

## Severance

Season 1, Episode 1: Good News about Hell

### 1) Make notes on Lacey's repertoire of elements as you watch the episode.

| Element   | Conventions  |
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| <b>Setting</b> ( <i>mise en scene/locations</i> )   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lumon Industries Office: A artificial environment with bright, uniform lighting and minimalist design, reinforcing themes of control and isolation.</li> <li>- Mark's House: A contrast to Lumon, with a warmer and more personal atmosphere, but still somewhat lonely and empty, reflecting his grief.</li> <li>- Elevator: A symbolic space where the transition between his work personality and outside of work personality occurs, reinforcing the idea of separation and control.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Characters</b> ( <i>representations, stereotypes, behavior, body language, specific actors/stars</i> ) <b>Consider Propps character types.</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mark S. – The protagonist, a grieving man who chooses the severance procedure to escape his pain. At work he is obedient and somewhat lost, and when he is not he is more emotional and struggling with his personal loss.</li> <li>- Helly R. – The audience surrogate, she resists severance and questions its morality. Represents rebellion and free will.</li> <li>- Petey - Former Lumon employee who defies the severance system, appearing paranoid and desperate as he urges Mark to question the company while displaying restless body language and a sense of urgency, highlighting his fear and vulnerability.</li> <li>- Harmony Cobel - Calculating and authoritative figure who enforces Lumon's strict control with an unsettling mix of warmth and menace.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Narrative events</b> ( <i>how is the narrative ordered and structured? Is it elliptical?</i> )   | <p>Non-linear &gt; flashback</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The episode begins in medias res with Helly waking up in the conference room, setting up the mystery of Lumon and the severance procedure.</li> <li>- The narrative alternates between Mark at work and his outside life, showing the stark contrast between the two.</li> <li>- Flashbacks hint at Mark's grief and his decision to undergo severance.</li> <li>- The structure is non-linear, revealing information slowly, keeping the audience disoriented, mirroring the characters' experiences.</li> <li>- Plot twists make the story a thriller such as us finding out that Petey</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Iconography</b> ( <i>well known or recognizable people/objects/buildings/mise en scene/props/costume, setting, symbolic codes</i> )            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Severance Conference Room: A stark white, prison-like setting, emphasizing control and dehumanization.</li> <li>- Employee lanyards: Represent their dual identities and lack of personal autonomy.</li> <li>- The Elevator: Symbolic for transformation, a key visual motif representing the severed mind.</li> </ul>  |

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| <b>Style</b> (technical and audio codes e.g. camera use, editing, sound, lighting, color) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Camera Use: Long, symmetrical shots reinforce the feeling of control and order. Close-ups emphasize characters' emotions and discomfort.</li> <li>• Editing: Slow pacing builds tension and unease, often lingering on reactions.</li> <li>• Sound: Haunting, minimalistic score adds to the eeriness of the corporate world. Stark contrast between silence and abrupt noises heightens discomfort.</li> <li>• Lighting: Overhead, cold fluorescent lighting in Lumon vs. natural, warm lighting in Mark's home, reinforcing the division of his two lives.</li> <li>• Mis-En-Scene: Muted, sterile colours in Lumon contrast with the slightly warmer tones outside, further illustrating separation.</li> <li>•</li> </ul> |
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## 2) Make notes on the following Macro elements as you watch.

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| <b>Story Arcs</b> within the episode: <i>make note of which are resolved by the end of the episode, and which will continue into the season.</i> | <p>Resolved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helly's introduction and initial struggle with severance. Marks work personality being promoted to department head after Petey's departure.</li> </ul> <p>Continuing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Petey's mysterious disappearance and the secret he knows about Lumon.</li> <li>• The nature of severance and what Lumon is really doing.</li> <li>• Mark's emotional struggles.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Todorov's Narrative Theory:</b> <i>In what ways does his theory apply (or not apply) to this episode.</i>                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Equilibrium: At the beginning of the episode, Mark's life is strictly divided between work and home, following Lumon's rules without question. At work, his severed self, performs his duties without knowledge of his outside life, maintaining a calm but sterile existence. The office environment is eerily controlled, with strict protocols, repetitive tasks, and an impersonal atmosphere. Outside of work, Mark's outie lives a lonely and emotionally detached life, still grieving the loss of his wife. His decision to undergo severance reflects his desire to escape emotional pain, creating a seemingly stable yet artificial equilibrium carefully maintained by Lumon's control.</li> <li>- Disruption: This equilibrium is disrupted when Helly is introduced to the severance program and immediately resists. Unlike Mark and his coworkers, she refuses to accept her new identity and openly challenges the system, asking pointed questions and attempting to escape. Her defiance introduces conflict within the office, forcing Mark to manage her rebellion. Meanwhile, a second major disruption occurs outside of Lumon when Petey, Mark's former coworker, contacts his outie and reveals he has escaped severance. This revelation contradicts Lumon's claim that severance is</li> </ul> |

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|   | <p>irreversible, suggesting that the company may be hiding deeper secrets. These disruptions introduce mystery and plant the first seeds of doubt in Mark's mind.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recognition of Disruption: As the episode progresses, Mark begins to sense that something is not right, but his severance prevents him from fully understanding the situation. At work, his innie struggles to manage Helly's resistance, while subtle cracks in Lumon's carefully curated environment suggest underlying control and manipulation. Outside of work, Mark's outie is unsettled by his encounter with Petey, whose erratic behavior and warnings about Lumon create unease. Although Mark is skeptical, he cannot shake the feeling that there may be more to Lumon than he has been led to believe. This stage establishes Mark's growing internal conflict as he unknowingly begins to question the reality imposed on him.</li> <li>- Attempt to Repair: Though this stage is not fully developed in Episode 1, there are early hints that Mark may begin to resist Lumon's control. Petey's warnings plant doubt in Mark's mind, suggesting that he might eventually seek answers about his severance and Lumon's true intentions. Similarly, Helly's refusal to comply within the office foreshadows potential rebellion within the severed workforce. While Mark has not yet taken active steps to uncover the truth, the episode subtly suggests that he is at a turning point, with his stability beginning to erode.</li> <li>- New Equilibrium: Unlike traditional narratives that restore balance by the end of an episode, <i>Severance</i> is a serialized show, meaning the disruption continues to escalate without resolution. Rather than returning to a stable state, the episode ends with more questions than answers, as Mark remains caught between his growing doubts and his programmed compliance. Helly's resistance threatens the office's delicate order, and Petey's revelations create unease in Mark's personal life. This lack of resolution ensures ongoing tension, setting the stage for deeper conflict and mystery as the series progresses.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Binary Oppositions:</b> <i>list and explain the oppositions present in the episode. How is this adding to narrative conflict?</i></p> | <p>Work personality and Home Personality: Employees exist as two separate people, creating ethical dilemmas and internal conflict.</p>   |

**Themes:** *What themes can you identify in the episode and how are these being portrayed so far?*

- Corporate Control & Surveillance – Lumon’s strict rules, constant monitoring, and dehumanizing office environment reflect extreme corporate dominance, reinforced by Cobel’s dual role as Mark’s boss and secret neighbor.
- Identity & Free Will – The severance procedure strips employees of their autonomy, shown through Helly’s confusion and resistance as she wakes up in the severed state, questioning her own existence.
- Isolation & Grief – Mark’s decision to undergo severance stems from his personal loss, highlighting how people use work or external forces to escape emotional pain. And how past trauma can lead a person to do things they wouldn’t naturally do
- Resistance vs. Compliance – Petey’s escape and Helly’s rebellion at the beginning of the episode contrast with Mark’s loyalty, setting up a conflict between questioning authority and blindly following it.