrow plot line but adjusts every time the player interacts within the story. However, the real-time events of play unfold act by act as the player is manipulating the programme (Carr et al. 43). The holonovel combines a traditional narrative we know from television with the benefits and flexibility of a role-playing game. The possibility of different plot experiences within one story is now discussed in reality[2] by the characters in the episode. Torres advises Paris to go along with the mutineers right from the start because 'it's much more fun.' It turns out that the programme is already the talk of the ship. Neelix (Ethan Phillips) approaches both of them and tells about a third possible plot line: 'I tried sending an encoded message to Captain Janeway's shuttle to warn her about the mutiny. But Chakotay caught me, phasered me, and the programme reset. Next time, I'm going to pretend to go along with the conspirators and then stage a counterstrike.' Note that Neelix mentions the programme reset after he got phasered which seems to be equivalent to a *game over* situation in video games. Paris then plays the programme again and this time he goes along with Chakotay. It is now that the story is expanded further: Janeway and the simulated Paris try to recapture the ship and beam onto the Voyager. The holographic and the real Paris suddenly have each other at gun point (fig. 5).

Figure 5: Encountering oneself.

2 In this and the following context, the term "reality" refers to the television reality of the *Star Trek* universe, not to our "real" reality.

Encountering oneself is a startling moment here because it is not like a mirror image that mimics the "real" Paris. Instead, the real Paris (who plays a mutineer right now) faces a holographic self that is loyal to the ship's captain. The moment lasts only for some seconds as the programme ends suddenly. But imagine the programme would go on. Who is the "true" and who is the "false" one? What may be distinguishable at the start would become indistinct the more the story unfolds. However, when Paris instructs the computer to resume the programme, he is notified by the computer that there is no such story: 'Additional narrative parameters have not been programmed.'

Having reached the middle of the episode, let us review the previous story. We have seen that a holonovel can react to the interaction of the player. Therefore, we can assume that a holonovel is a possible future elaboration of today's video games by combining elements of television viewing and game interaction. Player's immersion is total and from the outside (that is, the television viewer) it is impossible to tell whether we are in a simulacrum or reality unless we are explicitly told about. With this episode as an example, the *Star Trek* writers set up a twofold narrative. First, there is the television layer in which a story is being narrated about the "real life" on Voyager. While the audience is immersed in the story, we imagine ourselves to be there and follow the story about an impending mutiny. For the first act, we do not know that this is a holonovel. However, when Paris breaks the illusion at the end of act one we instantly get expelled from two immersions at once, holographic simulacrum *and* "reality".

It is obvious that the programme is incomplete because of its abrupt ending. Beginning with act three of the episode, the true author is now revealed both to the characters and the audience. The programme turns out to be rather a combat training than a fictional story, written by security officer Tuvok (Tim Russ) who was not sure about the loyalty of the Maquis crew. However, the entire senior staff enjoyed the programme and it is decided to expand it. This episode reflects television writing: like in a writer's room, the crew meets in the ship's mess hall discussing story ideas and plot twists. Eventually, Tuvok and Paris go to the holodeck for editing the programme. When they re-activate the programme and enter the edit mode, something unplanned happens. It turns out that Seska (Martha Hackett), a former Maquis crew member of Cardassian origin who has betrayed the entire Voyager crew and was killed in action in the past, has booby-trapped the programme. Her holographic *alter ego* appears, explaining 'I finished writing it for you, with a few revisions of my own. […] To start with, the holodeck is now sealed. Your friends will find it very difficult to get you out of here. And the safety protocols are off, which means if I shoot you, and I am going to shoot you, you'll die. But not just yet. You've got ten seconds to run.' Here, Seska is breaking the fourth wall within the holodeck programme. Her holographic *alter ego* is aware of the situation and suddenly speaks off the stage.

While there were still boundaries between "reality" and simulacrum (because the programme could be stopped at any time and eventually ended itself), these boundaries have now vanished. From an inside view, at this moment the simulacrum turns into reality for Paris and Tuvok. They are still on Voyager, but although it is a simulated reality, they are neither able to stop it nor to escape it. With no safety protocol, the simulacrum becomes as dangerous as reality. At this point, the term *immersion* obtains a new meaning. When we talked about immersion into a medium like television or even video game, it was perfectly safe for the viewer/player to emerge again. But in the holodeck, we are the real and the simulacrum suddenly turns into a state of hyperperfection. It becomes more real than intended, more so even than when there are no safety protocols in place.

The remaining Voyager crew outside the holodeck becomes aware of the situation but cannot help immediately. Because the safety protocols are off-line and Seska introduced some precautions no one is able to break into the holodeck. In the middle of act four, Janeway and her crewmates try to help Tuvok and Paris by literally re-writing the narrative. Like a casual attendee, they are able to watch the holodeck events on screen. It is as if they are watching TV. From now on, this episode leads to the quite strange situation that the TV audience is watching the Voyager crew watching the holodeck. Thus, *Star Trek* plays a double game on its audience with this episode. Tuvok and Paris are trapped in a thriller-like narrative in which their actual lives are threatened. Acting like a proxy, Janeway now constantly re-writes the programme to help the protagonists as she gets as well immersed into the programme as the TV viewer is into the episode. There is an extensive cross-cutting

montage between the holodeck and the Voyager ship. Janeway has to learn that while she is able to place some information into the programme (like a computer display message), the simulacrum is also counteracting against the new narrative from the outside. For example, Janeway modifies the characterisation of the holographic Chakotay so he objects to the execution of both Tuvok and Paris in the simulacrum:

Seska: Fire on my order.
Chakotay: Belay that.
Seska: What are you doing? We planned this.
Chakotay: I'm not sure it's necessary to kill them.
Tuvok: If I'm not mistaken, the Chakotay hologram is undergoing some sort of character change.
Paris: Do you think they're trying to help us again?
Seska: These two rodents betrayed us. They deserve to die.
Tuvok: Don't listen to her, Commander. You've taken the ship. There is no need to add murder to your list of offences.
Seska: Quiet! […] You're not going to lose your nerve, are you?
Chakotay: We have what we want. There's no reason to kill them.
Seska: Prepare to fire on my order!

The holographic Chakotay has been altered by Janeway so that he is unwilling to execute both Tuvok and Paris. However, Seska's programming is able to adjust the programme to this new task: she simply kills the character to eliminate the obstacle:

Chakotay: Seska! I'm in command of this operation.
Seska: Not anymore.
[Seska kills Chakotay.]

It becomes apparent that the same rules that apply for RPGs do also apply for holodeck programmes. A certain change of character within a game might change the entire storyline (Carr et al. 49). As the TV audience is unable to change the narrative, Janeway is unable, too. In the end, it is Tuvok who "wins the game" by causing the programme to end: he modifies a phaser rifle in a way that the 'evil' character of Seska is being killed by herself within the programme. The game is up.

4. Simulacrum II: *Ship in a Bottle*

Another example for how a real person can become completely immersed into a simulacrum is TNG season six episode 'Ship in a Bottle' (USA 1993). In the opening teaser, Lieutenant Commander Data (Brent Spiner) and Chief Engineer Geordi LaForge (LeVar Burton) reprise their roles as Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, respectively, while enjoying another holonovel of Holmes' adventures. As Data is near to the conclusion of a murder case, he notices a malfunction of the holodeck systems: a holo character is supposed to be left-handed in the story, but, however, catches a box of matches with his right hand. Lieutenant Barclay (Dwight Schultz) runs a diagnostic check and recalls the character of Dr. Moriarty (Daniel Davis) by accident. To Barclay's surprise, Moriarty is aware of being a holographic character created by the computer and complains about being stored in the ship's memory banks for over four years – in other words, he appears to be a sentient being.[3]

Barclay: You know... you know what you are?
Moriarty: A holodeck character? A fictional man? Yes, yes, I know all about your marvellous inventions. I was created as a plaything, so that your Commander Data could masquerade as Sherlock Holmes. But they made me too well, and I became more than a character in a story. I became self-aware. I am alive.
Barclay: That's not possible.
Moriarty: But here I am.

Like the audience and the *Star Trek* characters, the holographic Moriarty can have a look from the outside. 'He sees past the masks: he knows that Data isn't "really" Holmes' (Graham 25), thus becoming conscious. Like in *Worst Case Scenario*, Moriarty also breaks the fourth wall by speaking off the stage. He demands to be freed from the simulacrum.

3 The story of becoming an apparently sentient being is told in *TNG* 'Elementary, Dear Data' (USA 1988) in which – also by accident – LaForge instructs the computer to create a character capable of outthinking Data – and not Holmes (Stoppe, 'Tee, Earl Grey, heiß.' 105–107).

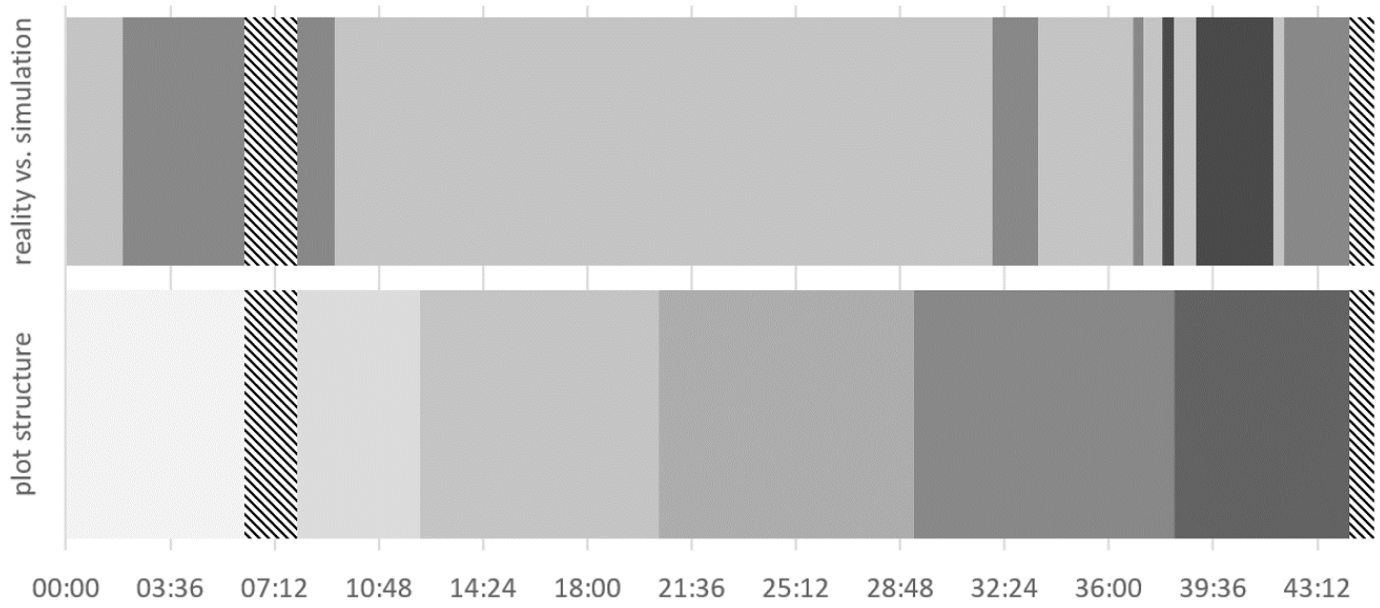

Figure 6: Sequence overview of *TNG* 'Ship in a Bottle'. The lower bar shows the five-act structure of the episode with the cold opening far left (running over six minutes). The upper bar indicates whether the plot is set in the simulation (light grey), the television "reality" (dark grey), or the simulation within the simulation (black). Hatching indicates the opening and end credits.

Unlike *Worst Case Scenario*, the audience is aware of being in a simulacrum at the start (fig. 6). This is more than obvious as Data and LaForge are in period costumes. After Barclay has finished his diagnosis, Captain Picard, Data, and Barclay visit Moriarty on the holodeck. Picard tries to explain while Moriarty has been kept in the ship's memory for such a long time but Moriarty does not believe him: 'I have consciousness. Conscious beings have will. The mind endows them with powers that are not necessarily understood – even by you. If my will is strong enough, perhaps I can exist outside this room. Perhaps I can walk into your world right now.' He repeats his demand to be freed from the holodeck as being as sentient as any other lifeform.[4] Picard shows him the boundaries between the real world (the Enterprise) and the holodeck simulacrum. He calls for the holodeck's exit (which appears literally as a pathway between reality and simulacrum as we discussed above) and tosses a holographic book through the doorstep. The book vanishes and Picard predicts the same for Moriarty: that he will simply cease to exist when stepping outside. Moriarty, however, proves him wrong. He steps outside the holodeck and does not vanish because 'I think, therefore I am' (Moriarty). At this point, the borders between reality and simulacrum seem to melt away. A holodeck character is getting immersed into the real world. Yet unbeknownst to Picard, Data, Barclay, and the audience, this is not the case. We are still in simulation. No one has left the holodeck so far. Instead, Moriarty plays a trick on everyone. Being sentient, he creates a simulation of the real within the holodeck that extends his own holonovel to the outer world. In a sense, he re-created a reality that is practically indistinguishable from the "real" reality. Everyone takes this real for granted including Picard, Data, and Barclay – and the television audience as well. Instead of being misled right from the beginning of the episode like in *Worst Case Scenario*, the writer tricks the audience in a simulacrum now. From now on we are not able to differentiate between reality and simulacrum.[5]

Communication with the real world is being

4 In *The Next Generation*, the question whether an artificial being can be considered sentient has been discussed in 'The Measure of a Man' using the example of the android Data. Ironically, the concept of a sentient holographic character was resumed in *Voyager* with the Emergency Medical Holographic.

5 However, if we have a closer look on the episode we discover a slight hint: there is no exterior shot of the Enterprise between scenes until Moriarty gets into contact with the "real" bridge. That means that the audience is actually confined within the limits of the holodeck like Picard, Data, and Barclay and thus literally not able to have a look from the outside.

blocked (because Moriarty got the command codes from Picard), the safety protocols are off-line,[6] and Picard, Data, and Barclay are being held as hostages inside the simulacrum. However, the simulated reality is faulty (as Barclay has not solved the computer problem from the story's beginning yet) and Data eventually notices that they must be still inside the holodeck. Data notices that LaForge is catching objects with his left hand although he is right-handed. It is the same glitch that occurred at the beginning of the episode during the Holmes story. Data deduces that because LaForge behaves like this, he cannot be real and therefore it is still a simulacrum. So, Moriarty never did leave the holodeck (he is still unable to do so). Yet being in the possession of Picard's command codes, Moriarty is now able to threaten the real world to get out of the holodeck. It is until here, about half an hour into the episode, that the audience learns about their own deception (fig. 6). From now on the television viewer is able again to tell the simulacrum apart from reality. Like in *Worst Case Scenario*, Picard tries to communicate with the outside by telling Moriarty through another character that 'decoupling the Heisenberg compensators' might be a solution for beaming Moriarty off the holodeck into reality. Moriarty buys into this and contacts the "real" First Officer William Riker (Jonathan Frakes). Or so Moriarty – and the audience again – believed. To deceive Moriarty, Picard in fact created a simulation within the simulation and transfers Moriarty there. Moriarty now thinks he is in the real world (as Riker is greeting him at the transporter room) and finally departs the Enterprise by shuttle. Picard – now having regained his command codes – orders the computer to end the second simulation (that is still within the first simulation). Again the audience has been misled. We were about to believe that a holographic character is indeed able to leave the simulacrum and get into reality but it was only another simulacrum.[7] Yet again we were unable to tell which of the real is true or not.

Picard, Data, and Barclay are now able to communicate with the real world outside again and leave the first simulation. However, the simulation does live on within a small computer chip being put in a portable device – like a "ship in a bottle".[8]

5. Conclusion

Storytelling means creating imaginary worlds. Both episodes are examples for how television writers deliberately manipulate the audience by telling stories within different worlds. Aside from the fictional format of television, the holodeck serves as secondary instance for telling stories and for an unreliable way of storytelling. These episodes demonstrate the thin line between reality and simulacrum. Getting immersed into a simulacrum may render an individual unable to distinguish between "true" and "false". As Picard puts it in the end of the episode (again breaking the fourth wall), 'our reality may be very much like theirs. All this might just be an elaborate simulation running inside a little device sitting on someone's table'. In a manner of speaking, this is a correct assumption. As *Star Trek* itself is only a fictional franchise, the 'reality' presented to us is, in fact, just a simulation running inside a TV set on our table. Alas, there is no evidence that our 'reality' is truly real or just a simulation itself in which we are immersed in.

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6 We learn that this is a common plot device within the *Star Trek* universe.

7 The Emergency Medical Holographic will eventually be able to leave his confines with the help of a mobile emitter. Thus, a hologram can be existent in places where no holographic emitters are installed.

8 Moriarty and the question of sentient holographic characters are again referenced in *VOY* 'Alter Ego' (USA 1997). Here it is revealed that the incident made its way into scholarly discourse at the Starfleet Academy.

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