THE *DEUTSCHLAND83* MINISERIES. TECHNOLOGICAL REPRESENTATION OF THE COLD WAR BETWEEN *OSTALGIE* AND *VERGANGENHEITSBEWÄLTIGUNG*

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the German television series *Deutschland83* on air, not only in Germany, since 2015. The author wants to demonstrate how the use of representation in the eight episodes of the series of numerous technological objects from the Cold War period represents a way to tell in Germany's recent past before reunification to a new generation audience. From a methodological point of view, the article leans on semiotic and cultural studies themes, analyzing for each episode which type of technological object is highlighted by the plot and why. In the article neither the historical reconstruction nor the summary of the eight episodes of the series are left out.

The vintage technological objects present in the *Deutschland83* series can be divided into objects of common use and objects not of common use: in the first case, the objects have the task of historically contextualizing the series, in the second case, the objects not of common use they have the task of influencing the whole plot centered on the espionage activities of the protagonist Martin / Moritz and his attempt to thwart nuclear war.

Recently, the thirtieth anniversary of the collapse of the Berlin Wall (1989-2019) has passed. The European collective culture and its mediums, old and new, continue to investigate from numerous points of view what was a historical caesura, not only symbolic, but real and tangible, perhaps the last to have marked European history. The collapse of the East German political system led to the reconstruction of Germany and the search for identity of many German citizens of the West and East who still today look for a lost *Heimat*[1]. Although a few decades have passed since reunification and the end of the Cold War, a widespread sentiment continues to spread, especially in the former East Germany. This phenomenon, which is defined as *Ostalgie*[2], has become increasingly popular, especially in recent years due to its exploitation in marketing.

Ostalgie is a crasis between the German words *Osten* (East) and *Nostalgie* (Nostalgia). (The word officially entered the German vocabulary in 1993 when the *Gesellschaft für Deutsche Sprache*[3] included it among the ten most representative words of that year).[4] Born in the 1990s as a common feeling of nostalgia for life in the GDR (DDR)[5], or East

Germany, *Ostalgie* soon became featured as a trend of costume with the recovery, in fact, of objects, living styles and clothing, typical of a world that has now disappeared or that perhaps did not exist at all. In short, it became a nostalgia for a country that "is never the country it was, but what one would have wanted it to be: as such, a refuge from the aggressions of history, a space of resistance to the cancellation of the past, the claim of a difference" (Banchelli 2006: 13).

In 2003, the *Ostalgia* phenomenon became global thanks to the success of the film *Good Bye, Lenin!* directed by Wolfgang Becker and whose plot revolves around the protagonist's attempt to reconstitute the daily routine of life in the GDR precisely through the objects, places, and consumption that characterized it before the transition and reunification. Emblematic is the frequency with which in the former East Germany, during the film, the well-known Coca Cola arrives, complete with pervasive and omnipresent advertising actions for the western drink that was going to replace the Vita-Cola of the East, produced since 1957 in the GDR and still today in Germany on the basis of the *Ostalgie* phenomenon. Other manifestations of *Ostalgie* are also the *DDR Party*, real private ostalgic parties, but also organized in public places and during which you can consume East German products, listen to the music of that time and dress as then. Speaking of food products, and as already mentioned for the Vita Cola case, in the wake of *Ostalgie* many companies have resumed the production of East German products which at that time were frequently considered of poor quality. An example of this are the chocolate brands *Knusperflocke* and *Bambini* which reappeared on the shelves in the late Nineties; *Mokka-fix* coffee; *Kabinett* cigarettes and others.

In recent years, film and television production has also ridden the sentiment-trend of the *Ostalgie*. In addition to the aforementioned *Good Bye, Lenin!*, *Go Trabi Go*[6] and *Go Trabi Go 2* must certainly be mentioned, two films from 1991 and 1992 respectively; *Das Versprechen* (*The Promise*) from 1994, set in Berlin where the Wall is being built since 1961 and defined as "Ein eindringlich gespieltes, politisches Melodram"[7] (*Lexicon des Internationalen Films*).

With the 1999 film *Sonnenallee*[8], they were launched a series of successful comedies linked to the theme of *Ostalgie*, and also the film in question, in addition to gaining appre-

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[1] Frequently translated as 'homeland', 'home', Heimat can take on much broader philosophical connotations, constituting the 'place of roots and memory', 'a lost homeland' since it refers to ethnic groups that have had to undergo many displacements and forced migrations over the centuries. In German culture, Heimat has given life to numerous productions, the most famous among which, even to an international audience, is the 1984 film Heimat, by director E. Reitz and which tells the story of the Simon family in 11 episodes and together that of Germany in the period from 1919 to 1982. A very successful production, it saw the release of two sequels, Heimat 2 and Heimat 3 respectively in 1992 and 2004, and the prequel The other Heimat in 2013. For an in-depth study on multicultural approaches between Italians and Germans, also with reference to the concept of Heimat, see in particular the texts by Maj (2001), Romeo (2007), Brogelli Hafer and Gengaroli-Bauer (2011), Vannuccini and Predazzi (2004).

[2] The critical bibliography on the subject is very wide and heterogeneous. Among the most recent studies in German, Italian and English, see: Ahbe 2005 and 2016, Banchelli 2006, Cooke 2005, Garofalo 2012, Gislimberti 2007 and 2009, Neller 2006.

[3] The GfDS, Society for the German Language, is the most important German linguistic institution, funded by the State and immediately re-founded in 1947 on the ashes of the similar institution originally founded in 1885.

[4] It is interesting to note how in the Neuer Wortschatz: Neologismen der 90er Jahre im Deutschen (Herberg, Kinne and Steffens 2004), the other neologisms it was deemed necessary to officially insert in the German language in the 1990s are dominated by terms related to technology and web. These include words such as button (referring to turning on the computer), cybersex, online, offline, e-business, e-banking and among others the now commonly used term das Handy (from das Handtelefon) which indicates the mobile phone.

[5] DDR (Deutsche Demokratische Republik), the German Democratic Republic, commonly known as East Germany, was a state that existed from 1949 to 1990, as a territory assigned to the Soviet Union at the end of the Second World War. State of socialist order, its capital was East Berlin, when the city was divided into sectors by the Wall.

[6] The title clearly refers to the Trabant car produced and used in the GDR.

[7] "A political melodrama interpreted with emphasis" (author's translation).

[8] The title refers to a street in Berlin that was the passage from the East to the West.

ciation in Germany, was then screened in US cinemas between 2000 and 2001, and in Italy in 2005, but directly on television.

Not so lucky, the broadcast of the 2004 series *Meine schönsten Jahre* (My Best Years), centered on the life of a boy from the East against the backdrop of a Berlin in the 1980s, was interrupted. To the detriment of the low ratings, it should be remembered that this series also had the merit of bringing to light the finds of life in the GDR without caricaturing them: "Die Platte, der Trabi, das Westpaket von Omi, genüsslich holt Regisseur Ulli Baumann alle Klischees über die DDR hervor, ohne sich über sie lustig zu machen"[9] (Wirth 2004).

In general, and to arrive at a synthesis of elements that will be useful to us in reading the series *Deutschland83*, it is possible to affirm that the sentiment-tendency of the *Ostalgie* should not be classified as a desire on the part of former citizens of the GDR to want to restore that political system. Rather, it is a phenomenon based on a real search for identity, a "Symbol der Identitätskonstruktion und der Selbsverteidigung"[10] (Pollack 2003: 10), a nostalgia that is not total, but rather for some aspects of a world in which, like it or not, many citizens had lived by internalizing their civil values, lifestyles, perspectives. The latter, in particular, suddenly disappeared, so rapid and unexpected was the dissolution of the socialist world and the transition to a reunified Germany.

The *Ostalgie* is therefore distinguished by an ongoing and rather complex phenomenon because it is connected to the concept of nostalgia, where the latter "is not only a fashion or a trend. Rather it very often expresses or hints at something more profound, as it deals with positive or negative relations to time and space. It is related to a way of living, imagining and sometimes exploiting or (re) inventing the past, present and future" (Niemeyer 2014: 2). And the re-invention of the past can only pass through the new media[11] where, as for the series object of this article, the screened nostalgia "could consequently present a symptom of progress, but also of crisis" (Niemeyer 2014: 3).

Alongside the *Ostalgie* phenomenon, of crucial importance for the understanding of certain cultural phenomena, there is

the all-German concept of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*[12]. "The word was born in the 1950s, but it became commonplace only twenty years later. It meant confronting the past, but it also contained the expectation of being able to put a stone on it" (Vannuccini and Predazzi 2004: 64). Closely connected to the elaboration of historical and individual responsibility for the Holocaust, the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* has assumed a purely historical significance in German-speaking countries. The long process of confronting the then-recent Nazi past has usually been identified with this concept, without denying it, but rather rehabilitating places, concepts and above all people who had been swept away by censorship or by crimes perpetrated in the name of the regime's ideology. The debate around the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* went on throughout the Cold War and probably culminated in the Warschauer Kniefall (Warsaw Genuflection), when, on 7 December 1970, the Chancellor of Germany Willy Brandt came to kneel at the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Monument. The event was rightly seen as a turning point in the elaboration and overcoming of the past.

Over the decades, an extensive bibliography[13], both critical and derivative, has developed around the theme. Specifically, there have been many literary works[14], but also films and television that have faced overcoming the past and the processing of collective guilt connected with the Holocaust. In particular, *Das Erbe der Nazis* (The legacy of the Nazis), a television miniseries in two seasons, from 2015-2016, deals with the theme of the denazification of Germany and the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* process from 1945 until 2015 in a documentary perspective.

In this article we will investigate how the recent miniseries *Deutschland83* was inserted in the historical-cultural background of reunification, and how it deals with the two socio-cultural phenomena of *Ostalgie* and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. It will also be pointed out how the series, in a precise and non-trivial way, has been able to recount historical facts in themselves abused from the point

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9   "The record, the Trabi, Omi's western package, director Ulli Baumann brings out all the clichés about the GDR with gusto without making them ridiculous" (author's translation).

10   "Symbol of identity construction and self-defense" (author's translation).

11   About the recurrence of nostalgia in the media see: Berry 2020, Holdsworth 2011, Lizardi 2015, Reynolds 2011.

12   Literally the term is given by the union between -e Vergangenheit (the past) and -e Bewältigung (the overcoming), where the latter term is used not in the first meaning of the verb bewältigen (come to the head, to complete), as much as in the sense of überwinden (to overcome in the sense of winning).

13   See among others: Arenhövel 2000, Battis et al. 1992, Giordano 1987, König 1998.

14   See: G.Grass, Die Blechtrommel; H.Böll, Ansichten eines Clowns; M.Walser, Unser Auschwitz; S.Lenz, Deutschstunde; F.Dürrenmatt, Der Verdacht; E.Hilsenrath, Der Nazi und der Friseur; P.Celan, Todesfuge.

of view of media exploitation (films, novels), adapting an almost traditional content to the new medium of the television series, and then implementing a re-writing and re-narration for contemporary audiences.

The theme of technology is addressed in this article under a double methodological and epistemological key. From a narratological point of view, we will try to demonstrate how the narrative construction of the individual episodes deals with the technological objects. From a semiotic point of view, we will evaluate how these objects, brought to the fore today, in a completely changed context, instead have a central function of re-semioticizing the past.

The aim of the article is to demonstrate how, at the level of narrative construction, *Deutschland83* revolves around technological objects and how a new storytelling of those times is still possible today, and indeed desirable. The period of the late Cold War changed the fate of European history, and therefore that of the world, but it has left behind the rubble of a world, made up of material objects, which however no longer exists. It is precisely the objects and material culture, well highlighted in *Deutschland83*, that can contribute to the narration of that historical period. The miniseries will be analyzed with particular reference to the representation of technological objects in each episode: we can divide the objects in question into objects of common use, which serve to give historical-cultural depth to the story and objects not of common use but derived from the application of the science to technology and which are intended to advance the narrative. We can define the latter, which are the most relevant from a narratological point of view, and on the basis of Propp's classification as:

> В распоряжение героя попадает волшебное средство. Волшебными средствами могут служить: […] 3) предметы, имеющие волшебное свойство, как, например, дубины, мечи, гусли, шары и многие другие; 4) качества, даруемые непосредственно, как, например, сила, способность превращаться в животных и т. д. (Propp 2001: 42).[15]

From Propp we also know how all the elements of a narrative, as well as these magical means, are linked together by a series of well catalogable functions, so that if we want to

consider the magical means from the point of view of their transmission, which, in the series occurs frequently in relation to technological objects of the second type not in common use, then we can refer to two main types of functions:

> 1) Похищение волшебного средства, связанное с попыткой уничтожить героя (изжарить и пр.), с просьбой о разделе, с предложением обмена.
> 2) Все другие формы передачи и получения, связанные со всеми другими подготовляющими формами. […] Второй тип чаще всего дает дружественных дарителей (за исключением тех, которые отдают волшебное средство поневоле, после драки), первый тип дает дарителей враждебных, или, во всяком случае, обманутых. Это уже не дарители в собственном смысле слова, а персонажи, снабжающие героев поневоле. (Propp 2001: 45).[16]

During the analysis of the episodes of the series we will see how the objects, whether they are of the first type (commonly used) or of the second type (not commonly used), interact with the plot, with the characters, and in general contribute to making to know today, after decades, how people lived in the divided world of the Cold War and with what technological means the latter was brought to its end.

DEUTSCHLAND83

Deutschland83 is a German television miniseries that aired starting from 2015, first in the United States (June-August) and later in Germany (November-December) on the RTL[17] channel. On 14 October 2016 the series was renewed for a second season called *Deutschland86* and which pre-

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[15] "Magical means that come into the possession of the hero. They can act as a magical means […] 3) objects that have a magical property, such as clubs, swords, shells, orbs and many others; 4) powers given directly, such as strength, the ability to transform into different animals, etc" (author's translation).

[16] "Subtraction of the magical medium, linked to the attempt to annihilate the hero (to cook it, etc.), to the request for distribution, to the exchange proposal. 2) All other forms of transmission and achievement related to all other preparatory forms [...] In the second type of transmission we almost always have friendly donors (except those forced after a struggle to surrender the magical medium against their will), in the first we have hostile donors or victims of deception. It is no longer a question of donors in the proper sense of the word but of characters forced to pass on their means to the heroes" (author's translation).

[17] In Italy it was aired from 2 to 23 December 2015 on Sky Atlantic, while in the clear it was aired from 30 July 2017 simultaneously on VH1 and Paramount Channel. Today it is available on Prime Video. In general, the first series was more successful in the US than in Germany, hence the decision by Amazon Prime Video to require the production of the second and third series.

miered on 19 October 2018. To date, filming for the third season called *Deutschland89* has been completed and post-production is in progress.

Regarding the US success of the first season of the series, it represents a concrete example of the transnational dissemination of German film and television products, also through effective public relations action for an all things considered niche product:

> However, this 1980s drama remains a fruitful example, as it helped to push the recent transnational expansion of the German TV (fiction) industry. Given the niche status of SundanceTV, the allegedly great success of *Deutschland83* in the US in 2015 was partly a construction of PR work,70 as some TV professionals lecturing at the observed industry workshop noted. Still, the miniseries was a starting point for the further transnationalisation of the German TV fiction industry and its individual actors (Krauß 2020).

Deutschland83 is produced by Ufa Fiction[18] from an idea by Anna Winger[19], Anna's husband, Joerg Winger, produced and directed by Edward Berger and Samira Radsi. The cast includes Alexander Beyer, a well-known face in German cinema and who plays the role of law professor Tobias Tischbier, a spy from the GDR, who has always infiltrated the West to defend the socialist cause; Maria Schrader as Lenora Rauch, also an Eastern spy, infiltrated in the Western capital, Bonn, unperturbed and completely devoted to the political mission; and Sylvester Groth as Comrade General Walter Schweppenstette. Jonas Nay[20] plays the protagonist role of Eastern frontier soldier Martin Rauch, who infiltrates the

West by pretending to be Moritz Stamm, aide-de-camp to a West German general.

Undeniably, Jonas Nay reached a wide popularity with *Deutschland83* and from one of the interviews he gave about his starring role in the series, we can see his in-depth preparation and attention to character construction in that historical context:

> My closest adviser for historical questions and in NATO maneuvers, like "Able Archer" for example, as well as for my conduct as an ordnance officer, was the military adviser and NATO expert Steffen Meier, who helped me in my preparations for the role, as well as on location. He is a former high-ranking military adviser of the West German army during the Cold War and therefore could help me with firsthand experience on a political and military level.[21]

In addition to scientific advice from NATO counselors, the production also focused on the construction of the double character Nay was required to perform:

> Martin and Moritz is not a double-role in the usual meaning. Martin adopts the identity of Moritz Stamm, and finds himself forced within the shortest time to change his front. His personality and also his worries, like leaving behind his sick mother and his girl-friend, his learning how to adapt to a new surrounding, a differently-influenced culture and a new working place, are still the worries of Martin.[22]

Nay's assumption of double identity in the series is therefore not devoid of a certain existential complexity. The world into which Martin is catapulted, from East to West, attracts him with colors, tastes, possibilities, but disgusts him for its extreme pragmatism and cynicism.

Coming specifically to the series, we must first briefly illustrate the structure of *Deutschland83*. As mentioned, it is a miniseries for television whose original language is German, and the first season (*Staffel*) is divided into eight episodes

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18   German production company based in Potsdam and renovated in 2013 after a series of corporate mergers and specializing in TV series, but also film productions and TV shows.

19   American writer by Berlin adoption. Today among the co-authors of the recent and successful first television series on the Yiddish world Unorthodox produced and broadcast by Netflix.

20   Jonas Nay is a German actor and musician, born in 1990, born in Lübeck just before the days that saw the reunification of Germany; trained in theater and active since 2005, he has starred in numerous TV series and films. He starred, among others, in the Großstadtrevier series (14th District), one of the longest-running (broadcast since 1986) and best-known series in Germany. Both in the television series Tannbach - Schicksal eines Dorfes (Separation Line) and in the film Wir sind jung. Wir sind stark. (We are young and strong), Jonas Nay measured himself in the role of protagonists of historical events, respectively the Cold War in the first case and the days of the xenophobic uprisings that in 1992 shook the city of Rostock in Germany.

21   "6 Questions with Deutschland 83 Star Jonas Nay." Sundance TV. https://web.archive.org/web/20150721073901/http://www.sundance.tv/series/deutschland-83/blog/2015/06/6-questions-with-deutschland-83-star-jonas-nay# (last accessed 06-12-20).

22   Ibidem.

lasting about forty-five minutes each. Each episode has a title that summarizes in a more or less direct way the theme of the episode itself. The original titles are: "Quantum Jump" (1.01), "Brave Guy" (1.02), "Atlantic Lion" (1.03), "Northern Wedding" (1.04), "Cold Fire" (1.05), "Brandy Station" (1.06), "Bold Guard" (1.07), and "Able Archer" (1.08). Each episode is preceded by a summary of previous events, then a few minutes of anticipation, the initials, and then the entire episode.

The theme song consists of the song "Major Tom (Coming Home)," in the English version, by Peter Schilling[23]. The original song, titled "Major Tom (Völlig losgelöst)" was recorded in West Germany in January 1983 when quickly gained first place in the charts of the most listened to songs in Western German-speaking countries (West Germany, Austria, Switzerland). In the autumn of 1983, given its success, a version was made for the US market where it soon reached second place in the charts. The popularity of the song in the West is certainly justified also by the theme it tells: it refers to the invented character Major Tom, who had already been the protagonist of several songs by David Bowie, including "Space Oddity". The story of an astronaut lost in space because his mission is not going well suits the historical context of the Cold War in which *Deutschland83* is set.

As often happens, the first series always turns out to be the densest in meaning and most faithful to the original aesthetic idea. In *Deutschland83*, the plot certainly does not stand out in originality: in the autumn of 1983, in the height of the Cold War, NATO announced military maneuvers in West Germany, a signal received, both in Moscow and in East Berlin, as a preparation for the so-called first nuclear strike to the East; the frontier soldier Martin Rauch is recruited by his aunt, a collaborator of the *HVA - Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung*, the foreign intelligence secret service of the Ministry for State Security, better known as the Stasi. Martin is forced to infiltrate in disguise in the West and report the secret plans of NATO and the *Bundeswehr*, that is the apparatus of the armed forces of the Federal Republic of Germany[24]. Thus begins the most classic of spy stories, in which each ingredient appears predisposed to involve the viewer in the dichotomy of good vs. bad, usual and reassuring since everyone already

knows which side to be on. Instead things are different and the first episode of the series, which partly represents its summa and contains its stylistic code, shows that it is still possible to invent a way of talking about the Cold War without fear of repeating paths already beaten.

There is no doubt that the originality of *Deutschland83* focuses on the representation of the way in which the ability to know how to wage a war with new technologies, in that precise historical juncture, represented the key to the outcome of the events, both for how they really went, and for how they are narrated in the series.

From this point we will start again by analyzing the eight episodes of the series, always in consideration of the distinction that was made in the introduction to this article, that is, between commonly used technological objects and non-commonly used technological objects.

The first episode, titled "Quantum Jump", well illustrates this dichotomy of technological objects. In fact, also in order to achieve a historical-geographical contextualization, we see various technologies appearing in order, the first of which is precisely a television that is broadcasting, to the West of course, the famous speech given by the President of the United States Ronald Reagan[25] on March 8, 1983. Not only in this episode, but widely throughout the series, television will have the function of historically contextualizing the events. In fact, the historical-political events of that year will not be narrated by an external narrator or by the protagonists themselves. The television will instead appear with the original speeches that, from time to time, the opposing political leaders will hold in that historical period and which well summarize the climate of an imminent war.

So television, even as an object of common use, has a didactic function in the series. That is, it represents that component of commentary and summary that in the Greek theater was personified by the choir, then in the dramatic text or in the film script are realized in the indications and contextualizations of the author or director.

A whole series of objects of common use then take over for the training of Martin who became Moritz, but here valued in the espionage activity that will have to be carried out: camera and micro camera are just some of the technologies with which Martin, a young man in the '80s, will encounter

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23   Pierre Michael 'Peter' Schilling (1956), is a German singer. Among the major exponents of the German New Wave (better known as NDW - Neue Deutsche Welle), he was particularly successful in the 1970s and 1980s.

24   BRD (Bundesrepublik Deutschland), Federal Republic of Germany, commonly known as West Germany, was a state that existed from 1949 to 1990 with Bonn as its capital. It included the British, US, and French occupation zones. The subdivision was the consequence of the Yalta Conference of 1945.

25   The speech, delivered in Orlando before the National Evangelical Association, is also known as Evil Empire Speech, as for the first time R. Reagan, openly, defined the Soviet Union as the 'empire of evil', putting an end to the so-called 'politics of the détente' which, albeit in the climate of the Cold War, had characterized the previous presidencies.

for the first time once he reaches the West. The same goes for technologies such as a telephone with answering machine: symptomatic is the scene in which Martin, taken on duty as General Edel's attendant, is grappling with an incoming call and proves not to have the slightest idea of how to use a telephone set with answering machine and call forwarding buttons. All this happens in the West, since in the first episode and in the scenes set in the East the world of objects is a much more *naive* world, made up of old radios that don't keep the frequency, manual coffee grinders and wall phones; in everyday life, technology does not create problems, you do not have to train to use it, it remains in the background of a strongly ideological lifestyle in which objects of worship – or from which you can benefit, leisure, and even profit – remain old chessboards and books, especially those not marketed, as banned, in the East. In both cases, however, whether they are technological or artisanal objects, both in the West and in the East it is true that "After several decades of thinking centered on persons, more attention is now being given to things, as they are seen as important, and active, constituents of social life" (Sánchez 2012: 29).

In this episode, the so-called Pershing II[26] missiles appear for the first time in the speech of the protagonists and in the images of the era, defined exactly as a 'weapon system' by the American army that created them. The Pershing IIs, which entered service in 1983 to replace the Pershing I, were used by the US Army for a total of one hundred eight launches and for a total of two hundred and seventy-six missiles produced.

They are uncommon technological objects that take on enormous importance in the Cold War phase told in *Deutschland83*: in fact, the Pershing II were modified for medium range delivery and armed with nuclear warheads. The aim of the users of these missiles, namely the United States and West Germany, which were the only holders, was to hit the most western countries of the Soviet bloc, such as Ukraine, Belarus or Lithuania. The missiles were an advanced technology, partly unknown in the Soviet Union[27], and Martin will have the task not only of making this technology known to HWA by photographing the technical data sheets of the Pershing II, but also and above all of intercepting the West's plans for the actual launch of the missiles. The latter in fact represented the classic technology voted, in war, to the so-

called 'overkilling', that is to say the risk of using such powerful and lethal weapons (nuclear weapons) capable of killing the enemy, many more times than necessary, as well as, given the use of nuclear weapons, to exterminate even themselves. In fact, in the series, General Edel's greatest concern is precisely to see the German territory exterminated in its entirety without distinction of East and West if these missiles were used.

In the second episode, entitled "Brave Guy", the same dichotomy between objects of common and uncommon use is substantially repeated. The most significant scene is the one in which Martin has to worry about checking the hotel room for the NATO official in Brussels Enrich Meyer who will have to give the famous Abel Archer report in Bonn precisely on the conclusions reached by the NATO leaders, namely that a nuclear war would not only be useless, but even disastrous for all mankind.

Martin, in Meyer's hotel room during the inspection, places the most classic of bugs (a microphone), but in reality it is the surrounding technology that upsets him: central heating, light intensity regulator, remote controls, are all – along with a safe – things that he hears of for the first time. Regarding this object, he demonstrates ignorance not only of the mechanism, but also of its specific function. It will be mentor Tischbier who makes him understand what the safes are for when he tells him in a quick secret interview: "Yes! Capitalists love to buy objects, but then they are afraid that someone will steal them". In fact, Martin manages to break into the safe and while he is already there with a micro-camera in hand ready to photograph the report, supposedly on paper, he finds himself in front of a square plastic object, steals it and invents a fake aggression in order not to blow up his cover: he was unable to put the collected object back in its place as he was unable to photograph it.

A floppy disk, this is the support of Meyer's report, and is in a certain sense the technological object commonly used in the West, but not in the East and around which much of the series will take place in its subsequent episodes.

The third episode – "Atlantic Lion" - opens precisely with the leaders of the Stasi staring bewildered at the floppy disk; they are helpless in the face of that object and the so-called 'technical office' is involved to try to decode it. They try to do this with a Robotron A5120 computer, which does not read the media, and would therefore need at least an IBM 436 which, however, cannot be sent to East due to the embargo on certain assets imposed by Reagan.

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26   The missiles are named after the American general John Pershing.

27   The USSR was equipped with missiles with much longer ranges and only two warheads.

"Are you trying to say we need American technology?" Schweppenstette asks one of his collaborators who, in contrast, looks at him affirmatively. At the end of the episode, a computer is finally found in which it is possible to insert the floppy disk, but, once inserted, its content appears encrypted and the all-technological challenge between East and West opens up again.

In the fourth and fifth episodes – "Northern Wedding" and "Cold Fire" –, technological objects of common use in the West appear again: the Walkman, the vacuum cleaner, the photocopier, and others with which the spy from the East, Martin, is much more familiar. The object Martin recognizes is the most classic of the bugs that is sold to him in a Brussels warehouse, where even the dealer cannot tell him what it is and if it works. Martin, on the contrary, recognizes it and knows how to make it work. Through technological objects, the socio-cultural gap between East and West is accentuated even more. At the same time, the use of screens, televisions or control monitors and computers of the time becomes more and more marked, in a sort of less and less subtle appeal to Orwellian Big Brother. And George Orwell's *1984* is the text that is smuggled from West to East and used to encrypt the coded messages that Martin receives and sends.

The only unconvincing episode, the sixth – "Brandy Station" - sees the explosion of the individual conflict, but which is symbolic of a generational conflict of greater scope, by Alexander Edel, son of General Edel of whom Martin is an attendant.

Alexander takes hostage General Jackson, a member of the US Army in West Germany, and who apparently supports the launch of the Pershing II. Alexander forces General Jackson to film a speech in which he reveals the war plans of the West. This also fails due to Alexander's awkwardness in conducting the amateur shoot, but also and above all due to Jackson's interruptions, which very openly suggests that he has no intention of authorizing the missile launch because he is aware of its uselessness and lethality. In front of the camera, the hidden human frailties emerge that stand out against the overheated historical context. Nonetheless, it all seems caricatured and even too immersed in the reality of the 21st century and not in that of the Cold War and the sense of a certain historical authenticity is partly lost.

In the seventh episode – "Bold Guard" - the misunderstanding between the alleged plans of attack of the East and the West respectively becomes increasingly evident and dramatic and this happens because the technologies used by the two sides in the game are no longer able to communicate: the bugs placed by Martin have been sucked up by a trivial vacuum cleaner; the activation codes of the missile launch are encoded in the West with the Lena computer; and in the East they cannot be decoded because they are too sophisticated. As an extreme consequence, and also thanks to a certain bad faith of the Stasi general Schweppenstette, who takes advantage of the fact that he is the only – or almost the only – one to have access to the floppy printed version of the Able Archer report, the latter is read to the East as an imminent operation of war.

In the eighth episode – "Able Archer"[28] - Martin, blowing up his own cover, reveals with great personal risk that Able Archer is nothing more than the simulation of the scenario also envisaged by NATO and to be avoided in any way, and thus foils the operation of a preventive offensive that should have started from the Soviet Union with the launch of nuclear missiles. Misunderstanding between technologies is resolved thanks to human intervention.

In conclusion, it can be said that, for the realization of *Deutschland83*, historical research on common technologies was conducted with a certain diligence and above all with the ability to show the interaction between technological objects used in daily life (where available) and the more sophisticated ones which in that historical phase were mainly conceived to be applied to the Cold War in progress. Precisely in the last episode, in the Able Archer control unit, in full exercise, complete with a myriad of screens and lights on, you can see the original Defcon push-button panel, a scale from one to five, with five different colors, from white to blue, and which would have served to indicate the level of probability of a Soviet attack when the buttons on the scale itself lit up.

Certainly, the use of the technological theme for a series produced in 2015 and which has the ambitious goal of returning again to the themes of the Cold War, was a winning choice both from the point of view of the *Ostalgie* mentioned at the beginning of this article, but more generally on the basis of a vintage mood which can be seen "come passione *per* il passato più che *del* passato, da fenomeno di nicchia sta diventando una tendenza mainstream"[29] (Panosetti and Pozzato 2013: 24).

Looking away for a moment from the broader concept of nostalgia, which is always a passion for the past, but also and above all "sentimento disforico di un soggetto che sa di

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28   Able Archer 83 is the original name of the exercise that NATO conducted for five days and during which the world escalation that would have led to atomic war was simulated.

29   "As a passion for the past rather than the past, from a niche phenomenon is becoming a mainstream trend" (author's translation).

essere disgiunto da un oggetto di valore con cui, in passato, si trovava congiunto"[30] (Panosetti and Pozzato 2013: 26).

But in *Deutschland83* there can be no nostalgia, or not only, since the series' audience is made up of generations of spectators who, both by birth and geography, cannot experience a feeling of disjunction with respect to objects that they have not known in the past, or who otherwise did so through the mediation of stories told by parents or grandparents.

The medium through which the past, albeit recent of course, is narrated, strongly affects the thematic choice of technological objects: the web and streaming platforms make the series and its plot completely new because they are aimed at a different audience than that 'victim' of *Ostalgie*.

The transmedia inherent in audiovisual narratives such as films, TV series, mini-series turns out to be the most suitable mechanism capable of combining the explanatory power of storytelling and the aesthetic effectiveness of visual expression.

The most evident consequence is that the past, with its traumas and historical events, is re-semioticized, and in the *Deutschland83* series this mechanism is put into action precisely through the exhibition of the technological objects of the time: they are the objects of common use, those that will become such (think of the floppy disk), or of uncommon use (military technologies), to confer a new reading for a very specific historical period, as it was experienced by individuals and by the leaders in the field represented by two forces opposed.

> D'altra parte, che ogni epoca rechi in sé il ricordo del proprio passato, lo rifletta, lo elabori e a volte lo cancelli o lo occulti non è una novità: la cultura, come sostiene Jurij Lotman altro non è che la memoria del passato ed è proprio su tale cultura-memoria che una società fonda la propria identità[31] (Violi 2014: 16).

The strong thematic reference to technology in *Deutschland83* therefore becomes an instrument of that typical German process, the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, that is the comparison with the past –and, we could add, the reflection on the broken identity that still attempts a synthesis today. But it is something more, that is, a completely new way of enhancing the past and its cultural heritage, also and above all through objects.

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30   "The dysphoric feeling of a subject who knows he is detached from an object of value with which, in the past, he found himself joint" (author's translation).

31   "On the other hand, the fact that every epoch bears within itself the memory of its past, reflects it, elaborates it and sometimes deletes it or conceals it is nothing new: culture, as Jurij Lotman argues, is nothing but the memory of the past and it is precisely on this culture-memory that a society bases its identity" (author's translation).

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