SERIES

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
TV SERIAL NARRATIVES

SERIES has been created with two main purposes: first, to respond to the surge of scholarly interest in TV series in the past few years, and compensate for the lack of international journals specializing in TV seriality; and second, to focus on TV seriality through the involvement of scholars and readers from both the English-speaking world and the Mediterranean and Latin American regions. This is the reason why the journal's official languages will be Italian, Spanish and English.
SERIES will be an open access and peer reviewed journal, with ISSN and indexed in major international databases. SERIES will publish 2 issues per year.
This is a joint project by the Universitat Politècnica de València (Escola Politècnica Superior de Gandia) and the Università di Bologna.

Cover illustration Lorena García (http://www.lorena-garcia.net/art/) based on an original frame from *Gomorra*.

EDITORIAL

It is not easy to make an academic journal. We have been working for almost two years to reach our goal, which however has not yet been made with the release of this first issue. We will be able to claim to have reached our goal when SERIES will be a consolidated project. Nonetheless, we believe that a free and open access journal dedicated to TV series it still worth our time and energy. We also consider essential to overcome the limitations that often affect the scope of academic research. In particular, it seems important to us to accommodate within SERIES paper by scholars coming from any subject area and with different methodological guidelines, in order to promote the diversity of perspectives and encourage collaboration among disciplines.

So, in the choice of articles to be published we will focus on their scientific quality as well as on the originality of the research perspectives. Still, another goal that we set is to promote geographic diversity, both with respect to the origin of the scholars involved, and to the phenomena studied. We hope, therefore, that what prompted us to work on this project will lead us to a better understanding of all aspects of the rich and complex world of television series.

Fare una rivista non è facile. Abbiamo lavorato quasi due anni per raggiungere il nostro obiettivo, che tuttavia non si è ancora realizzato con l'uscita di questo primo numero. Potremo ritenere di aver raggiunto la nostra meta solo quando SERIES sarà un progetto consolidato. Ciò nonostante, crediamo valga comunque la pena dedicare tempo ed energie a un progetto di rivista aperta e gratuita. Riteniamo inoltre essenziale superare i limiti che spesso colpiscono l'ambito della ricerca accademica. In particolare, ci sembra importante accogliere all'interno di SERIES lavori di studiosi provenienti da qualsiasi ambito disciplinare e con orientamenti metodologici diversi al fine di promuovere la varietà di prospettive e di incoraggiare la collaborazione tra le discipline.

Dunque, quello che ci interessa maggiormente nella scelta degli articoli da pubblicare saranno la qualità scientifica e l'originalità delle prospettive di ricerca. Ancora, un altro obiettivo che ci siamo posti è quello di promuovere la diversità geografica, sia rispetto alla provenienza degli studiosi coinvolti, sia rispetto ai fenomeni studiati. Ci auguriamo dunque che quello che ci ha spinti a lavorare su questo progetto possa portarci a capire meglio tutti gli aspetti di una realtà ricca e diversificata

Crear una revista no es fácil. Llevamos casi dos años trabajando en nuestro objetivo, que todavía no se ha alcanzado con el primer número. Lo habremos logrado cuando SERIES sea un proyecto estable. Hemos creído que valía la pena dedicar todo este tiempo y esfuerzo pensando sobre todo en una revista pública, abierta y gratuita. También consideramos esencial estimular la superación de limitaciones que a menudo afectan al intercambio científico. Nos parece especialmente importante recibir trabajos desde cualquier orientación disciplinar y metodológica, para promover la variedad de perspectivas e incentivar la colaboración entre disciplinas. Las dos condiciones principales de los artículos y materiales publicados serán la calidad científica y la innovación. Finalmente otro motivo de inspiración es promover la diversidad geográfica, tanto de las contribuciones como de los fenómenos a estudiar. Esperamos que esto nos llevé a comprender la variedad de aspectos que intervienen en una realidad tan rica y diversa como la serialidad.

Este primer número recoge ya en su sección principal varias contribuciones muy distintas, dedicadas a fenómenos seriales de continentes diferentes y escritas por investigadores de procedencia muy diversa. En

This first issue contains, in its main section, different contributions, dedicated to serial phenomena from different continents and written by researchers from many institutions. Ivan Abarca, Mexican researcher currently active at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, offers a socio-political reading of the soap opera *The candidate* demonstrating an interaction between the power of television and politics in one of the key moments in the recent history of Mexico. The basis of his work is a methodological innovative hybrid between cognitivism, pragmatic and sociological perspective inspired by the concept of habitus of Pierre Bourdieu.

The second contribution, by the young Australian researcher Elliott Logan, focuses on one of the least explored aspect of television series, namely the actor's performance. The intent of Logan is to show the problems and difficulties in the major interventions in the field of television studies, since the studies of Andrew Klevan. In this regard, of particular interest is the perspective of this article regarding the interpretation of Claire Danes in the finale of the first season of *Homeland*, which stands in opposition and as an alternative to that offered by Jason Mittell.

Mikhail Skoptsov, researcher at Brown University, offers a new concept of narrative that he calls "visio-narrative". The author focuses mainly on the analysis of the narrative value of the raids of the mysterious and the supernatural through the visions of a character in *Twin Peaks*. Skoptsov shows the extent of this type of narrative strategies in contemporary TV serial narratives analyzing the effects on the narrative and aesthetic, for instance in *Carnivale*, but also in *Game of Thrones, Lost, Battlestar Galactica* or *Hannibal*.

Finally, the work of Lucia Tralli, active at the University of Bologna, by adopting a new methodological approach within fan studies, the fandom ecology by Tisha Turk and Joshua Johnston, is aimed to study the role of a community of vidders working on *Scooby Road*, a video montage from a fan of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, in which scenes of the series are combined with the songs of the Beatles album *Abbey Road*.

The Geographica section of SERIES aims to publish articles dedicated to the TV series from a specified geographical area. In this

come la serialità televisiva

Questo primo numero contiene, nella sezione principale, diversi contributi tra loro diversi, dedicati a fenomeni seriali provenienti da diversi continenti e prodotti da ricercatori provenienti da molte istituzioni. Ivan Abarca, ricercatore messicano attualmente attivo presso il Massachusetts Institute of Technology, offre una lettura socio-politico della telenovela *Il candidato* in grado di dimostrare una interazione tra il potere della televisione e della politica in uno dei momenti chiave della recente storia del Messico. La base del suo lavoro è un'ibridazione metodologica innovativa tra cognitivismo, e prospettiva sociologica ispirata al concetto di habitus di Pierre Bourdieu.

Il secondo contributo, del giovane ricercatore australiano Elliott Logan, è incentrato su uno degli aspetti meno esplorati della serialità televisiva, e cioè la performance attoriale. L'intento di Logan è quello di mostrare i problemi e le difficoltà nei principali interventi nell'ambito dei TV studies, a partire dagli studi di Andrew Klevan. A questo proposito, particolarmente interessante è la prospettiva di questo articolo in merito alla interpretazione di Claire Danes nel finale della prima stagione di *Homeland*, che si pone in opposizione e in alternativa a quella offerta da Jason Mittell.

Mikhail Skoptsov, ricercatore presso la Brown University, propone un nuovo concetto di narrazione che egli chiama "visio-narrativo". L'autore si concentra principalmente sull'analisi del valore narrativo delle irruzioni del misterioso e del soprannaturale attraverso le visioni di un personaggio in *Twin Peaks*. Skoptsov mostra la portata di questo tipo di strategie narrative nella serialità contemporanea, in opere come *Carnivale*, ma anche in *Game of Thrones, Lost, Battlestar Galactica* o *Hannibal*, analizzando gli effetti sul piano narrativo ed estetico.

Infine, il lavoro di Lucia Tralli, attiva presso l'Università di Bologna, adottando un approccio metodologico nuovo all'interno dei fan studies, la fandom ecology di Tisha Turk e Joshua Johnston, si pone come obiettivo lo studio del ruolo di una comunità di vidding al lavoro su *Scooby Road*, un montaggio video da un fan di *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, in cui le scene della serie sono combinati con le canzoni dell'album dei Beatles *Abbey Road*.

primer lugar Iván Abarca, investigador méxicano actualmente activo en el Massachussets Institute of Technology, ofrece una singular lectura político-social de la telenovela *El candidato*, capaz de evidenciar una interacción entre el poder de la televisión y la política en uno de los momentos claves de la historia reciente mexicana. La base de su trabajo es una innovadora hibridación metodológica entre cognitivismo, la pragmática y una perspectiva social inspirada en el concepto de *Habitus* de Pierre Bordieu.

La segunda aportación, del joven investigador australiano Elliott Logan, penetra en uno de los aspectos menos explorados en la serialidad, la interpretación actoral. Su estrategia es mostrar los problemas y dificultades en los principales discursos de los TV Studies, partiendo del referente teórico de Andrew Klevan. A este respecto es especialmente interesante su alternativa crítica a la lectura que ofreció Jason Mittel sobre la interpretación de Claire Danes en el momento final de la primera temporada de *Homeland*.

En tercer lugar se ofrece el trabajo de Mikhail Skoptsov, investigador de la Brown University, que propone un nuevo concepto de storytelling al que denomina "visio-narrative". Su autor basa fundamentalmente su hallazgo en un análisis del valor narrativo de las irrupciones de lo enigmático y sobrenatural a través de las visiones de un personaje en *Twin Peaks*. Lo más relevante es que Skoptsov muestra la extensión de este tipo de estrategias narrativas en la serialidad contemporánea, en obras como *Carnivale*, pero también en otras como *Juego de Tronos, Lost, Battlestar Galactica* o *Hannibal,* y a la vez analiza el efecto narrativo y estético global que provocan.

Finalmente, el trabajo de Lucia Tralli, investigadora italiana de la Università di Bologna, desarrollando una singular metodología dentro los fan studies, la fandom ecology, de Tisha Turk y Joshua Johnston, estudia el rol de una comunidad, la *vidding community*, en el caso concreto de *Scooby Road*. Este proyecto es un videomontaje realizado por un fan de *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* en el que se combinan escenas de esa serie con las canciones del album de los Beatles *Abbey Road*.

La sección "Geographica" tiene como objetivo la publicación de artículos dedicados a la serie de televisión con respecto a una zona

first issue, our choice was to dedicate a deep analysis to Italy. Since its first draft project, SERIES was created with the specific objective of promoting a global discussion and interdisciplinary exchange between scholars working on serial narratives. In this case, we believe that focusing on Italy could be very productive, since the academic work on this subject has exponentially increased in the last 10 years and the production of TV series has dramatically changed, if compared to the old style "sceneggiato", thanks to the most recent transnational productions as *Romanzo Criminale – La serie* and *Gomorrah*.

The Geographica section will then analyze the theme of the TV series in Italy through three papers with different approaches. The article by Marta Martina and Attilio Palmieri is devoted to an exploration of the scientific literature on the television series in Italy, and it reconstructs the history of Italian research in this field, presenting the state of art of academic research. The article by Massimo Scaglioni and Luca Barra is dedicated to the production context which recently went through several profound changes, with the entry of new broadcasters / producers who are implementing a new type of TV serial narratives, far from the more traditional RAI and MEDIASET productions. Finally, the article by Marta Boni is dedicated to the analysis of *Romanzo Criminale* as contemporary epic narrative.

Finally, in the interview section we present Rodolf Sirera, screenwriter and playwright of Valencia, responsible for seven seasons of *Amar en tiempos revueltos* and thus coordinator of a series whose audience was of over 3 million viewers per episode for years.

In conclusion, we take this opportunity to encourage our first readers to have an active role in the construction of the journal, helping us with your feedback to design a place that hosts rigorous research always produced in total freedom. WELCOME!

La sezione Geographica di SERIES mira a pubblicare articoli dedicati alle serie TV provenienti da una determinata area geografica. In questo primo numero la nostra scelta è stata quello di dedicare un approfondimento all'Italia. Dal momento che il progetto di SERIES nasce con lo scopo specifico di promuovere una discussione globale e lo scambio interdisciplinare tra studiosi che lavorano sulle narrazioni seriali, riteniamo che concentrarsi sull'Italia potrebbe essere molto produttivo, dal momento che il lavoro accademico su questo argomento è esponenzialmente aumentato negli ultimi 10 anni e la produzione di serie TV è profondamente cambiata rispetto al vecchio stile "sceneggiato", grazie alle più recenti produzioni transnazionali come *Romanzo Criminale* o *Gomorra.*

La sezione Geographica analizzerà quindi il tema delle serie TV in Italia attraverso tre articoli con diversi approcci. L'articolo di Marta Martina e Attilio Palmieri è dedicata a una esplorazione della letteratura scientifica sulla serialità televisiva in Italia, e ricostruisce la storia della ricerca italiana in questo campo, presentando lo stato dell'arte della ricerca accademica. L'articolo di Massimo Scaglioni e Luca Barra è dedicato al contesto produttivo che di recente ha attraversato diversi cambiamenti profondi, con l'ingresso di nuove emittenti / produttori che stanno attuando un nuovo tipo di narrazioni TV seriali, lontano dalle più tradizionali produzioni RAI e MEDIASET. Infine, l'articolo di Marta Boni è dedicato all'analisi di *Romanzo Criminale* come narrazione epica contemporanea.

Nella sezione interviste presentiamo infine Rodolf Sirera, sceneggiatore e drammaturgo di Valencia, probabilmente uno dei più brillanti tra gli europei, responsabile per sette stagioni di *Amar en tiempos revueltos* e dunque coordinatore di una serie il cui pubblico è stato per anni di oltre 3 milioni di spettatori a puntata.

In conclusione, cogliamo l'occasione per incoraggiare i nostri primi lettori ad avere un ruolo attivo nella costruzione della rivista, aiutandoci con il vostro feedback a progettare un luogo che ospiti una ricerca rigorosa ma sempre prodotta in totale libertà. VI ASPETTIAMO!

geográfica determinada. En este primer número nuestra elección ha sido Italia. Dado que el proyecto de SERIES nació con el propósito específico de promover un debate global y un intercambio interdisciplinar entre los investigadores que trabajan sobre series de televisión, pensamos que centrarse en Italia podría ser muy productivo, ya que el trabajo académico sobre este tema se ha incrementado exponencialmente en los últimos 10 años y la producción de series de televisión ha cambiado profundamente desde el antiguo "sceneggiato", gracias a las producciones transnacionales más recientes, como *Romanzo criminale* o *Gomorra.*

La sección Geographica se ocupa, por tanto, de investigar la serialidad televisiva en Italia a través de tres artículos con diferentes enfoques. El de Marta Martina y Attilio Palmieri está dedicado a la exploración de la investigación sobre serialidad en Italia, reconstruyendo su historia y presentando el estado del arte al respecto. El artículo de Massimo Scaglioni y Luca Barra está dedicado al un contexto productivo que recientemente ha pasado por varios cambios profundos, con la entrada de nuevos organismos de radiodifusión / productores que están implementando un nuevo tipo de narraciones en serie de TV, muy lejos de los más tradicionales de la RAI y de Mediaset producciones. Por último, el de Marta Boni está dedicado al análisis de *Romanzo criminale* como narración épica contemporánea.

Finalmente, en la sección de entrevistas, presentamos a Rodolf Sirera, guionista y dramaturgo valenciano, probablemente uno de los más brillantes europeos, responsable de guión de *Amar en tiempos revueltos* durante siete temporadas, es decir coordinador de una serie cuyas audiencias fueron superiores a los 3 millones de espectadores durante años y que atrapó a los públicos más variados durante más de siete años.

Queremos aprovechar esta ocasión para animaros, como primeros lectores, a tener también un rol en la construcción de la revista y que penséis en ella a la hora de idear y desarrollar investigaciones rigurosas y con total libertad. ¡LAS ESTAMOS ESPERANDO!

TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT: THE POLITICAL *TELENOVELA EL CANDIDATO* AND THE 2000 MEXICAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

IVAN ABARCA TORRES

ABSTRACT

Explaining the 2000 Mexican presidential election through the *telenovela El Candidato* that aired in parallel and was based on the actual candidates and events is a cautionary account of how a fictional television series can influence a major national election. To understand how it could impact an election, one needs to go beyond seeing the series as purely entertainment. Instead, it needs to be examined from many perspectives, including media, sociology, political science, anthropology, history, etc. This paper analyzes how the *telenovela El Candidato* was intertwined with and could have interfered with a key recent political process, and how the television company that produced it also instrumentalized it for economical and political gain. To examine how viewers are influenced by the point of view of a media company that aired both the newscast and the *telenovela*, I developed a methodology I call cognitive-socio-pragmatics and applied it to the analysis of the 2000 presidential election and the *telenovela* titled *El Candidato*.

KEYWORDS

Exposure to electronic mass media has made contemporary democratic publics more aware that credible popular fictions have greater impact on shaping our political realities than do rational social choices or moral arguments.

Yaron Ezrahi.
Imagined Democracies. Necessary Political Fictions

REAL CANDIDATES | FICTIONAL CANDIDATES

△ FIGURE 1

INTRODUCTION

The 2000 Mexican presidential election was one of the most important elections in the history of Mexico, during which one of the most important Mexican political *telenovelas*, *El Candidato*, aired. The historic election marked the first time the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) [*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*] lost an election in seventy-one years (1929-2000).

The PRI, the longest running party to rule a government anywhere in the world, and its candidate for the 2000 election Francisco Labastida,[1] lost to Vicente Fox and his right-wing party (National Action Party - PAN) [*Partido de Accion Nacional*]. It also was the longest presidential campaign in Mexican history, beginning with Vicente Fox's election as governor of Guanajuato in 1997 when he began his campaign for President. The third candidate was Cuauhtémoc Cardenas[2], the mayor of Mexico City and leader of the leftist party, the Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD) [*Partido de la Revolucion Democratica*].

At the same time as the presidential campaign, the second largest television company in Mexico (*TV-Azteca*) aired the *telenovela El Candidato* (The Candidate)*,* mirroring the three politicians in reality.

Explaining the 2000 Mexican presidential election through the *telenovela El Candidato* that aired in parallel and was based on the actual candidates and events is a cautionary account of how a fictional television series can influence a major national election. To understand this, one needs to go beyond seeing the series as purely entertainment. Instead, one needs to examine the *telenovela* from many perspectives, including media, sociology, political science, anthropology, history, etc. This includes taking a look at the full context of the culture, the language, and how the brain processes all that it takes in.

This paper analyzes how the *telenovela El Candidato* was intertwined with and could have interfered with a key recent political process, and how the television company that produced it also instrumentalized it for economical and political gain. Through empirical examples from the *telenovela*, I will analyze some of the cognitive paths and configurations proposed to viewers/potential voters.

El Candidato was presented as the first interactive *telenovela* of Mexican television. *El Candidato* tells the story of three different candidates but mostly it tells the story of a political process experienced by a country (Mexico of 2000) through a political party (an "official party"[3]) that tried to be democratic and how it managed issues of plurality in the election of a new president. In what to many seemed an attempt to expose or embarrass the PRI party, the *telenovela*'s producers promised to highlight controversial topics such as the real assassination in 1994 of PRI's presidential candidate

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1 He is one of the kingpins of Mexican politics and particularly from the PRI. He has occupied very important positions such as Secretary of Energy, Secretary of Agriculture, Secretary of Interior, Governor of the State of Sinaloa and Senator. He is also best known for being the first PRI presidential candidate to lose a presidential election.

2 Cuauhtémoc is the son of Lazaro Cardenas, Mexico's most-popular 20th-century President who is most well-known for expropriating oil interests of American and European petroleum companies before World War II. Cuauhtémoc had been twice a presidential candidate (1988, 1994) and in 1997 was elected governor of Mexico City, capital of the country and Mexico's most populated city. Some people believed his position as governor would be a stepping stone for his becoming a candidate in a third presidential election bid in 2000.

3 The PRI was identified as an "official party" that all the *telenovela*'s viewers could easily connect with the space of reality.

Luis Donaldo Colosio and stories of PRI involving corruption, lies, nepotism, infidelity, disloyalty, etc. Before examining the role played by *TV-Azteca* in airing the Presidential campaign and the *telenovela El Candidato*, I will briefly mention some political antecedents that allowed the PRI to govern during 71 years and then show how the television powers are linked to political powers.

POLITICAL ANTECEDENTS

If there is one characteristic that best represents the PRI since its foundation in 1929 through the end of the 1980's, it is discipline. The discipline that has reigned in the PRI was this: the incumbent president in consultation with party's leaders selected the PRI's next candidate among his friends or closest collaborators in a procedure known as "the pointing of the finger," (*el dedazo*) a true "meta constitutional" practice.

In essence, given the PRI's overwhelming dominance, the president chose his successor. By choosing his successor, the incumbent was protected or "immunized" from being accused and prosecuted for cases of corruption during his term of office. The PRI's dominance was nearly absolute at all other levels as well. It held an overwhelming majority in the Chamber of Deputies, as well as every seat in the Senate and every state's governorship. And the PRI and the President of Mexico have historically held very tight relations with the media and particularly with television, always playing the role of an ideological device of political power.

POLITICAL ANTECEDENTS IN MEXICAN TELEVISION

The organization of television reflects the political and economic system in Mexico. Television in Mexico began as a private enterprise without any judicial restrictions. As a result, private investors have found perfect investment conditions in Mexico. The country's presidents have been the only persons authorized to grant television rights and concessions that have enabled them to exploit commercial television.[4] It is an unregulated industry. And since television was intro-

duced, politicians have seen the television business as their unconditional ally – a supporter of political campaigns in exchange for authorizations and concessions.

In 1972, the government bought channel 13 with the goal of satisfying widespread criticism, especially by the intellectual class, of the excesses of private television. In 1973, several smaller television companies merged to form *Televisa,* a company that later became the largest in Latin America and in the Spanish-speaking world. *Televisa*'s CEO and owner was the charismatic Emilio Azcarraga Milmo who called himself a "soldier of the PRI and the President."

In 1983, President Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988), founded a public decentralized television station called the Mexican Institute of Television, widely-known as *Imevision*. The economic crisis, bad management and corruption were some of elements that led to its collapse. The government of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) led his administration in 1992 to sell *Imevision* to private Mexican investors. Twenty-four hours after receiving four proposals, President Carlos Salinas, offered the station to his cousin Ricardo Salinas Pliego, the household electrical goods entrepreneur.[5] Ricardo Salinas transformed the public television station into *TV-Azteca,* the second largest private television company in Mexico after *Televisa*.

TV-AZTECA, A NEW DEPARTURE FROM A PUBLIC ASSET INTO A COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISE

After a rocky start, *TV-Azteca*'s strategy had focused on the two main components of *Televisa*: newscasts and *telenovelas*[6]. *TV-Azteca*'s creation of its nightly newscast *Hechos de la Noche* was made to compete with *Televisa's 24 horas* and pushed back the nightly newscast *24 horas* that had aired for 26 years. During the 2000 presidential campaign, *Hechos de la Noche* was the most viewed nightly newscast in the country. However, *TV-Azteca* added and emphasized sensational programs that

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4   Garcia Rubio, Claudia I. (2008). *Para entender la television en Mexico: Un analisis que decifra la pantalla.* Ed. Fragua San Pablo. Pp. 399; And Miro V, Juan Jose (1997). *La television y el poder politico en Mexico.* Ed. Diana. Pp. 267.

5   The deadlines to drop off the proposal were fixed at July 16 (Friday). The authorities had until July 23 to study the proposals. However, on July 17 (only one day after) the authorities announced that the winner proposed 645 million dollars. Before this auction, some groups received a call from an unidentified official authority that advises them not to propose more than 450 million dollars. The well-respected journalist who reported what looked like a massive fraud against citizens' interests was Granados Chapa, Miguel Angel (1996). "Plaza Publica". Reforma. June 9. p. 7.

6   A *telenovela* is a popular limited-run serial television drama –a miniseries- that runs for a set period of time.

were very successful and for *Televisa* to compete, it began offering similar sensational programs that produced a "fair amount of competition" between *Televisa* and *TV-Azteca* creating what was referred to in Mexico as the "war of televisions."

This war introduced two significant trends that made up the newscasts of both TV channels: in one trend, there was an emphasis on sensationalist current events journalism. In the other, there was an emphasis on scandals and gossip – sensationalist tabloid journalism devoid of content. The newscasts of both TV channels focused on spectacular and/or scandalous information. Both stations were producing what one *TV-Azteca* producer termed "docudramas" inspired by the reality of urban violence across the country. However, they were not inspired by facts, but rather the dramatic fabrication of reality. At *TV-Azteca,* producers were fabricating dramatic events and news, which were aired as if they were real. Examples included staged hold-ups where cameras would conveniently show up "by chance" to record the lurid details with close up. Eventually, an inquiry by the police led to several key producers being caught falsely reporting crime stories or commissioning projects that could best be referred to as "docufiction" (real-fake news). The *mise-en-scene* of these melodramatic news events had an impact on viewer's emotions and nobody was aware of it.

This confusion of mixing private and public news, that is to say, national political interests and entertainment, had an important influence in the way the newscast viewers/potential electors perceived violence in the context of a Presidential election. This mixture of real news used in a fictional television series was unethical because a climate of violence was reinforced and glorified. Both televisions became judges of real-fake current events. In this competition, both newscasts were in competition to create the most spectacular *mise-en-scene* news-events and attract more viewers.

The competition pushed real newscasts to present their stories in segments (in a sort of episodes as if in a fictional real series) that teased viewers who then needed to come back each day to find out how stories turned out. It was similar to the daily suspenseful episodes of *telenovelas*. It was a case of television journalism imitating a "socially realistic" series. The presentation of news during the newscast becomes shorter but more fragmented and out of context.

Things in the "war of televisions" reached a low point when *TV-Azteca* used its newscast to support not only its neoliberal vision, but also to openly attack its political adversary. For example, on June 7, 1999 Paco Stanley, a national well-known television entertainer from *TV-Azteca,* was assassinated in a public place. *TV-Azteca* suspended all its programs to send the cameras *on the scene* for live coverage of the crime. Then, *Televisa*'s and *TV-Azteca*'s "journalists" working as propagandists interviewed people in the streets and asked them what they thought about violence in the city of Mexico. Several sensational entertainers from both television stations accused Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas Solórzano, Mexico City's mayor from the leftist party at the time and demanded that he resign because according to them, he was responsible for the assassination and for the explosive grow of violence in the city.[7]

Ricardo Salinas, who owned the *TV-Azteca* station, interrupted the channel's programming to launch in person what many called a public lynching using his position to attack the authorities of the city and particularly Cardenas.[8] This caused public outrage only between intellectuals. A few years before when the PRI still ruled the city of Mexico, the country lived through several political assassinations of national and international magnitude such as the presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio, the PRI's general secretary Jose Francisco Ruiz Massieu or the Cardinal Posadas (among others) and no television channel launched a campaign to discredit the authorities. Nobody demanded the authorities to resign.

However, in Stanley's assassination[9], Ricardo Salinas and his affiliated stations targeted Cuauhtémoc Cardenas's political aspirations for the 2000 presidential election in July. This campaign of discredit showed that *TV-Azteca* sought to portray Cardenas as a bad governor. Pragmatically this campaign openly reflected *TV-Azteca*'s political strategy against its political adversaries and in particular against Cardenas. Finally the dirty campaigns against the left-wing party had a significant cognitive negative influence on the perception of the viewers vis-à-vis the PRI's and leftist candidates.[10]

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7 Kenton T., Wilkinson, (2008). "Democracy Sponsored by Nafta?. Mexican Television in the Free Trade Era" Ch. 10 in Blankson, Isaac A.; Murphy, Patrick D. *Negotiating Democracy*. SUNY Press. p. 210.

8 Garcia Rubio, Claudia I. (2008). *Op. Cit*. The author presents a brief transcription the interventions of Ricardo Salinas and other sensational entertainers such as Jorge Garralda.

9 The first hypothesis presented by the general prosecutor of Mexico City, linked Stanley to organized crime and in particular indicated that Stanley consumed and sold drugs in the entertainment world and had a lot of debt with a notable drug-lord.

10 Chappell Lawson had shown that during the 2000 presidential election, *TV-Aztecas*' tone of the coverage was substantially more sympathetic towards Vicente Fox than that of *Televisa*. The author has also shown that *TV-Aztecas*' viewership or exposure worked powerfully in favor of Fox. These effects of coverage were large enough to change the outcome of the election and the news coverage exercised a powerful effect on voters' choices. Lawson, Chappell (2004). "Television Coverage, Vote Choice, and the 2000 Campaign". In *Mexico's Pivotal Democratic Election*.

What was a public television asset was transformed into a partisan instrument of power. In the face of this kind of unethical and illegal use of television, politicians and their parties have their hands tied because they are supported by the two television companies with whom they need to work with for television rights and licensing. The two most viewed programs on Mexican television are newscasts and *telenovelas,* which apparently were both instrumental in the context of presidential elections.

TELENOVELAS MADE BY TV-AZTECA

After founding *TV-Azteca,* Ricardo Salinas focused on competing with *Televisa* to change the way the *telenovelas* were traditionally produced for *Televisa. Telenovelas* made by *Televisa*, especially "pink" *telenovelas,* had happy endings. At the beginning of this adventure, *TV-Azteca* was associated with the production company called *Argos* owned by two journalists (one was a war correspondent). *Argos* helped *TV-Azteca* greatly by proposing political *telenovelas* closer to people's reality (and away from "rosy"stories) such as *Nada Personal* and *Perfume de Mujer.* This change really led viewers to switch from *Televisa* to *TV-Azteca.* One of the most innovative practices presented by some of *TV-Azteca*'s *telenovelas* was the explicit introduction of real events into the scripts (such as the reference to sensational unresolved political assassinations in the country) and the narrative. This kind of narration was one of the antecedents to *El Candidato.*

EL CANDIDATO[11]

The significance of this *telenovela* lies in the fact that it mimicked the actual election in real time and it was the first "participative" Mexican *telenovela* in the history of television. The producers (ZUBA productions and *TV-Azteca*) promised to show and to make references to recent or historical controversial facts in a way that Mexicans were not used to.[12] To achieve this, they took advantage of the fact that *TV-Azteca* recorded national events for their nightly newscast and mixed them into the fictional script often in in real time. *El Candidato*'s writers and producers followed the daily news and created a political agenda by incorporating real events or references into their fiction. Their cognitive goal clearly appeared to influence viewers' perceptions by either supporting or denouncing corruption surrounding the viewers' lives.

According to the journalist Varona Limia Arnoldo, the producers who framed *El Candidato* " wanted to show real events through fiction that reflected their understanding of the general public's political consciousness."[13] They wanted viewers to perceive the producers as mere "witnesses" and not "judges" or manipulators of historical events.[14] According to the producers, they only wanted to "show the reality of the country in a profound way."[15]

El Candidato was intended to air for only six months but its success led the producers to extend it by four months. *El Candidato* was aired between August 16, 1999 and until June 16, 2000 (only two weeks before the real election!),[16] from Monday to Friday at 10 pm. Directly following *El Candidato, TV-Azteca* aired the most important newscast of its channel: *Hechos de la Noche*[17] where viewers could often see the same, but real news with the same images or references used in *El Candidato.* [18]

El Candidato is framed as a fictional election process where the president tries to impose his "official" candidate.

Dominguez, Jorge I and Lawson, Chappell (Eds). Ed. Stanford University Press. Center for US-Mexican Studies. pp. 202-208.

11   The corpus of this article is part of my PhD dissertation and is composed of approximately 100 VHS videos containing 160 out of 190 episodes of *El Candidato,* as well as the nightly newscast, political advertisements, political platforms, spots, parody programs, etc., that I recorded daily for an entire year before the 2000 election.

12   ZUBA is a contraction of two last names ZUrita and Bach. ZUBA is owned by the main actor of *El Candidato* Humberto Zurita who was also the director of the *telenovela*, his brother Gerardo Zurita, and his wife the actress Christian Bach. Humberto Zurita and Christian Bach are very well known actors in Mexico.

13   Varona Limia, Arnoldo (1999). "America Latina: las telenovelas que nos unen". *Letraria.* Revista de los escritores hispanoamericanos en Internet. No. 80. 18 October.

14   Zurita, Gerardo (2004). Personal communication. Mexico, DF.

15   Alvarez, Ethel (1999). "Apuestan a una TV inteligente" Reforma. 18 August.

16   According to electoral law, presidential campaigns should stop at this point. In Mexico the presidential election at that time had duration of 6 months and voting day is organized always the first weekend of July. With the 2007 electoral reform, the campaigns were reduced only to three months.

17   At that specific time, this newscast was the most watched nation-wide.

18   "Over two-thirds of Mexicans get their information about politics primarily from the small screen, and even among the most affluent and educated segments of the population, television remains the dominant medium. Moreover, despite its traditional biases, television news is viewed as more credible than any other form of political communication in Mexico (...)". Chappell Lawson (2004). *Op. Cit.* p. 187.

The *telenovela* shows that even surrounded by corruption, it is possible to organize an election without fraud. During the official launch of *El Candidato,* Humberto Zurita (director, producer and actor -main character-) announced: "the *telenovela* aims to show that the right to vote is unique and democratic, that it allows people to be free and choose their government."[19] This statement reflects the real concerns of voters, especially those who felt they had been pressured to support PRI in the past.

Ricardo Salinas, owner of *TV-Azteca,* said *El Candidato* was an example of a "different television... intelligent and one that makes Mexicans think.[20]" He insisted if the public supports this kind of program, *TV-Azteca* would continue to make more *telenovelas* like this even if the government doesn't like it, "because it's the public who is in charge."[21] The producers tried to engage the audience interactively because they believed in the next election it was the only way for a new and different political candidate to come into power.[22] Besides producing and acting in *El Candidato,* Humberto Zurita decided to enter politics himself after the *telenovela* ended and was elected General Secretary of Actors and Performers of Mexico. This example demonstrates the crossing of frontiers between public and private where an actor playing the role of a key political figure becomes a political figure in real life.[23]

A similar crossing of lines occurred behind the scenes when Gerardo Sanchez Luna[24] an advertising copywriter for PRI candidates, became a co-scriptwriter for a political *telenovela.* When a journalist questioned Sanchez's crossover, Sanchez responded, "Before I got 30 seconds to show the political intentions of Colosio (candidate killed in 1994 during his campaign) and then the Zedillo (the replacement candidate) but today, Jorge Patino and I have 160 chapters to convince the viewers to vote in favor of the *telenovela.*"[25] He continued, "...reality is fundamental but it is boring and monotonous; however the *telenovela* is like passing that reality through a magnification lens, giving a melodramatic sense to passages, events and characters."[26]

Gerardo Sanchez recognized the potential represented by the argumentative and narrative structure of a *telenovela* where the scriptwriters have the time to present, develop and evoke ideas, beliefs, emotions, intentions, etc. *El Candidato* was constructed to produce emotions in parallel with the reality of the real political campaign. The producers wanted to connect emotionally with viewers' situation and influence their actions in an election.[27].

In reaction to journalist's criticisms, Gerardo Sanchez defended himself saying that even if he had worked for the PRI, he was not looking to support it (through the *telenovela*). Later, however, he made a declaration about his preferred candidate: "... [the fictional candidate] Humberto Zurita is a politician's model who could love people, a man with clean and solid ideas and who disagrees with the current political system even if he is part of it."[28] The fictional candidate happens to have similar, if not identical, characteristics and connections that correspond perfectly with the characteristics and campaign of the real candidate Vicente Fox who was the outsider of Mexican politics, challenging mainstream politics and opposing corruption.

The framing of the political figure showed by *El Candidato* helped Fox's campaign.[29] Furthermore, the sad

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19   Alvarez, Ethel (1999). *Op. Cit.*

20   *Ibid*

21   *Ibid*

22   There are some social categories studied by sociologists like age, gender, income, religion, family, geographic situation, etc., that link citizens with some political preferences. Without the intention of getting into detail, in those categories and their link with the 2000 Mexican presidential election: the younger people (just 18 years old), women, people with higher education, high income and urban people had voted for Vicente Fox. Moreno, Alejandro (2003). *El votante mexicano: Democracia, actitudes politicas y conducta electoral.* Ed. Fondo de Cultura Economica. Pp. 196.

23   "The bad news is that in today's freewheeling media environment, consumers seem increasingly unable to distinguish truth from fiction, news from polemic, reality from fantasy". Murray, Alan (2004). "Political Capital". Wall Street Journal, May 11.

24   He worked in 1994 with the famous Mexican publicist Alazraki doing the political ads for the PRI's candidate Ernesto Zedillo who became president of Mexico (1994-2000).

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25   Garay, Adriana (1999). "Detras de El Candidato". Reforma. September 19.

26   *Ibid.*

27   Even if this article mention and considers the role of emotions, this in not a proper paper focused on emotions but it considers the legitimate and underestimates importance of this element on other social sciences and humanities' work. To go deeper in the field of emotions and its cognitive structure see among others: *The Cognitive Structure of Emotions* (1988). Andrew Ortony, Gerald L. Clore and Allan Collins (eds). Cambridge University Press. Cambridge, New York, Port Chester, Melbourne and Sydney. According to philosopher Gregory Currie in reference to desires and beliefs, "A creature capable of actions needs two things: a representation of what the world is like and a representation of what it wants the world to be like. Only with those two things in place is it sensible to speak of the creature seeking to bring about a change in the world." Currie, Gregory (1999). "Narrative Desire". *In Passionate Views. Film, Cognition and Emotion.* Carl Plantinga and Greg M Smith (eds). The Johns Hopkins University Press. Baltimore and London. P. 188.

28   Garay, Adriana (1999). *Op cit.*

29   "We may often experience a fusion between what a film (-or a *telenovela*) element represents and the feelings and emotions it evokes"... "because it follows that the film-viewing experience must be described as a process, a mental flow, with bodily reactions as sounding boards. The flow is a double one [-in the case of *El*

social reality (in the fiction) framed by the *telenovela* triggered viewers' positive emotions towards a candidate who stood for changing the environment of corruption portrayed in the *telenovela* and experienced by the public in their daily lives. From a psychological perspective, the sentiment cued by the *telenovela* in that pragmatical context of elections created an emotional connection with viewers. The viewers experience is considered to be a "genuine emotion,"[30] and have their "roots in the same kind of processes that generate real-world emotions."[31] In order to be part of and "function well" in the social world as a logical, analytical and rational being, we need emotions, because "emotions and cognition are two aspects of the way our embodied brain functions."[32]

On the topic of *El Candidato* and its main objectives, actress and producer Christian Bach stated: "It is true that the central drama revolves around topics such as corruption, lies, nepotism, infidelity, disloyalty but the *telenovela* doesn't approach sensationalist topics."[33] It was clear the producers would never approach those topics from a sensationalist point of view or even try to do a parody of them. Doing so would be counter productive. The producers needed to be more subtle.

Even if the producers did not openly accept the idea of potentially instrumentalizing *El Candidato*, creating a special editorial board to help the scriptwriters and producers manage some news and topics reflected their strategy and their political leanings behind this *telenovela*.[34]

In reality, the creation of this editorial board was a pragmatic move to support the economic and political channel's

interests in the real elections. It reflected support for Vicente Fox who was the most liberal candidate whose positions served their best interests. The presence of Sergio Sarmiento as the Head of Information was essential for the *telenovela* in constructing the sense of interactivity that mixed actual current events with fiction. To examine how viewers are influenced by the *telenovela* in the context of real elections and its cognitive impact from perception to action, I have developed an approach I call cognitive-socio-pragmatics.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The necessity for an approach like cognitive-socio-pragmatics has emerged from the new discoveries and developments of cognitive science (CS) in recent years. Usually social sciences and humanities have not done enough empirical research on the role played by our brains in our daily lives, in processes such as perception, choice, decision-making, reasoning, action, comprehension, emotions and so forth. However, our brains are mediators between one's self and the external (social) world. "CS is typically identified with the study of single individuals, as if the mind were locked in a brain box".[35]

My approach uses the theory of conceptual blending or conceptual integration[36] based on the theory of mental spaces[37] as a point of departure. Blending is a theoretical framework that integrates the information around us in the social world in order to construct meaning out of it. Blending is a basic mental operation that allows two mental spaces to connect through the projection of structures into a network of mental spaces with the goal of creating a third space (blend) that has its own emergent structure (which is not present at the beginning) and that appears as a creative process of imagination.

One of the main ideas is the notion of projection between structures that are linked by connectors. "We estab-

Candidato is triple: the local knowledge embedded by the news or historic events in Mexico]: audiovisual data flow from eyes and ears to the brain/mind, and narrative events flow forward in the diegetic world from beginning to end". Grodal, Torben (1999). "Emotions and Narrative Patterns". *In Passionate Views. Film, Cognition and Emotion.* Carl Plantinga and Greg M Smith (eds). The Johns Hopkins University Press. Baltimore and London. P. 128.

30   Tan, S. H. Ed and Frijda, Nico. (1999). "Sentiment in Film Viewing". *In Passionate Views. Film, Cognition and Emotion.* Carl Plantinga and Greg M Smith (eds). The Johns Hopkins University Press. Baltimore and London. P. 51

31   Plantinga, Carl and Smith M, Greg. (1999). "Introduction". *In Passionate Views. Film, Cognition and Emotion.* Carl Plantinga and Greg M Smith (eds). The Johns Hopkins University Press. Baltimore and London. P. 6.

32   Grodal, Torben (1999). *Op. Cit.* p. 127.

33   Olvera, Marco Antonio (1999). "Inician Campaña el lunes". Reforma. 13 August.

34   The editorial board included: Sergio Sarmiento, an editorial advisor, and Ignacio Suarez Vazquez who worked as the coordinator of advisors for *TV-Azteca*'s president Ricardo Salinas Pliego. The board managed controversial topics, the cases of censorship and self-censorship, the references to real topics and events and the political limits of the *telenovela*. The producers argued publically the board was established to reassure the public of their "objectivity" *vis-a-vis* a specific candidate.

35   Donald, Merlin (2012). "An Evolutionary Approach to Culture". In *The Axial Age and Its consequences*. Robert N. Bellah and Hans Joas (Eds.). The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. Cambridge and London. P. 49.

36   Fauconnier, Gilles and Turner, Mark (1995). "Conceptual Integration and Formal Expression". Metaphor and Symbolic Activity. Vol. 10. Num. 3. pp183-202. For reasons of time and space, I won't be available to develop this approach, perhaps only mentions some concept used for this paper.

37   This theory was first developed by: Fauconnier, Gilles. (1984) *Espaces mentaux. Aspects de la construction de sens dans les languages naturelles.* Ed. Minuit. Paris. It was then upgraded in: Fauconnier, Gilles (1997). *Mappings in Thought and Language.* Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.

lished [for biological and cultural reasons] links between different objects' nature (real objects, images, beliefs, desires, etc.), and those links established allow us the reference of one object (source) by the bias of another one (target) linked to the first one properly"[38] and this concept has been called "pragmatic function mapping". This kind of mapping plays an important role in structuring our knowledge base."[39] This "pragmatic function mapping" is based on a metonymical principle known as the "principle of identification" that states that in a pragmatically linked situation, one description of the space source could serve to identify the target (example: source (trigger)+connector+target). The mappings between the two initial spaces could be made based on a different nature of connections such as: identity, similarity, analogy, pragmatic function, representation, etc.[40]

Projection, in a metaphorical sense, is the backbone of analogy, categorization and grammar, and connects frames to specific situations. According to Charles Fillmore, the notion of a frame is synonymous to schema, script, scenario, ideational, scaffolding, cognitive model or folk theory.[41] So the frame is the characterization of a small scene or abstract situation in accord with a certain context. The frame structures the sense of a category of a word or an action. The frame is also a kind of envisioning of the world from a text (author, movie director, speech of a politician, etc.), it refers to the perspective through which a narrative is presented and that schematizes a situation and encourages the interlocutor to construct a visualization.

A metaphorical projection and the connected structure play a central role in the construction of meaning and reasoning, but is constrained by the nature of our brains and its mental simulation capacities that is called Embodied Simulation Hypothesis (ESH).[42] The idea of ESH "is that you make meaning by creating experiences for yourself [in your brain and unconscious] that – if you're successful – reflect the experiences that the speaker [writer, movie director, etc.], intended to describe."[43] When we watch a movie or read a novel we do not imagine ourselves related to the characters or events as if we were there. However, we have embedded experiences that allow us to drive the "cognitive flow" to understand the reality or fiction in front of us.

Torben Grodal summarizes perfectly the cognitive processes when viewers are face to face to a film (or photograph, book, interlocutor, television program, etc.), which roughly occurs in this way: "First, a given film frame/shot activates ear and eye. These perceptual clues are then processed in the rear part of the brain by a series of filterings and synthesizations to model three-dimensional objects. If this construction of objects is successful it will lead, via a series of mental processes (for instance, matching what is seen with memorized information), to a mental representation of what is seen and heard. This in turn induces affective reactions in part determined by attention and the activation of memories and associations. The film processes will then activate representations of possible actions and perhaps induce muscle tension and an activation of the frontal and prefrontal brain areas linked to motor action".[44] The cognitive constructions are underspecified by the support that triggers them whether it be linguistic or visual support, or support constituted by social praxis and/or human interactions.

As mentioned above, CS studies the single experience of individuals, "as if the mind were locked in a brain box." And, "if meaning is based on experience with the world – the specific actions and percepts an individual has had –, then it may vary from individual to individual and from culture to culture. And meaning will also be deeply personal."[45] However CS does not consider the social *genesis* of individuals as social agents nor does it consider the principles and categories of the social world such as: religion, social class, economic income, gender, geography, etc. Social sciences, humanities and cognitive sciences share a common interest because "the

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38   Fauconnier, Gilles. (1984). *Ibid.* pag.15.

39   "Pragmatic function mapping, like projection mapping, will often be responsible for semantic change over time". Fauconnier, Gilles (1997). *Op. Cit.* p. 11.

40   Coulson, Seana and Oakley, Todd (2000). "Blending Basics". Cognitive Linguistics 11-3/4.

41   Fillmore, Charles J. (1981) "Frame Semantics". Linguistics in the Morning Calm; selected papers from SICOL, Seoul Korea.

42   Bergen, K. Benjamin (2012). *Louder Than Words. The New Science of How The Mind Makes Meaning.* Basic Books. New York. Pp. 296. According to Benjamin Bergen, "simulation is the creation of mental experiences of perception and action in the absence of their external manifestation...The theory proposes that embodied simulation makes use of the same parts of the brain that are dedicated to directly interacting with the world. When we simulate seeing, we use the parts of the brain that allow us to see the world; when we simulate performing actions, the parts of

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the brain that direct physical action light up. The idea is that simulation creates echoes in our brains of previous experiences, attenuated resonances of brain patterns that were active during previous perceptual and motor experiences. We use our brains to simulate percepts and actions without actually perceiving or acting". Pp. 14-15.

43   Bergen, K. Benjamin (2012). *Ibid.* p. 16.

44   Grodal, Torben (1999). *Op. Cit.* p. 132.

45   Bergen, K. Benjamin (2012). *Op Cit.* p. 16.

cognitive activities of a culture are organized, governed, and distributed across an entire population group.[46]"

I will not consider and mobilize the social categories that also play a role in the construction of sense of mental events in an explicit way. Through cognitive-socio-pragmatics, my goal is to research and explain socio-political phenomenon through the deep analysis of brain-culture co-evolution[47] (in my personal case "popular culture").

However, every individual brain is surrounded by different socio-cultural contexts and all individual knowledge of the social world is a collective act of construction. "The social environment created by culture deeply affects the physical architecture of our brains and the way that individual brains deploy their resources"[48]. Here, I try to bridge the gap between the biological and social worlds through the concept of *Habitus* employed by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu.

Bourdieu defines *Habitus* as a cognitive system of dispositions or structures, from a social origin that the individual uses in a practical way to know the social world (collective). The knowledge that an individual (who is part of it) has of the object itself informs the construction of knowledge about the reality of the object.[49] Those cognitive structures used by individuals to understand the social world are embedded social class structures restrained by the physiological capacities of the brain.

Bourdieu states, "The *habitus* could be understood as a structure of mind characterized by a set of acquired schemata, sensibilities, dispositions and taste." The *Habitus* is a "cognitive device" socially ingrained in individuals that structures the historical schemata of perception and appreciation as a result of an objective (embodied) division of class.[50]

The biology and culture co-evolution (language, social categories, meaning, and cognitive configurations, etc.) is balanced by the sight of how the context (pragmatics) contributes meaning to where events and phenomenon take place. In order to see how these concepts could be used to interpret the 2000 presidential election, we must describe how *El Candidato* manipulated legitimate political news and used it for their own purposes in fictional storytelling.

THE PLACE OF POLITICS IN *EL CANDIDATO*

Starting with the title itself that was used as a pragmatic functional mapping, *El Candidato* established a link between the socio-political real space of the 2000 presidential campaign and the fictional space of the *telenovela*. Given the political context in people's minds, the title evoked a potential source of government criticism in the mental space of fiction, and they knew the events, characters or situations in the fiction would be targeting the space where the PRI governed.

To understand the thematic choice of *El Candidato* in a crucial political time in Mexico, there is an obvious clue. The choice of airing the *telenovela* in parallel to the real election could have been interpreted as a political pragmatic calculation. Speculating about the timing, one could see a potential Machiavellian[51] political move on the part of *TV-Azteca,* potentially looking to influence the political choices of viewers/voters in the 2000 presidential election. In the real space, all the citizens knew the PRI was called the "official party" and in the *telenovela* the Popular Alliance Party (PAP) was also called the "official party." The principle of identification allows us, through the verbal reference of the "official party," to connect both spaces without doubt. So PRI+PAP= Official parties. In the space of the *telenovela*, PAP's politicians are portrayed as corrupt, inefficient and with links to drug lords and cartels. The *telenovela* shows the PAP's corruptive practices inside the party, the antidemocratic president's practices to choose their successors, their conspiracies, their use of violence, and their corrupt links to entrepreneurs. Using PAP's characteristics as the space source, and applying the principle of identification helps to identify the space target and almost all the viewers were effortlessly aware that *El Candidato* targeted the PRI in the real space with those negative characteristics.[52]

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46   Donald, Merlin (2012). *Op. Cit.* p. 49.

47   I borrow this idea from Donald, Merlin (2012). *Op. Cit.* 50.

48   Donald, Merlin (2012). *Ibid.* p. 50.

49   Bourdieu, Pierre (1975). *La Distinction. Critique sociale du jugement.* Les Editions de Minuit. Paris. p. 544.

50   Bourdieu, Pierre (1975). *Ibid.* p. 546.

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51   Blakey Vermeule applies the concept of Machiavelian Intelligence Hypothesis (as a mental mechanism link to mind reading) to literary characters but we can extrapolate it and use it for visual experience. According to her, "we evolve to live in highly complex socially stratified groups. This mechanism is specially attuned to calculation, cooperation and conflict. In other words, this mechanism helps us to think several moves ahead on a giant social chessboard". Mind reading means simply that people "represents to our selves the mental states of other people –attributing to them belief, intentions, desires and attitudes". Vermeule, Blakey (2010). *Why Do We Care About Literary Characters?* The Johns Hopkins University Press. Baltimore. Pp. 30-39.

52   One of the biggest discoveries in Cognitive Science is the concept of the *cognitive unconscious*, which the three most important characteristics are: 1. Our thoughts are unconscious in the sense that 2. It operates beneath the level of cog-

However, *El Candidato* is more subtle and complex than it appears. The producers emphasize, and frame, the main character (*El Candidato*) in a very positive way by featuring a politician who was in the system but who fights against the system from within. The *telenovela* portrayed a modern hero, an outsider, somebody who could save the population from its corrupt politicians. The positive framework of the *El Candidato* story (PAP's candidate), for example, does not directly link Francisco Labastida (PRI's candidate) in the space of reality because he is in the mainstream of historical PRI's politicians. And Cardenas, the other real candidate, could not be directly linked as well. But the cognitive target of the writers and *TV-Azteca* was Vicente Fox (from the PAN), the outsider who challenged the PRI's system. And some studies concluded *TV-Azteca* was the television company that supported Vicente Fox the most.[53]

The political dimensions in the fictional narrative were constructed with three different layers. The first one was created by a general framework that shows how politics is practiced and was part of the DNA of the fictional political party (PAP). Even if this party was imaginary, there are many obvious and explicit examples proving an analogical connection and identification between both spaces: the party's logos, use of colors and verbal references, etc.

The physical features of real and fictional candidates mobilize in viewers' minds a whole set of local knowledge, connectors, mappings, representations, emotions, etc.[54] However, what is interesting here are the visual characteristics of the fictional candidate of PUC who represents Vicente Fox. In

the mind of many Mexicans, what emerges automatically as a new structure between the two mental spaces of fiction and reality in the space blend (the third space) as a product of imagination, is the image of Manuel "Maquio" Clouthier presidential candidate in 1988, and Diego Fernandez de Cevallos a presidential candidate in 1994, both from the PAN's (Fox political party).

MANUEL "MAQUIO" CLOUTHIER	DIEGO FERNANDEZ DE CEVALLOS

△ FIGURE 2

In the second political dimension, *El Candidato* makes significant verbal references to current political news that connects viewers to the country's past. This "strategy" has two objectives: the first one is to inform the viewers about important news that happened the same day or recent events that are shown in the *El Candidato* broadcast before being shown later in the real nightly newscast. The second objective is to provoke a debate and/or criticize certain measures and decisions made by the real government. For example: two characters in *El Candidato* debate an action taken by the government that day in the space of reality such as the creation of a new division of the police force. While the fictional characters discuss the action, one gestures to show incredulity, suspicion, etc., and others criticize the action, giving their opinion (often against the leftist party governing the capital). This technique is a very subtle way of expressing the television channel's veiled opinion through the fictional characters and spreading doubts about a real political action.

Another strategy used by the *telenovela,* is to take advantage of a specific real event (such as a presidential debate, a demonstration or an accident) to instrumentalize or target a specific politician in the real space. It was not surprising to watch fictional characters launch criticism against decisions by real politicians.

El Candidato was very subtle, however, in how it leveled criticism of real politicians and real events. To pick up on what was really happening in the *telenovela*, members of the audience needed to pay attention and have a certain

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nitive awareness, inaccessible to consciousness and 3. Operating too quickly to be focused on. The result of cognition seems generally as natural but in reality it implies a sophisticated interpretation of operations and calculus. The visible-conscious thought is just the top of a bigger unconscious structure, which is hidden. This hidden structure shapes the way in which we conceptualize all the aspects of our experience. For a deeper discussion see: Lakoff, George and Johnson, Mark (1999). *Philosophy in the Flesh. The Embodied Mind and it Challenge to Western Thought.* Basic Books. Pp. 624.

53   Chappell, Lawson (2004). *Op. Cit.* pp. 188-199. This study had monitored only the mainstream devices such as the time in spots, presentations, interviews, etc. without considering the cognitive influence that the *telenovela El Candidato* could have.

54   For reason of time and space, I won't develop here. This part and more connections between both spaces had developed in a deeper way in: Abarca, Ivan (2011). Construction de la fiction et la réalité dans l'image et le discours politique : Analyse de la *telenovela El Candidato* et la campagne présidentielle mexicaine en 2000. PhD dissertation. Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales. Paris, France

local knowledge to connect and to map/connect a specific criticism with the *telenovela's* target. Viewers do not always have this knowledge or, put differently, they simply didn't see anything suspicious because as social individuals they do not have the same *habitus* and hence they have different predispositions, sensibilities, and structures of perception as a result of the division of class.

The third political dimension is to make reference to real events or images well known by the viewers that nowadays are part of "cultural narratives" of Mexicans. These narratives are stable events, representations of representations (meta-representations) in people's collective memory. Those cultural narratives bridge the individual with the collective through the concept of *habitus* where viewers mobilize whole acquired schemata of a social origin to make sense of those stories. This third strategy does not appear to produce a critic thinking about a specific event, but it does intend to mobilize a whole cognitive network including: emotions, local context and common ground knowledge with the goal of connecting them to the system of actions and decision-making that make up cultural narratives that are deeply ingrained in citizens' minds and bodies. This was the case when the *telenovela* recreated the assassination of the 1994 PRI's presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio, or real images of poor people voting in past elections, or references related to the Virgin of Guadalupe, "the mother of Mexico" or images of historical heroes from the Independence in 1810 and the Revolution in 1910[55].

Among several other cases, one of the most emblematic was the Virgin of Guadalupe. On September 9 1999, Vicente Fox was in a meeting and before it ended, two of his children presented him with the flag of the Virgin of Guadalupe and he took advantage of this opportunity to give a speech with independence tones. Three days later, the fictional candidate who represented Fox also gave a speech with the flag of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Then *El Candidato* used the fictional character with this image as a *leit motif* (four or five times) and that fictional character's narrative included giving speeches with independence tones.

What is interesting here as a result of the mapping between Vicente Fox in the source space and his fictional can-

didate's (in the space target) use of the flag of the Virgin of Guadalupe is the emergent structure of Don Miguel Hidalgo (in the space blend). The priest Miguel Hidalgo (1810) is the most famous and emblematic hero of the independence of Mexico, who started the movement of liberation from Spain with the flag of the Virgin of Guadalupe as well. Miguel Hidalgo is considered the father of the patria -- the liberator. When viewers integrate the information of both spaces between Vicente Fox and his fictional candidate, there is a projection of common elements (candidates, flag of the Virgin, speeches, etc.) into the blend where the figure of Miguel Hidalgo emerges automatically. The positive characteristics of Miguel Hidalgo (as liberator, father of the patria, etc.) emerge as well as in the blend and are retro-projected to the initial spaces giving a positive viewpoint to the space of Vicente Fox, which is the real space of action. Vicente Fox's conscious use of the flag had connected an analog cognitive network of configurations of knowledge, history, inferences, and actions, etc. These are deeply embedded in Mexican culture and exploited politically by Vicente Fox in the real space, mobilizing the image of Miguel Hidalgo in the historical-source space and the reinforcing frame of the fictional candidate representing Vicente Fox in *El Candidato*

MIGUEL HIDALGO IN 1810

△ FIGURE 4, 5, 6

The configuration of Vicente Fox with the flag is visually based on the historical and heroic act of Miguel Hidalgo in 1810 in the sense that it reminds Mexicans of the way that Miguel Hidalgo had liberated Mexico from Spanish domination. This framing proposes to viewers an analogous unconscious path that Vicente Fox, through the 2000 election, will also liberate Mexico from the seventy-year domination of PRI.

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55   "However, the emotional effect will be enhanced if the viewers are acquainted with "grand" historical narratives (Nazism, World War II, the invention of the A-bomb) and the Jewish biblical narratives [local-national narratives]. The emotional charge of these themes is activated as support for the narratives. Such charges are sometimes "partial activations" in that they may be nonconscious or may exist at the periphery of our attention". Grodal, Torben (1999). *Op Cit.* p. 129.

This configuration had the purpose or reminding Mexicans in an unconscious way that Miguel Hidalgo had liberated Mexico from Spanish domination and that Vicente Fox through the 2000 election will liberate Mexico from the seventy-year domination of PRI. This aspect is reinforced by the Culture, because the month of September is known in Mexico as the month of the patria (*El mes de la Patria*) where the figure of Miguel Hidalgo with the flag of the Virgin of Guadalupe decorates the public spaces of official institutions all over the country and is also reinforced by the ritual of the "celebration of the independence". This historical and cultural narrative is embedded deep in Mexicans and is a part of their *habitus* as a system of predispositions through which they see what they are as a nation especially because the Virgin of Guadalupe is also part of this deep *habitus* and strong identity of *Mexican-ness*.

We can see that Vicente Fox took advantage of Miguel Hidalgo's political and symbolical capital as a historical figure, to link it cognitively to his own political capital in the context of the 2000 presidential election and reinforced that frame ("liberator") by the numerous appearances of the fictional candidate.

The emotions[56] and cognitive inferences emerged in the space blend that pops up unconsciously in people's minds to evoke what Miguel Hidalgo and other historical heroes represent in the history of the country such as: liberty, democracy, revolution, independence, sacrifice, freedom, unity, etc., and that Vicente Fox capitalized with his campaign promises of change, democracy, liberating Mexico from the PRI, challenging the system, etc. However emotions can also be structured and culturally constructed.[57]

We find that the producers used some actors' physical features or religious artifacts as connectors with other mental spaces for the purpose of increasing and amplifying the network's meaning. For example, in the space blend (the emergent structure) the figures of candidates Clouthier and Cevallos are brought to mind.. This combination between fiction and reality was possible in part thanks to the device of interactivity set up by the close collaboration between the newscast crew and the *telenovela* team.

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56   ..."The functional role of emotions in relation to imagined events in fiction is different from ordinary emotions, and that emotions in relation to fiction are disconnected from moral reasoning to a degree that ordinary emotions are not". Bruun Vaage, Margrethe (2013). "Fictional reliefs and reality checks". Screen 54:2. Summer. Pp. 218-237. PDF version.

57   Plantinga, Carl and Smith, M Greg (1999). *Op. Cit.* P. 9.

HOW THE INTERACTIVITY WAS CONSTRUCTED?

Since the beginning of *El Candidato,* the producers wanted viewers to participate in this *telenovela* in different ways. The producers set up a special phone line where the viewers could suggest ideas for the script or to alert producers to an exceptional event happening in real time such as a fire, a demonstration, an assassination, etc. On this telephone line, the viewers could also give their point of view about a political topic, an actor, or the overall story. *TV-Azteca,* eventually sent a team -- perhaps their nightly news crew -- with cameras to record actual events and evaluate whether the event fit into *El Candidato*'s story line. If the events were relevant, producers would incorporate them into the script and/or broadcast them in the real newscast.

Sometimes, the *telenovela* showed or made reference to the most important news of the day even before the nightly newscast broadcasted that news. *TV-Azteca* and *El Candidato* very often blurred the lines between the interest of public affairs and private entertainment. Actually, they merged both into a fictional program for the purpose of entertainment. To do this, they transformed the interest that viewers have in civic and state matters – an interest in the republic – into an entertainment program where real news was dramatized under the guise of fiction. Put simply, they injected real news events into a fictional landscape that mirrored what was happening in the day-to-day lives of an audience who would soon be electing its civic leaders.

The producers also created an email-address (elcandidato@tvazteca.com.mx) where viewers could send in their comments. With the same e-mail, viewers could get access to a form to fill out and share their ideas about topics including actors, specific issues, real politicians' speeches or declarations, and special or extraordinary events. According to the producer Gerardo Zurita (brother of the *telenovela's* lead actor Humberto Zurita) some days they got around 300 e-mails per day. In response to viewers' comments, the producers decided to create a female main character (to include more women in politics).[58] Zurita also commented that based on feedback from viewers, viewers' opinions changed towards politics after they saw the fictional versions of the real political debates.[59]

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58   After the 2000 presidential election, I speculate that the participation of women in politics in reality had increased considerably as a consequence of *El Candidato* but this would need to be proved by further studies.

59   Personal interview with the producer, January 2004.

Towards the end of *El Candidato*, the producers asked the viewers how they should end the *telenovela* and they received 19,206 suggestions. Those suggestions were reduced to two and viewers were invited to vote between the two scenarios.

The producers had also set up an information center where they managed all the information they received by mail, phone or via the newscast material produced on the *telenovela*. According to the producers, the interactive part was actually the most challenging part of *El Candidato* because of the difficulty of mixing or integrating the fictional script with real situations. The communication between the producers and the viewers was as personal as possible. Producers would send a note to viewers asking them to watch specific episodes or sequences that related to the viewers' e-mail messages. According to Gerardo Zurita, even if *El Candidato* was fictional, the public needs truthfulness in the story. Using interactivity or viewers' participation, the producers created a fiction that was close to real – that simulated reality – in a way that often resulted in the perceptual disappearance of boundaries between fiction and reality.

EL CANDIDATO A REAL FICTION OR A FICTIONAL REALITY?

El Candidato was a political-fictional melodrama fed basically by real events that integrated and reflected the national political scene. The fact that the *telenovela* was aired in parallel to the real election gave an added boost to the fictional story because the narrative was perceived as fiction but was well integrated with the real socio-political context. *El Candidato* was realistic and appeared truthful because it represented what people believed happens in real politics. In this case, it also reflected a kind of common knowledge of culture and politics (*habitus*) shared by viewers and the producers.[60] Producers and viewers share a general *habitus* of beliefs, perceptions and desires about the political change. In his study on "Narrative Desire", Gregory Currie states, "desiring things with the imagination (the sort of desiring involved in narrative desire) might make one more prone to desire it in reality."[61] This idea applied to the viewers of *El Candidato*,

and thus appeared to influence their outlook on politics and whom they voted for.

Even if the *telenovela* is a melodrama that exaggerates gestures and stories, fiction is inserted into a meaningful structure that parallels real life. Even if by definition, the *telenovela* is a metafiction (representation of a representation), the producers wanted to touch people's emotions and present the story in a realistic context, close to things that people see, know, experience, understand and can imagine effortlessly through the mechanism of Embodied Simulation Hypothesis (ESH). Viewers have embedded experiences that allow them to drive the "cognitive flow" to understand the reality or fiction in front of them.

Imagination is crucial to processing information about the real world and the information obtained through *El Candidato* was also important to understanding Mexican real world-politics. Even if people know they are watching fiction, they allow themselves to believe what seems real (ESH). They willingly suspend disbelief, to use the words of the 19th century poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. What the viewer sees on the screen can be analogous to what he or she perceives in reality. As Kendall Walton points out in relation to mimesis as make-believe, everything we see on a screen or a page feeds our imaginations.[62]

In *telenovelas*, reality has an important presence. When producers mix the real with fiction, they are seeking to create an anchor point with a physical and cultural world where producers and receptors live and share a *habitus*, a world that they both understand. In this case, the producers then created a framework or "device" connecting the fictional narrative to the real presidential campaign and to the history of the country in general. This kind of strategy guides the viewer's reading of the social-political world through a specific frame, between *El Candidato* and the real campaign (between the space source and target). This strategy gives the *telenovela* a different status as a continual fictional guide to the presidential election that resonates with viewers' predispositions, tastes, and perceptions. *El Candidato* helped viewers to read "the reality" at that time from an abstract socio-political world.[63]

60   "Language matters to us because it is a vehicle for meaning-it allows us to take the desires, intentions, and experiences in our heads and transmit a signal through space that makes those thoughts pop up in someone else's head." Bergen K, Benjamin (2012). *Op. Cit.* p. 5.

61   Currie, Gregory. (1999). *Op Cit.* p. 198.

62   "When viewers are confronted with pixels and words on a screen or a page, they are prop for our make believe." Walton, Kendall (1993). *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*. Ed. Harvard University Press. Cambridge.

63   According with Blakey Vermeule, what is special about fiction is that viewers are rewarded with the most intense cognitive stimulation: social information... "for-

Like any melodrama, the *telenovela*'s goals are related to dreams, imagination, creativity and utopia. However, the fact that *El Candidato* mixes those dimensions with images from real current events or at times becomes partly documentary (socially realistic)[64] in relation to the history of Mexico, it poses an ontological problem of docu-fiction. *El Candidato* is fiction but in the socio-political context of the 2000 presidential election, it became a "pre digested"[65] reinterpretation by the producers - a document of history attesting to the private appropriation of history by citizens. Mixing documentary (real and historical facts) with fiction (private leisure –a love story), *El Candidato* tried to legitimatize the set of arguments and comments that it presents through fictional characters. On the contrary, it winds up communicating a false and misleading pseudo-historic narrative. Doing so, *El Candidato* transforms itself as a fictional prop into an exegetic document that allows viewers to read and "falsely" interpret the socio-political reality. *El Candidato* became a co-constructor of historical facts already interpreted and inserted into fiction.

Despite the appearance of being an opened-up political conscience, the *telenovela* is above all a commercial product of a huge industry. In appearance, *El Candidato* challenges the linear narrative of real and even sometimes the legitimate version of historical events. *El Candidato* constructed a new perception of reality and raised awareness focusing on some points and hiding others. The most important hidden elements are those that are there and look natural. *El Candidato* hides things by choosing to frame and represent only small parts of the whole socio-political picture. A remaining question is how did *TV-Azteca* instrumentalized the *telenovela El Candidato* and the news for its political interests?

mation that would be too costly, dangerous and difficult to extract from the world on our own". Vermeule, Blakey (2010). *Op. Cit.* p. 14.

64   I borrow this concept from Margrethe Bruun Vaage "this arguably usually entails that it is a fiction that borrows from the nonfiction mode, in that it clearly directs the spectator's attention to the real world, makes assertions about the state of this world, and typically wants the spectator to learn more about the real world by watching the fiction." Bruun Vaage, Margrethe (2013). *Op Cit*. PDF version.

65   "We do not usually rely upon the emotions to organize fictional film events for us as much as we rely upon the emotions to perform this task for us in ordinary life because, in the main, fiction film events have been emotionally predigested for us by the filmmakers. That is, the filmmakers have foregrounded what features of the events in the film are salient" (including camera position, composition, lighting, editing, etc.) Caroll, Noel (1999). "Film, Emotion, and Genre". *In Passionate Views. Film, Cognition and Emotion*. Carl Plantinga and Greg M Smith (eds). The Johns Hopkins University Press. Baltimore and London. P.29.

COGNITIVE IMPLICATIONS OF MIXING REAL AND HISTORICAL EVENTS INTO FICTION IN THE CONTEXT OF POLITICAL ELECTIONS

The most important cognitive element is that *El Candidato* was a propaganda program supporting the candidacy of Vicente Fox, disguised as a *telenovela* that most citizens, politicians, journalists and intellectuals did not recognize or challenge. Through *El Candidato, TV-Azteca* "naturalized" and framed its private political interests under the guise of interactivity from real events and taking advantage of the electoral socio-political context. When *TV-Azteca* mixes the news of the day into the *telenovela El Candidato* and then features the same news on a live television newscast, this results in a distortion and manipulation, even if events are real. It seems clear that the purpose of mixing fiction with reality was to push the viewers to focus their attention to the real world where the PRI had governed for more than seven decades with striking results of corruption, poverty, assassinations, etc. The goal was to produce emotions and eventually incite action against this political party in the next election. As Gregory Currie reiterates, the complexity of our imaginations can likely be intimately connected with our capacity to act.[66]

Some of the viewers would have the impression that what they were watching was what really happened in reality but being hidden by the PRI government and revealed by the *telenovela*. *El Candidato*'s narrative was linear and could be called canonical, but the innovation was the insertion of reality into fiction[67]. However, the political context, the theme and the fact that the show included current events created an effective "mental flow" from perception to embodied simulation leading to action (viewers' changing their behavior). The linear story was powerful enough because it mobilized the whole network of our cognitive and social systems based on the *habitus* of Mexicans, on how the social environment of the election had changed the physiological synapsis in viewer's brains.

The viewers needed to have a very high level of awareness to distinguish between what was real and what was not.

66   "A complex mental organ like the imagination is not likely to be disconnected from our capacity to act." Currie, Gregory. (1999). *Op. Cit.* p. 197.

67   Torben Grodal qualifies canonical stories as a superior example of how our cognitive systems work together: "interaction of cognition, emotions, concerns and actions function by means of a linear phasic flow, supported by non-linear and atemporal associations networks". Grodal, Torben (1999). *Op. Cit.* p. 144.

If we consider that at that time *Hechos de la Noche* was the most viewed nightly newscast in the country and considering the studies about the television and news in Mexico quoted before (Lawson 2004:187), certainly *El Candidato* had a more important role in the 2000 Presidential election supporting Vicente Fox than what we think. *El Candidato* did not necessarily help Fox's campaign directly but it visually and emotionally legitimized a negative frame against the PRI on a daily basis.

El Candidato practiced symbolic violence on the most "vulnerable viewers" because they thought that they were watching an entertainment program when in truth, they were watching a veiled propaganda program. *El Candidato* was continuously producing double political meanings that viewers did not judge at the same level due to the origins of our *habitus* in which some viewers seemed to be more vulnerable.

Some studies have shown that, what really counts in the real cognitive impact on voters in the context of an election, is what they know or are willing to infer. Viewers use their massive semantic inference system to infer and to connect many different things because they have a pre-existing knowledge about politics and because we have meta-representational capacities. The embodied simulation hypothesis allows *El Candidato*'s viewers to make sense of the passage between their personal experiences and knowledge about the PRI in the real space and the fictional script.

The way that the *telenovela* framed the "official party" (PRI) in reality in a very negative way "resonated" in people's minds, confirming certain pre-existing beliefs and drawing upon local knowledge about what the political party did in the space of reality. *El Candidato* operated in a cues-based model for viewers where the *telenovela* proposed shortcuts using links, associations, connectors and inferences impacting the real world through "vivid images, emotion-evoking music, humor, negativity and other non-substantive elements of a message."[68]

CONCLUSION

The *telenovela El Candidato* did not elect Vicente Fox *per se* but it was a very powerful media vehicle that certainly helped him. Although there were suspicions from the begin-

ning about the *telenovela*'s positive support of the PRI in the context of the real election, it turns out that in fact upon detailed analysis key scenes and episodes of *El Candidato's* general framework, the opposite proved to be true. *TV-Azteca* and *El Candidato* together negatively framed the image of the PRI and its role in ruling the country for 71 years, which then helped to underline the necessity of change.

El Candidato visually explained the complexity of the social-political world even better that the politicians themselves or the press because its arguments are accompanied by images, angles, colors, music, emotions, etc. For some of those viewers-electors, the *telenovela* was an understandable guide to Mexican politics because the *telenovela* showed details related to what people thought about the PRI, politics, recent scandals and assassinations. The public mission of *TV-Azteca* and its nightly newscast *Hechos de la Noche* following *El Candidato* resulted in sensationalizing real public events with the private goal of supporting a president close to its own interests.

The viewers received fragmented knowledge about public affairs from *El Candidato* that they could have mostly learned through the television newscast. However, the importance of *El Candidato* and its influence on people's minds was that this fiction accompanied the real election and offered viewers a cognitive path of how to read reality and its tragic political events, while putting these events into images, recreating them with music and consequently creating emotions. This strategy to propose a myriad of permanent connections with other mental spaces and local people's knowledge was more fruitful than any direct message. The inferences evoked by *El Candidato* about politics resonated in people's minds and supported their suspicions and thoughts about what they thought about the political reality[69].

The most important thing is that *telenovelas* find great resonance among viewers and echo people's real life experiences. People's necessity for stories allows viewers to accept the idea of blurred frontiers between public affairs and private interests.

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68   Iyengar, Shanto and Valentino, Nicholas A. (2000). "Who Says What? Source Credibility as a Mediator of Campaign Advertising." In *Elements of Reason: Cognition, Choice, and the Bounds of Rationality*. Lupia, Arthur, McCubbins, Mathew D., Popkin, Samuel L. (eds). Ed. Cambridge University Press. p. 109.

69   *El Candidato* and the beginning of 2000 represented for television and the *telenovelas* an evolution of two new ways in which this genre could operate. Since 2000, television companies in Mexico have started co-producing international *telenovelas* (such as the *narco telenovelas*). Another way that *telenovelas* had evolved is creating a web series – a series of short stories to be released on the Internet, mobile or cellular phones. These productions are low-budget series that are taking advantage of improved video streaming. They are appealing to independent producers but they can also be distributed directly through platforms such as *You Tube, Vimeo, Blip, and Dailymotion*. These web series have a very quick narrative, few genres and short episodes.

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HOW DO WE WRITE ABOUT PERFORMANCE IN SERIAL TELEVISION?

ELLIOTT LOGAN

ABSTRACT

Television studies has produced few sustained analyses of performance in serial television. Yet film studies scholarship has shown how attending to the integration of performances with other aspects of film style is crucial to the interpretation and appreciation of expression and meaning in filmed narrative fictions. However, as a particle form of filmed *serial* narrative, series television raises a number of questions about performance that will not necessarily be satisfyingly addressed by the direct adoption and application of approaches to writing about performance that have been honed in regard to film. How, then, do we write about performance in television serials in ways that recognise and accommodate the form's relationship to film, while at the same time appropriately acknowledging and responding to long-form television's serial status? To examine the difficulties and opportunities of approaching performance in serial television this way, the article conducts close readings of various pieces of television studies writing on performance, by scholars such as Jason Mittell, Sue Turnbull, George Toles, and Steven Peacock. Their work brings into view film and television's points of common relation, and the distinctive challenges, achievements, and rewards of appreciating the best television serials, and the performances in them.

KEYWORD

Two related aspects of serial television viewing and criticism warrant my question. The first is the way our involvement in the best serial television is strongly keyed to the presence of particular performers over the periods and rhythms of time available to such shows. The second is the strange fact that the peculiar nature of that involvement is rarely a central subject of writing in television studies, and so an important aspect of what matters to us about serial television is going overlooked. If the need to address this question requires further justification, there is ample to be found in a certain strand of writing on acting and performance in film studies, exemplified by the work of scholars such as, among others, Charles Affron, Lesley Stern, George Kouvaros, Andrew Klevan, V. F. Perkins, George Toles, and Alex Clayton. The value of such writing is modelled well by Klevan's *Film Performance: From Achievement to Appreciation*, which shows how attending closely to the presence and activity of individual performers is crucial to understanding and appreciating a range of filmmaking choices. For Klevan:

> interpretations mature when one responds to the performer's multifaceted relationships – not always prominent – to the surrounding dramatic environment. We may well be rewarded for concentrating on a performer as they *merely* turn a street corner, sit in a chair, touch a wall, move around a bedroom, or carry a bunch of flowers. . . . Interpretations unfold and complicate with our moment-by-moment experience of viewing the performer's activity. (2005: preface; original emphasis)

In light of such attention to film performance, this article examines how pieces of television studies criticism approach and handle performance in serial television drama. One aspect of what appears distinctive about acting and performance in serial dramas – especially ongoing ones – is not only the length of time that actors inhabit characters and that audiences are involved with them, but also the sense of a relatively 'open horizon' towards which such inhabitation and involvement each move, and the dense accumulation of fictional and narrational history upon which performances may come to draw (and that may, in turn, draw upon those performances). However, it is not my aim to present findings about instances of acting and performance in serial television as such. Instead, I follow Alex Clayton and Andrew Klevan's attention to the 'language and style' of criticism (2011). For Clayton and Klevan – themselves following Adrian Martin (1992) – 'coming "to close terms" with

matters of style and language [in writing about film] will yield a sharper recognition of the "*action* of critical writing", and in turn, a stronger sense of the achievements and potential of film criticism' (2011: 2; original emphasis). In similarly looking at the '*action* of critical writing' in the pieces examined below, I hope to illuminate various hesitancies, difficulties, and successes in television studies work related to the criticism of acting and performance in serial television drama. This matters because, as outlined above, close attention to the work of actors, and to their integration within the narrative and style of individual series, should become of crucial importance to the burgeoning field of stylistic and aesthetic analysis in television studies. At the same time as we might call for more writing that pays such attention, it is just as important that we attend with close, critical scrutiny to the writing that we currently do have, and might wish to modify or emulate in future work.

As noted, there is a large body of film studies writing on performance and acting in movies, but the same cannot be said of television studies and serial television. This situation can be seen to follow from the younger discipline's historical tendency to direct its attention away from the style and achievements of individual shows. And, as Jason Jacobs and Steven Peacock note, many studies of individual shows 'remain, for the most part, informed by approaches through which theory is mapped onto the television "text" to decipher its so-called coded meanings', and 'such work resists a dedicated and sustained scrutiny of television style, attempting to undertake "close textual analysis" without getting close to the text's integral compositional elements' (2013a: 2). This has implications for television studies' appreciation of performance in television fictions. These follow from Klevan's claim that performers should be considered a pivotal element of film style (2005). If television studies has historically been reticent about paying close attention to style in individual television programmes, then performance as an aspect of style will represent a particular corner of this wider neglect. As Jacobs notes, 'celebrity studies and accounts of style and narrative seem to bypass, somewhat hurriedly in embarrassment, what is I think for many viewers the primary aesthetic experience of television – fiction and non-fiction – which is the compelling presence of human beings in front of us' (2013: par. 2).

Such hesitancies and difficulties around this presence are on display throughout pieces of television studies writing that aim to give accounts of performance or characterisation in individual works of serial and series television. For example, Roberta Pearson explicitly advocates for inattention to the materiality of screen performance:

Television characters are to some extent autonomous beings; autonomous, that is, of the televisual codes and individual scenes/episodes that construct them, existing as a whole *only in the minds* of the producers and audience. . . . Anatomising the televisual character requires identifying the elements that constitute a character *abstracted from* the design of the text and existing in the story, that is, in the minds of producers and audiences, rather than conducting a close textual analysis of individual scenes/episodes/codes. (2007: 43; my emphasis)

It is of course the case that the significance or meaning of any particular characterisation in a television fiction – or a film fiction, for that matter – is in part a product of a viewer's involvement with it. As Alex Clayton and Andrew Klevan note, 'more often than not [film] criticism emphasises those qualities that are discovered through an *imaginative engagement with the text*, and with each other (through dialogue, during teaching)' (2011: 5; my emphasis). But the imaginative component of this engagement is not of such importance that it elides the centrality of the material work, in response to which our imaginative engagement takes shape, and in regard to which our individual modes of involvement and response might find inter-subjective accord, or reasoned disagreement (Gibbs and Pye 2005: 3–5).

Pearson's position also seems at odds with the ontology of characters in film and television fictions altogether, which demands close attention to their material realisation in works of film and television. As Klevan writes:

Attending to the moment-by-moment movement of performers . . . enhances our understanding of film characterisation. It encourages us to attend to a character's physical and aural details and reminds us, because we are prone to forget in our literary moods, of their ontological particularity in the medium of film. A living human being embodies a film character. (2005: 7)

Forgetting this, as Pearson calls for television studies scholars to do, has serious implications for our capacity to appreciate individual works. This can be seen in the way Jason Mittell approaches television characters (and so therefore also the performers who embody them) as a 'specific *narrative* element' (2015: 118; my emphasis). This view of characterisation strongly shapes Mittell's account of a climactic sequence

in the eleventh, penultimate episode of the first season of *Homeland* (2010–), in which secretly bipolar CIA agent Carrie Matheson (Claire Danes) has a psychotic breakdown ("The Vest" 1.11). Mittell describes Carrie's breakdown only as 'Claire Danes's manic performance', and characterises its significance this way:

Our sustained allegiance through her breakdown marks Carrie's shift as a mid-level behavior change, rather than a high-level moral shift—Carrie is still motivated by noble ethics and consistent beliefs, even if her actions and attitudes differ radically from where she started the season, and we believe the shift to be temporary, anticipating her renewed stability following psychiatric treatment. (2015: 135)

By understanding characters as a 'narrative element', Mittell tends not to give close attention to Danes's qualities and activities as a performer, and so his writing distances us from how our sense of the scene is keyed to these crucial elements. The writing here favours ready-made conceptual categories, and as a result the particular quality, nature, and significance of what we see onscreen is too quickly and broadly determined and rigidly defined. Alex Clayton inadvertently describes the tendency exhibited by television studies writing such as Mittell's quoted above, when he contrasts two film studies essays on *His Girl Friday* (1940), one by David Bordwell and Kristen Thompson, the other by Stanley Cavell. 'Problems result,' Clayton writes, 'from the way a ready taxonomy of terms . . . has been forged outside of and prior to any specific critical encounter and then *applied* as a descriptive vocabulary' (2011a: 32; original emphasis). The result is Mittell's reduction of the scene to a catalogue of categorical terms – 'mid-level behavior change', 'high-level moral shift'– all of which remain abstract, bereft of the particular weave of specific feelings and ideas that good performers unfold, and hold in tension, not only across a moment or a scene but throughout a work.

A brief account of the scene can illuminate what goes missing through approaches that forgo attention to the activity of its performers. Following her narrow survival of a terrorist bombing, Carrie's bipolar symptoms have begun to re-emerge. However, the tightening grip of Carrie's mania allows her to weave a narrative that points toward a (still obscure) terrorist motivation that suggests the attack she survived was merely the prelude to a more public and massively devastating event. This is a narrative Carrie literally pieces together out of colour-coded scraps of newspaper articles,

intelligence briefings, and other secret documents, separately insignificant shards that nearly cohere into something of clarifying meaning when her CIA mentor Saul (Mandy Patinkin) arranges them as a chronological mural on her private living room wall, a fragmentary history (at once global and personal) that promises some key to the mind of Carrie's terrorist nemesis. The sequence to which Mittell refers begins with Carrie inspecting her appearance in her bathroom mirror, applying makeup, putting in and removing earrings, and draping a scarf. This is in preparation to meet Marine Sergeant Nicholas Brody (Damian Lewis), the returned prisoner of war whom at the beginning of the season Carrie suspected of being a terrorist sleeper agent but with whom she has begun a love affair, and in whom she has confided the secret conspiracy that is (illicitly) pieced together on the living room wall. Expecting Brody at the door, Carrie opens it to find CIA assistant-director David Estes (David Harewood), who has been alerted to Carrie's manic behaviour by Brody. Estes enters the house with two security agents, and upon discovering the mural, orders it torn down to have its pieces secured at Langley while a distraught Carrie is forcibly restrained as her father and sister look on. As Carrie struggles, a mournful jazz piece replaces the diegetic sound, and the episode ends.

The summary 'manic performance', and the characterisation of our involvement in that performance in terms such as 'allegiance', does not satisfy the depths to be found in Danes's performance as Carrie, how it enriches not only our sense of the sequence itself but also of the series as a whole. As Estes and his men take down the mural, Danes's performance is extraordinary. Central to its force are the actress's extreme facial contortions, which pull, stretch, and compress her features in conflicting directions across her face. Claire Danes as Carrie typically presents a face of open beauty and sharp intelligence, usually just marked by a faintly furrowed brow in times of intent interior scrutiny of a puzzle, as when she conducts her own analysis of performance when placing Brody under surveillance in the season's early episodes. Here, though, everything is pushed out of shape, especially the mouth, the lower lip of which curls out and over the normally fine chin that, at the front of a jaw stretched taught, has now become a bulbous protrusion, the warped jutting of lip and chin creating deep troughs of shadow that elsewhere line the face below each cheek, breaking-up what is usually a pleasant unity. But our sense of Carrie's wrenching trauma is felt most forcefully through the sight of her eyes, which bulge violently, their accusatory stare sharpened by the jutting of Carrie's mascara-heavy eyelashes that stab-out against her pale skin.

In this way, Carrie's application of makeup in preparation for presenting herself to Brody amplifies the disfiguring effect of Danes's facial expressions, as if her desire to be seen a certain way provides here the basis for her awful collapse of self. Alongside these aspects of the performance, Carrie's screaming pleas for comprehension fade out and are replaced with jazz, removing the character's voice and so rendering her gestures especially strange, puppet-like. The choice is apt. It deepens the scene's presentation of Carrie's madness as a condition of disfigurement, and effects more than just a split between inner and outer: it confronts us with the absolute and complete inaccessibility of one within the other.

What Danes's performance allows the scene to capture is something of the unhinged and fully overwhelming horror that one must surely feel if one's sole anchor to a world of meaning and sense was impossible to share with the people in whose judgment and insight one should most be able to trust or at least speak to, that the mural being stripped from the wall is to Carrie the piece-by-piece dismantling of the most convincing evidence of the world's intelligibility to her, the evidence she needs to trust in her own fragile sanity. In a scene earlier in the episode, we see Carrie view the mural for the first time. It is the morning after her mania first became apparent to Saul, who has spent the night discovering pattern and order among the jumble of colour-coded fragments in which Carrie sensed significance but was unable to reveal meaning. As the one able to assemble the incomprehensible fragments into meaningful order upon the corkboard wall, Saul emerges as possessing the capacity to discover, recognise, and come to see from Carrie's viewpoint. Yet Patinkin exercises admirable restraint in his responses to Danes/Carrie, in doing so rescuing the sequence from the risk of simplistically valorising what is troubling and dangerous about Carrie's way of seeing. Clear gestures and tones of agreement and understanding are guarded by a refusal to too closely endorse or join any proposal. When Carrie tells the story of first losing her sanity while at college, Saul reserves the politely distanced sympathy of a stranger, while his eyes carry a care for her only deepened by this revelation of how poorly he has known her. Prior to Estes discovering the mural, Saul's capacity to look at Carrie this way generously preserves and makes publicly shareable Carrie's world of sense, rescuing her from isolation in the inaccessible privacy of madness.

By contrast, Carrie and Brody's failure to meet each other the same way in the episode's closing sequence effects the collapse of that world, and Carrie's fall into a condition in which she is unable to make sense of herself or of the world she was

trained to interrogate. That the world Carrie inhabits is now hostile and unreadable to her is represented by the passive unresponsiveness of the men Estes unleashes. So perhaps we are inclined to be unsympathetic to Estes, who in his grim refusals to entertain Carrie's ideas provides a performative counterpoint to Saul. Yet in a small but moving final touch, the episode's closing moments suggest a possible saving grace for Estes, in the way David Harewood has his character gently take Carrie by the shoulders, keeping hold on his patient tenderness despite her thrashings, to steer her away from the mural as it is taken apart. He averts his eyes from Carrie, and keeps hers from the mural's destruction. Given the circumstances of the fully serious breach of the nation's trust and security, and of *his* trust, the gesture might strike us as generous, taking time and care to allow Carrie some privacy while also shielding her from a painful sight. But Estes is of course also shielding himself from Carrie's breakdown; his seemingly instinctive consideration of Carrie's privacy and feeling shades into a (perhaps unconscious) need to veil his involvement in her disintegration. Similar is the passivity and distance on the part of Carrie's father and sister, whose objections to the intrusion of these men come late. The sudden, unexplained, and clearly hostile entry of these strangers into the home is greeted with no more than a neighbourly hello. And soon after, as Carrie is accosted and restrained, her family's gestures apparently in defence of her are somewhat less than impassioned, as if seeking the poor consolation of a restored state of calm and peace rather than the preservation of a loved one's sovereignty of mind and self. So not only does the sequence invite and reward close attention to the detail and significance of its actors' performances, it finds in such attention and detail its major subject and thematic interest. What is at stake in how we look to each other, or how we fail to look?

Some television studies writing on performance does promise to look closely at details of performance in the way exemplified by the film studies work cited above. Indeed, Sue Turnbull's work in this area directly draws upon the approach that Klevan models. One aim of Turnbull's essay on *Veronica Mars* (2004–2007) is to explore how the aspects of screen performance that Klevan's work illuminates might be seen to interact with serial television's specific conditions, structures, and attributes as an ongoing form composed of episodes and seasons. Turnbull takes Klevan to identify and analyse three dimensions of film performance: the narrative (relations of performer to plot), the melodramatic (relations of performer to place), and the comedic (relations of performer to the camera) (Turnbull 2011: 39). These categories provide the basis

from which Turnbull considers how performance and long-form television's serial attributes interact. Immediately after outlining the categories she derives from Klevan, Turnbull writes:

> What also has to be considered is how these various elements play out within the medium of television as opposed to that of film. For example, a long-form drama series like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or *Veronica Mars* may also involve an evolution in the performance of the actors across an extended period of production as well as an evolution of the character as necessitated by narrative choices on the part of the writers. A performer might be required to shift from being a jerk to being a romantic hero, from being a hard-nosed teen private eye to a vulnerable victim.
>
> There are other factors to be accounted for too, such as the ways in which the narrative trajectory of the show might change depending on the nature of the performances themselves, and the direction the writers choose to take as a result. (2011: 39)

In addition to these issues, Turnbull also notes other contextual contingencies that might inform performances and characterisations in a television serial, and our response to them, such as changes in network (as was the case with *Veronica Mars*), and various instances in which actors leave a show, whether they are replaced or not (2011: 39–40).

Turnbull is right to note these issues as possibly being important to appreciating specific shows. The aspects of performance in serial television she identifies remind us that performance provides a particular framework for considering the provisional aspects of achievement, interpretation, and judgment in television serials, which Jason Jacobs and Steven Peacock have argued is a central issue with which the criticism of such shows must contend (2013a: 6–9). However, the way in which Turnbull takes up and applies Klevan's approach to film performance tends to inhibit the capacity of her descriptions to illuminate just how such issues should be seen to matter to our appreciation of the chosen moments of *Veronica Mars*. The passage in which Turnbull moves from Klevan's work to serial television is crucial:

> Taking the lead from Klevan, it is then possible to consider these performances in relation to the elements of plot, place, and position in the frame

while recognizing that as a long-form television series, *Veronica Mars* frequently changes mode from thriller to melodrama to comedy not only across a season, but also within an episode, sometimes even within a scene, requiring considerable dexterity on the part of the performers. (2011: 40)

I have to state at this point that my issue with Turnbull's argument isn't that I think it is *wrong* as such; it is indeed the case that within the majority of American television fictions we will find such shifts of mode, and mood, at varying levels of the work, and that, in the more fine-grained instances, such fluctuations of tone and feeling will require 'considerable dexterity on the part of the performers' in order for success to be achieved and the always-present risk of failure seen off. What I think requires further illumination, though, is how the peculiar attributes or conditions of serial television should be seen to inform our appreciation of such modulations of mode, insofar as they are achieved through the handling and situation of performances within the broader context of the series' style across its length. Part of the problem here is the general nature of the terms and their largely unmodified adoption from film studies scholarship. This works in concert with the tendency to home-in on scenes and moments in such a way that the reader is given little sense of the longer-range qualities and achievements of the show's performers, a range across which the relations between seriality and performance Turnbull aims to explore take shape, even if their effects might culminate within moments.

These two aspects of the essay come into relief through comparison with Deborah Thomas's attention to interactions between the melodramatic and comedic in *Schindler's List* (1993). Thomas opens her account of the film by making the surprising claim that, 'although it is unthinkable that anyone would presume to describe *Schindler's List* as a comedy, Spielberg is nonetheless audacious in his use of humour, especially in the film's first hour' (2001: 42). Thomas discusses a scene in which Schindler (Liam Neeson) chides his Jewish business partner Itzhak Stern (Ben Kingsley) for allowing a one-armed factory worker, in front of Schindler's SS compatriots, to thank Schindler for his (life-saving) employment. The interaction between Schindler and Stern culminates in this exchange:

> Schindler: Did you happen to notice that that man had one arm?
> Stern: Did he?

Thomas writes of this moment:

> What is noteworthy is not just the fact that the implicit humour is shared by the two men at this point, but the way in which, when shortly afterwards the one-armed man is shot by a German soldier while at work shovelling snow, Schindler protests to a high-ranking Nazi acquaintance, in a scene intercut with the killing so that we see the blood spreading in the snow as they speak, that the man was a skilled machinist ('He was a metal-press operator – quite skilled'), echoing Stern's disavowal of the fact that the machinist was so obviously ill-suited to his job. What I wish to argue is that Stern in some sense stands in for Schindler as rescuer (by hiring a one-armed man, for example) until Schindler himself is ready to take on this role, using humour to educate him and set an example, and that Schindler increasingly comes to share Stern's position as the film progressively darkens and its humour is drained away....
>
> The strategy of draining humour from the film's narrative world as the war progresses and the horrors proliferate (while nonetheless echoing its earlier jokes in some way to remind us of the loss) applies not just to Stern and his interactions with Schindler, but to the ironic commentary of the film itself . . .
>
> . . . Indeed, the film as a whole may be deploying such a strategy in its early stages to help the viewer deal with what is to come. This in no way lessens the horror, but permits us a degree of ironic distance. (2001: 43–45)

Thomas balances descriptions and interpretations of discrete scenes, moments, and qualities with an eye to their integration within the wider patterning of the film, and the way this shapes its developments of story, tone, character, and theme. In this way, Thomas is able to at once home in on a moment while also moving 'outwards', small details allowing her to outline how Spielberg's film so deftly folds the melodramatic aspects of its world together with darkly shadowed comedic perspectives or aspirations. This deftness of tone and touch in both the film and the criticism (handled so adroitly, in fact, it is likely to be missed in either) is not appreciated for its own sake – as an empty display of remarkable skill – but for the particular way it serves to capture without tactlessly declaring an aspect of the film's tragedy, which lies in no small part in its many images of awfully and undeniably corrupted hope.

By contrast, Turnbull's final reading of a scene of *Veronica Mars* works to narrow our attention to and understanding of the television serial. This funnelling seems in conflict with the expansiveness – in relation to past and future – that is fundamental to the serial attributes Turnbull is interested in exploring. Of a domestic scene in which Veronica (Kristen Bell) and her father Keith (Enrico Colantoni) enjoy an impromptu barbecue, Turnbull writes:

> While [the prior] scene is clearly played for laughs, its comic effect is enhanced by the positioning of the camera which frames Keith as if on a stage performing for Veronica; the scene which follows, however, switches from comedy to melodrama half way through. As Keith cheerfully bops to the diegetic music while barbecuing the steaks on the verandah of their apartment block, Veronica shows him a photograph of a car parked at the Camelot motel, the one which belonged to whomever Jake Kane was meeting for his extra-marital tryst. Keith's face darkens as he looks at it. His jaw sets, the mood immediately changes. The camera moves in for an intense close-up of his face as he warns Veronica off the case. Her back is to us, but as he walks away, she turns toward the camera, stunned and puzzled. The comedy is over, and Veronica is again faced with the problem of discovering what is going on: the problem which is driving the thriller narrative. The close-up on her face confirms the seriousness of the moment. (2011: 46–47)

That final sentence is the endpoint of Turnbull's reading, leaving the analysis of the series on a brief account of the capacity of its creators and actors to achieve, within a single scene, a sharp turning of tone around a moment of dramatic revelation and withholding. Yet our thoughts are precisely left at that moment and with it alone; the reading of the scene seems to shed little light on the rest of the show surrounding it, or on how the peculiar part–whole relationship of the series should inform our sense of these gestures and their significance.

This is a problem because Turnbull's stated aim is to explore the utility of a particular film studies approach towards interactions between screen performance and the *serial* dimensions of *Veronica Mars*. If the passage above gives a sufficient account of the scene and the performances it describes, then the scene provides a poor example of the phenomenon being studied. This is because the performances within the scene appear to make no demands on the viewer that are distinctive of serial television. It's of course true that our understanding of what is going on here relies on our familiarity with the preceding story. But from Turnbull's account it is not clear how this should be understood any differently from the familiarity with past (and future) narrative events that was necessary to Thomas's reading of Schindler's brief interaction with Stern in Spielberg's stand-alone feature film.

A pertinent counter-example is Jacobs and Peacock's account of a moment of revelation that turns the mood of *In Treatment* (2008–2010). A psychoanalyst, Dr Paul Weston (Gabriel Byrne), confronts his patient Sunil (Irrfan Khan) with his suspicion that Sunil harbours 'hostile lusty intentions' towards his (Sunil's) daughter in-law, suspicions that have been building across the past nine sessions, the past nine episodes. However, anticipations of a dramatic confrontation – shared by Dr Weston and viewer alike – are drastically upset: Sunil 'finds the idea hysterically funny, tittering and hiccoughing words in fits of giggles' (Jacobs and Peacock 2013a: 8). The effect is that:

> In the world of the drama, the carefully negotiated roles of these two men's performances in front of one another, developed over weeks, have now become troublingly undefined. Sunil has not acted "as expected" by therapist and viewer alike, and our gradually advanced understanding of the man is called into question. A few seconds of silence and mumbled words bring the session to a close without satisfactory reconciliation. The effects of Sunil's brief burst of laughter hang in the air across subsequent episodes. (Jacobs and Peacock 2013a: 8)

For Jacobs and Peacock, the force and resonance of the moment depends fully on the series' handling of serial television's particular opportunities for involving the audience in the slow accretion of a mutual history between viewer, performers, and characters, achieved through the repeated patterning and minute adjustment of behaviour, attitude, style, and tone. Importantly, this is not a matter of duration or length alone. It is rather achieved through the peculiar rhythms and fragmentations of television's seriality, which allows viewers, performers, and characters to settle into familiar relations. Central also is serial television's provisionality, which allows for such relations – and the understandings arrived through them – to be radically revised by previously

unforeseen or unplanned turns of event, performance, style, or tone, and for the discoveries found therein to further ramify into the future.

In George Toles's essay on *Mad Men* (2007–), the acclaimed series is seen to achieve rapport between provisional completeness, an ongoing condition of being unfinished, and our involvement with Jon Hamm as Don Draper. A close relationship between the serial qualities of the show and those of its subject matter informs the critic's appreciation of the performance. 'Don Draper and the Promises of Life' makes no explicit claims about serial television's particular structures and demands, indeed finding most of its reference points in film convention; there is little if anything made forthright about the fact of episodic or seasonal production, no considerations of the peculiar issues of re-casting, or of other unexpected contingencies that crop up in productions of such length. Toles instead approaches the material in a way that is of a piece with his many brilliant essays on film. In both this essay and those others, his elegant prose dramatises the process through which the film or television work guides the way the viewer occupies and inhabits the fluctuating modulations of perspective, feeling, and thought involved in our attachments to performances, characters, and scenes as they unfold, while being constantly keyed to the ways those experiences of individual parts press upon and inform our sense of the work as a larger whole.

That Toles appears to approach the description of films and television serials in similar ways with equal success might seem to suggest that the two forms call for no substantial difference of approach. However, the conditions and attributes of serial television can nevertheless be seen to inform Toles's account of our involvement with Draper, and of the significance of that involvement. Toles writes: 'Our image of Don Draper, and our way of thinking about him, will consistently return to his "man in a grey flannel suit" fitness for inspection. The composed outward form is an endlessly renewable source of beguilement' (2013: 148). And soon after, Toles characterises the 'central paradox' that holds our fascination with Don: it consists in 'ever-expanding dimensions within what continues to impress the viewer as a tight, restrictive outline' (2013: 149). As I have noted, elsewhere in the essay Toles involves himself in attending to and describing the moment-by-moment passage of scenes, gestures, and moods in a way no different to the kind of attention and description demanded elsewhere of him by, for example, *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) or *Fargo* (1996). Yet the two quotes above point to the way in which our continuing involvement in Hamm's

ongoing realisation of Draper has its basis in qualities that both lend themselves to, and are afforded by, long-form television's serial structures of unfolding, and the kind of viewing to which those give rise. Those structures, and forms of viewing, rely on the relative continuity of a 'composed outward form', but must maintain or sustain an 'endlessly renewable source of beguilement' within that form. Indeed, an elegant way to describe the challenge facing the creators of serial television is to imaginatively and compellingly realise 'ever-expanding dimensions within what continues to impress the viewer as a tight, restrictive outline'. That this aspect of serial television leaves things, including performances and their various dimensions of significance, 'unfinished' is captured in Toles's final sentences:

> And yet Don Draper's drive to find placement, belief, a sure center about his helplessness that would allow him to give himself back whole to those he might finally learn to love, is still intact. He knows there are further moves to make, moves that will count for something, in due time. (2013: 173)

'Further moves to make, moves that will count for something, in due time.' This aspect of television serials – their ongoing expansion into an unformed future – poses substantial challenges to the criticism of such works (O'Sullivan 2013), and of especially compelling qualities and moments of performance within them. In the face of a particular difficulty that this expansiveness presents, Peacock finds an opportunity for meaningful prose *expressiveness* in his essay on relationships between performance, genre, and serial form in *Deadwood* (2004–2006). The essay considers how *Deadwood* treats lines and demarcations – 'the boundaries of language, the physical border of setting and locale, and the limits of characterisation' – through the show's handling of performance, in particular the rendition of types familiar from movie Westerns. For Peacock, 'The richness of *Deadwood*'s involvement with the central syntax of the Western is inextricably linked to its status as a work of television' (2010: 96). This link consists in the way *Deadwood* comes to take advantage of long-form television's capacity for particular rhythms and forms of expansiveness. Peacock writes:

> In its distinctive melding of arcane and profane language, the series explores the borderline meeting point of civilised and wild ways. Equally, in extensive monologues and involved exchanges, its perform-

ers explore the limits of verbal communication. The characters adopt and adapt cultivated forms of language, coming from beyond and through the porous boundaries of the camp, to shape their negotiations.

The expansiveness of television's serial form allows for a gradual and intricate development of these negotiations. In a long-running serial drama (and in a settlement on the edge of the frontier) there is an abundance of time for talk. *Deadwood*'s heightened language, at once florid and foul, achieves depth and complexity over the length of the series. . . . Over time and in sustained, subtle yet striking acts of delivery, the primary shock of profanity and the disorienting flux of register give way to a sense of fluency, of rhythms shaped by arch or nuanced expression, flutters of gesture and fanciful patter, and timely terse jabs of curse words. (2010: 99–100).

This passage comes early in Peacock's essay, and is followed later by sustained engagements with the particular details and achievements of moments from the series, appreciating the work by Ian McShane as Al Swearengen, Jeffrey Jones as A. W. Merrick, and Timothy Olyphant as Seth Bullock. The above quotation was chosen for analysis instead of those later parts of the essay because it shows Peacock respecting how moments are so important to the intensity of our involvement in the long-running series, while at the same time conveying and sharing a sense of the more ambient kind of memory-impression left on us by the ways in which the show's performers realise the lives of its characters over time. The writer's challenge is to somehow compress and evoke in a short space of words those qualities of the work, and our experience of it, that develop and find their significance in matters of duration and gradual accretion handled through repetition and variation.

Crucial to Peacock's success in meeting this challenge is the expressiveness of his prose. A somewhat reductive summary of the propositional content the paragraphs put forward is that, across the episodes and seasons, our increasing familiarity with the performers bring us to a changed manner of involvement in the fiction, and that this development of our involvement in the show is pivotal to our understanding and appreciation of it. But in addition to advancing this claim, the non-semantic aspects of the writing *embody* just such a development, and so bring it home to us as a strongly felt *sense*.

The account of *Deadwood*'s 'heightened language' is at first marked by hard, sharp sounds that contribute to a sense of difficult-to-negotiate enjambment in parts of the passage's syllabic structure. (I am reminded of the traffic jam that greets our slow arrival in the Deadwood camp at the show's beginning.) Following 'sustained, subtle yet striking acts', the phrase 'primary shock of profanity' is able to convey, through its repeated alliteration of the hard 'p' sound, a sense of being struck over and over, as if weathering an assault. This sense is not just heightened but is in fact initially facilitated by the conjunction of 'striking' and 'acts', which puns on the fall of an axe blow, as if echoing the violence of our introduction to the series' characters and world in its opening episodes. (And within this, the unresolved relationship caught in 'sustained yet striking'. The first word's second syllable demands drawing out, 'yet' the choice of the third word requires in speaking a relatively hard, fast impact, the language verbally enacting the tension between the enduring and the transient, which is precisely the serial quality at issue in the matter of expansiveness within a work composed of fragmentary but connected moments.)

By the final parts of the passage, though, we have transitioned to more fluid imagery and feeling through word choices that achieve effects expressive of familiar modes of refinement and pleasing design. This follows the relatively harsh sense of trying to find ways of making things fit in 'disorienting flux of register', Peacock's potentially tongue-tripping turn, at once elegant but pressingly crowded. The five syllables of the first word are crammed-in and demand a sharp shift of gears for the two monosyllabic words that follow, only for Peacock to finish with 'register', the trick of which is tied up in the word simultaneously making available either its noun or verb sense, the proper expression requiring we get right its context. So the harmonious forms and patterns of the culminating clauses come as a relief, offering a sense of arrival at a place now pleasantly graspable and in that way seemingly familiar. 'Rhythms shaped by arch or nuanced expression' gives graceful form to its evocation of a purposive shaping now coming into view. The upward inclination of 'arch' meets the material form it names and brings to mind, harmoniously answered in a mirrored balance by 'nuanced', the downward pitch of the first syllable forming its own inverted arch with the rising tone as we move through the second part of the word. A kind of symmetry is formed through a repetition that marks a difference.

The prose further embodies the serial developments of varied repetition in its final two turns of phrase, which directly

point to examples of the series' 'rhythms shaped by arch or nuanced expression': 'flutters of gesture and fanciful patter, and timely terse jabs of curse words'. The first is a further sign we have reached a stage in which language no longer confronts or grinds against our reading (or listening), as the show's language does in its early parts, but now reaches us with a light and delicately pleasing touch. Yet in the final words, the dark shadow of looming violence remains, reminding us of the performers' capacities in this long-running series to upset too-easily settled assumptions: the alliterative rhythm of 'timely terse jabs' conveys the sense of an actor's deliberate yet delicate timing, skilfully executing convention in the manner of a well-practised athlete, here a boxer, a choice that refines the image into a fitting picture of disciplined aggression. Yet the repetition is upset by 'jabs', which at once breaks the pattern while further developing it, revealing its point to be the (violent) upset of expectation. And further, the evocation of crude violence is given one more turn of the screw with the decorous 'curse words', which – not unlike Swearengen's 'grubby long johns visible beneath the Prince Albert suit' (Jacobs 2006: 11) – enfolds vulgar sentiment within a polite façade, a surface smoothed by a choice of words.

The pieces of television studies writing examined here each demonstrate how the discipline writes about performance in serial television. And, to borrow from William Rothman, they show that television studies does not speak in one voice. Indeed, the diversity of the assembled approaches and attitudes to the study of performances in serial television, with which I have found both fault and favour, sounds an important warning against what is surely one tempting response to the question with which I began, which would be to sign a safe and absolute prescription of method. Instead, the pieces of criticism that I claim are exemplary – for the deftness and depth with which they understand and communicate richly achieved relationships between performances and serial television form – suggest a more nebulous critical aspiration, or principle. Christopher Ricks gives it eloquent voice when, in his essay 'Literary Principles as Against Theory', he suggests this idea of intelligence as against 'intellectuality': 'Intelligence, as both understood and evinced by Lawrence, aspires to be continuous with that which it works upon' (1996: 314). The aspiration to be continuous with that which one works upon – if there is need to mark a line of distinction between the writing favoured above and that which is not, I would draw it along this edge.

To conclude, I will make one more comment on Peacock's writing about *Deadwood*. In our reading of his phrases and words – especially if we allow ourselves the pleasure of speaking them aloud – we are involved in an experiential process akin to our tracing and responding to *Deadwood*'s own ways of settling and fluctuating: through forms of language and its performance that do not achieve immediate clarity, but rather make deepened intelligibility a matter of close involvement, attention, and absorption over time. By doing so, the best television serials, and their criticism quoted above, each earn and keep our appreciative intimacy.

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PROPHETIC VISIONS, QUALITY SERIALS: *TWIN PEAKS'* NEW MODE OF STORYTELLING

MIKHAIL L. SKOPTSOV

ABSTRACT

Following the April 1990 debut of *Twin Peaks* on ABC, the vision - a sequence of images that relates information of the narrative future or past – has become a staple of numerous network, basic cable and premium cable serials, including *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (WB), *Battlestar Galactica* (SyFy) and *Game of Thrones* (HBO). This paper argues that *Peaks* in effect had introduced a mode of storytelling called "visio-narrative," which draws on ancient epic poetry by focusing on main characters that receive knowledge from enigmatic, god-like figures that control his world. Their visions disrupt linear storytelling, allowing a series to embrace the formal aspects of the medium and create the impression that its disparate episodes constitute a singular whole. This helps them qualify as 'quality TV', while disguising instances of authorial manipulation evident within the texts as products of divine internal causality. As a result, all narrative events, no matter how coincidental or inconsequential, become part of a grand design. Close examination of *Twin Peaks* and *Carnivàle* will demonstrate how the mode operates, why it is popular among modern storytellers and how it can elevate a show's cultural status.

KEYWORDS

By the standards of traditional detective fiction, which necessitates rational explanations and does not permit fantastic elements (Todorov 49), *Twin Peaks* constitutes a failure. Though FBI Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle McLachlan), the serial's main protagonist, uses some logical methods in the course of crime solving, such as analyzing forensic evidence, he also openly applies intuition and dreaming. Surprisingly, his non-rational methods not only help resolve the Laura Palmer murder investigation, the series' initial central story arc, but also foretell his foray into an otherworldly realm called *The Black Lodge* in the show's final episode. This combination of dreams and investigative elements arguably characterizes the show as specifically an oeuvre of art film director David Lynch. Many of his films, such as *Blue Velvet*, *Lost Highway* and *Inland Empire*, deliberately blur distinctions between real life and dreams by focusing on characters that are both dreamers and investigators.

Simon Riches aptly defines these protagonists as 'knowledge *seekers*' that 'uncover concealed information.' (27) He asserts that Cooper, however, is distinct from Lynch's other knowledge seekers, because their dreaming is separate from acquisition of investigative knowledge, while Cooper's dreams 'provide him with knowledge of the world outside of his mind' and so inform his real life investigation. (29) It is true that Cooper receives external knowledge. For instance, the first major dream sequence on the show, which occurs at the end of Episode 2, introduces Cooper to multiple characters that he had never previously seen in real life, such as the mysterious one-armed man MIKE (Al Strobel) and the long-haired BOB (Frank Silva), who is ultimately revealed to be Laura's killer.

Rather than a product of his subconscious then, Cooper's dream constitutes a 'vision', an experience '...in which a personage, thing, or event appears vividly or credibly to the mind, although not actually present, often under the influence of a divine or other agency.' (Random House) By this rationale, Cooper's uniqueness lies in his qualification as a visionary – someone with the ability to receive visions – or, more specifically, as a 'shaman detective' that 'receives guidance in his investigations from intuitive, extra-rational sources of information.' (Bulkeley 2013 69) However, Riches' claim overlooks the existence of *Dune*'s Paul Atreides, an earlier Lynch protagonist whose dreams predict future events. More importantly, Cooper is not the sole visionary in *Twin Peaks*. Laura's mother Sarah (Grace Zabriskie) is actually the first to demonstrate the ability to see visions.

Later on, one learns that other characters, including Laura herself and possibly The Log Lady, are visionaries as well.[1] But while Cooper's ability is not unique for Lynch protagonists, its application within the serial television format was unprecedented at the time. Appearing as audio-visual messages with crucial information about the past and future, the visions of the multiple protagonists constantly disrupted the story's chronological progression. This allowed Lynch to develop what Kelly Bulkeley describes as 'an extended network of dream influences and interactions unfolding back and forth through time and across different domains of reality.' (2013 67) Unlike the largely sequential narratives of episodic sitcoms and long-running soap operas, *Peaks* would then possess an unconventional narrative structure that endowed the show's narrative in its entirety with a sense of unity and predetermination.

In effect, the show introduced an innovative mode of television storytelling that I term *visio-narrative*. Today, it is one of the most popular modes of storytelling within prime time serials. Using case studies of *Peaks* and *Carnivàle*, this paper intends to illustrate how the model initially functioned, how it has evolved through appropriation by other programs and why it is appealing to numerous storytellers today. Examining it will lead to a better understanding of how modern television programs are constructed and culturally evaluated.

A POETICS OF VISIO-NARRATIVE

At its core, visio-narrative has three interconnected components: the vision, the visionary and the source. The vision is the message, while the visionary is its receiver and the source – its possibly omniscient sender. Their interaction suggests that all events proceed according to a plan, that characters must fulfill their destiny, so nothing is incidental. Figure 1 illustrates a wide spectrum of network, basic cable and premium cable programs that come to feature these elements from the 1990s through the 2010s. Like *Peaks*, many of them, such as *Lost* and *Battlestar Galactica*, tend to fall under the label of *quality TV* within scholarly discourses. Note that I refer to the associations the term *quality* had gained primarily in the 1980s-90s, where it came to specify programs that distinguished themselves from traditional episodic and serial shows by defying or reworking their genre and narrative

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1 Unlike Cooper, none of them are actual professional investigators. So, the term 'shaman detective' will designate a subset of the 'visionary' that specifically works in or with law enforcement and uses visions to solve cases.

conventions, resulting in innovative new forms. (Dunleavy 32-33) In this sense, the notion of what quality is relies on comparative distinction.

As Robert Thompson puts it, 'quality TV back then was best defined by what it was not: *Knight Rider*, *MacGyver* and the rest of 'regular' TV.' (xvi) If *Peaks* qualifies as quality on the basis of its distinction from traditional television, then this status is at least partially attributable to its innovative visio-narrative storytelling. Arguably, the most crucial element to the mode is the visionary. Typically a main, if not *the* main, protagonist within a series, he is fundamental to a program's central narrative premise. To make a show around a visionary would then be equivalent to making unconventional quality television. As one can see from the chart, after *Twin Peaks* it becomes fairly popular to build shows around lead characters capable of seeing visions.

SERIES	RUNTIME	NETWORK	VISIONARIES
Twin Peaks	1990-91	ABC	Dale Cooper, Sarah Palmer, Madeline Ferguson
The X-Files	1993-02	FOX	Fox Mulder, Dana Scully
Babylon 5	1994-98	PTEN/TNT	Virtually all main characters
Millennium	1996-99	FOX	Frank Black
Buffy:The Vampire Slayer	1997-03	WB/UPN	Buffy Summers
Charmed	1998-06	WB	Phoebe Halliwell
Angel	1999-04	WB	Allen Doyle, Cordelia Chase
The Dead Zone	2002-07	USA	Johnny Smith
Carnivàle	2003-05	HBO	Ben Hawkins, Justin Crowe
Lost	2004-10	ABC	John Locke, Desmond Hume
Battlestar Galactica	2004-09	SCY-FY	Laura Roslin, Gaius Baltar
Medium	2005-11	NBC/CBS	Allison Dubois
Heroes	2006-10	NBC	Peter Petrelli, Isaac Mendez
Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles	2007-09	FOX	Sarah Connor
Kings	2009	NBC	David Sepherd, Silas Benjamin
Flashforward	2009-10	ABC	Virtually all main characters
Game of Thrones	2011-—	HBO	Bran Stark, Rickon Stark
The Legend of Korra	2012-14	NICK	Avatar Korra
Hannibal	2013-—	NBC	Will Graham
iZombie	2015-—	CW	Liv Moore
Twin Peaks	1990-91	ABC	Dale Cooper, Sarah Palmer, Madeline Ferguson

△ FIGURE 1

Perceived as a form of extrasensory perception, intuition, precognition or clairvoyance, the visionary's ability is typically innate and inexplicable. Cooper, for instance, appears to have the ability by the time the series begins, and makes no attempt to define when or how he gained it. Similarly, Londo Mollari of the sci-fi series *Babylon 5* establishes in the first episode that his entire race, the Centauri, have a natural aptitude for prophetic dreams that inform them when and how they will die. Londo thus knows that he will die strangling an enemy twenty years in the future, an event that is depicted literally in the 17th episode of the third season. By validating the external information visions provide, shows entice viewers to accept the premise that a character can simply receive visions without any further clarification. This also serves to distinguish visions from similar though explicable elements, such as vivid hallucinations.

Despite how fundamentally irrational visions are, some shows ground them in an internal logic. For example, Johnny Smith, the main protagonist and visionary of the *Dead Zone*

series, unlocks his ability only after he sustains brain damage from a car accident in the premiere episode, providing him with access to the brain's normally inaccessible 'dead zone.' This ostensibly makes his mind so active, that he is able to perceive the future and the past. Similarly, Will Graham, the lead of *Hannibal*, possesses a psychological disorder that provides him with the capacity for 'pure empathy.' By empathizing with other people and imagining their actions, he is able to visually recreate in his mind past narrative events with pinpoint accuracy. Neither explanation truly holds up to logical scrutiny, but it does help the programs avoid explicitly supernatural associations with the fantasy genre.

Shows also tend to impose certain conditions in regard to how and when visionaries receive their messages. Arguably, the most common condition is sleep, allowing for a presentation of surreal dream sequences. In addition to Cooper and Mollari, the visionaries of *Buffy, Terminator, Heroes, Lost, Battlestar Galactica* and *Carnivàle* among many others regularly receive prophetic dream visions. An alternative approach requires an awake visionary to actively induce the vision by coming in physical contact or close proximity with a particular person, object or space, on which the vision will then focus. The aforementioned Johnny Smith provides an excellent illustration of this, as touching anyone or anything with his bare hands can induce a vision, a point that leads him to wear gloves, so as to control access to his ability.

Visionaries aren't necessarily limited to only one type of reception. Cooper repeatedly receives visions when not sleeping, such as when the character of the Giant appears to him in the second season. And though he mostly gains visions through active physical contact, Smith occasionally has prophetic dreams. Whatever their methods, visionaries can receive two types of messages: 'connotative' and 'denotative.' The 'connotative' vision appears as a series of symbolic and cryptic images representing literal events that have occurred in the series' past or will have occurred in the future. The transmitter deliberately obfuscates its true meaning, providing the visionary and the audience with the motivation to decipher it. As more narrative events transpire over time, the vision's literal meaning grows clearer, though it is often possible to realize this only through the benefit of hindsight.

Contrariwise, the 'denotative' visions literally depict narrative events that have, will or could take place, leaving only the context surrounding them ambiguous. In this case, there tends to be a clear delineation into past and future sub-types. Past-oriented visions either raise questions and mysteries about the past that compel the visionaries to unravel them

in the present or, conversely, resolve questions about past events that are relevant to the present. Future-oriented ones, meanwhile, usually prompt the visionary to change the future by averting a disastrous or undesirable outcome that is yet to take place. Much of the intrigue in the first season of *Heroes*, for instance, revolves around the question of whether or not the main characters will be able to prevent a nuclear explosion that will claim millions of lives sometime in the future, as prophetic painter Isaac Mendez foresees in his vision.

In addition to these intratextual narrative effects, the different vision types can produce extra-textual cognitive effects. Sternberg defined them as the three 'universals of narrative.' Two of them, 'curiosity' and 'suspense', refer to a state of mental restlessness that occurs in a reader due to a lack of narrative information relative to a specific tense – the past in the case of the former and the future in the case of latter (Sternberg 1978 65). While suspense makes the reader wonder about the outcome of a future conflict, curiosity requires him to hypothesize about previous 'gaps' and ambiguities in the narrative and make sense of them through retrospection. 'Surprise', the third universal, occurs in conjunction with curiosity when the narrative reveals to the reader his misreading of past events and '...enforces a corrective rereading in late recognition.' (Sternberg 2001a: 117 quoted in Sternberg 2003 327) A given vision can easily produce multiple effects.

The connotative vision, whether about the past or the future, evokes viewer curiosity by inviting active speculation in the present about its literal meaning, while the past-oriented denotative vision accomplishes this by specifically raising questions about the past. Both deliberately withhold answers, compelling viewers to keep watching the series in hopes of obtaining them. Subsequently, they surprise audiences, the former by revealing the literal meaning behind the previously veiled symbolism and the latter by resolving questions and properly contextualizing the vision events. All this prompts retrospection and re-cognition of the vision images. Future-oriented denotative visions, on the other hand, raise suspense by appealing to a viewer's prospection. In this case, the viewer needs to keep watching to alleviate the sense of restlessness he feels from knowing a narrative's potential future outcome and wondering, if the visionary can alter it.

Providing anachronous glimpses into the future or the past that disrupt the linear progression of the narrative, visions evidently function in a manner comparable to prolepsis and analepsis. I refer to Gerard Genette's definition of 'prolepsis' or flash-forward as 'any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place

later.' Meanwhile, 'analepsis' or flashback refers to 'any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment.' (40). Defined this way, flashbacks and flash-forwards divide a text into past, present and future segments. Once the anachronous segment play out, the text resumes narrating the present.

A key difference then is that visions collapse the temporal divisions, for the anachronous segments are presented within the frame of a character's learning of them within the present. As such, unlike flashbacks, which traditionally possess a connection to a character's memory and so represent information he already knows in the present (Currie 204), visions always provide the visionary, if not the audience, with new narrative information. And unlike flash-forwards, which render the audience cognizant of what will take place in the future, while leaving the characters in the present ignorant, visions allow a present character to see events that should or could happen ahead of the time they happen. The formal execution of visions is also fairly different. Like the present-day sections of the narrative, flashback and flash-forward segments in serial television primarily ascribe to the 'classic realist' mode of storytelling.

Predominant in the Classical Hollywood cinema and mainstream television drama, this mode aims to 'use film conventions (of narrative, genre and style) to create a plausible, coherent narrative world (or diegesis), and to use film techniques to generate and maintain audience belief in this.' (Dunleavy 79) This allows an unobtrusive style of storytelling that convinces the viewer that what he is seeing is real by making imperceptible formal aspects that call audience attention to the constructedness of the screen text. (Allen 64) In particular, editing becomes crucial to sustaining audience belief in the illusion of reality. To this end, screen texts utilize the form of invisible editing, which involves creating eyeline matches, following the 180-degree rule and cutting on action, so as not to detract the viewer from the narrative. (Allen 66; Dunleavy 80) This allows for a linear progression of the narrative from scene-to-scene.

Naturally, the transitions between a present-day sequence and a flashback or flash-forward segment can violate the classic realist mode. The flashback in particular is associated with dissolves and fades, which visibly indicate the passage of time on-screen and draw attention to editing as a storytelling technique (Hayward 133-134) However, following the transition, the text resumes the classical mode until the anachronous segment concludes. So, with the exception of the transitions, the classic mode remains dominant. Foregrounding of formal

elements, on the other hand, is frequent in visions. Common techniques include shifts in editing style and sound design. In addition, connotative visions regularly include narrative elements that blatantly contradict the classic realist segments that precede and follow them. This codes them as unreal or non-literal in relation to the narrative diegesis. The case studies will show further how such elements operate within a serial.

CASE STUDIES: TWIN PEAKS TO CARNIVÀLE

As I said in the beginning, *Twin Peaks* introduced the visio-narrative model, so it makes sense to examine how the series uses visions to construct a serial narrative. For this, I will look at two from the first season – Sarah Palmer's waking vision of BOB in Episode 1 and Cooper's dream vision in Episode 2. The first takes place when Sarah and Laura's friend Donna bond in their grief over Laura's death. While hugging Donna, Sarah sees something that shocks her. There is a cut to a first person shot and for three brief seconds we see what Sarah sees: BOB crouching behind Laura's bed. This cryptic image marks BOB's first official appearance on the series. The camera quickly zooms in closer and a jarring sound effect resembling a pipe organ transmits Sarah's shock to the audience before the scene cuts back to Sarah screaming in terror. Rather than editing, the scene uses camerawork and aural cues to formally distinguish this sequence from the aesthetic norms of the classic realist mode it adhered to previously.

The sequence makes one curious to know, who the man behind Laura's bed was and if he was really there, while also raising the question of whether or not Sarah had a hallucination. This entices the audience to keep watching the series, so as to learn the truth. Cooper's dream vision in the next episode sheds some light on the mystery of BOB. It establishes that the man Sarah saw is real, that BOB is his name, and that he was once a friend of a one-armed man named MIKE. Cooper's dream retroactively establishes that Sarah had a connotative waking vision and while builds on it narratively. Formally, however, it differentiates itself from Sarah's waking vision via fades, dissolves and other techniques that call attention to the process of editing itself, while distorting or heightening character voices to call attention to the artificiality of on-screen sound. This also frames the sequence as distinct from the invisible editing and audible dialogue that pervades every previous scene. So, if Sarah's vision remains

within the bounds of reality, Cooper's takes place within the dream world.

Roughly, one can break down the dream into three parts. The first part features multiple fade-in and fade-out dissolves between images of Cooper in bed, an image of Cooper in the Red Room and a scene from the Pilot, with Sarah running down the stairs yelling Laura. Here, we see it in slow-motion, Sarah's voice is distorted. Then there's a series of quick cuts with flashes or flickers of light that intercut Sarah descending with a shot of BOB at Laura's Bed from Sarah's vision, as well as shots of dead Laura and a bloody towel from the Pilot. Part 2 commences as the sequence settles on MIKE, who recites the poem *Fire Walk with Me*. Multiple dissolves intercut this with Cooper lying in bed before transitioning to BOB, who seems to communicate with MIKE and Cooper from another time and place.

Part 2 ends with a shot of candles in a circle going out as the show dissolves to the Red Room for an extended sequence that composes Part 3. The Red Room segment, where Cooper, now an older man, meets the odd-looking Little Man (Michael J. Anderson), a dwarf in a red suit, and a girl who resembles Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee), both of whom speak in riddles, largely stands alone. If the preceding segments stylistically deviated from classic realism via editing, the final Lodge segment accomplishes this through sound design, while resuming the invisible editing style. Unlike Cooper, the Little Man and the Girl speak with voices so highly distorted and deliberately unrealistic that the episode provides subtitles to help viewers understand them. Their largely nonsensical dialogue accentuates the unreality of the scene. Towards the end, the Girl comes up to Cooper and whispers something in his ear.

We cut to Cooper awakening in his bedroom. He calls Sheriff Truman (Michael Ontkean) and claims that he knows who killed Laura Palmer. But instead of immediately sharing the answer, Cooper instead demands that Truman wait until morning. The lack of immediate clarity to what Cooper sees and experiences elicits audience curiosity, imploring the viewer to watch the next episode. However, after recapping his dream in the beginning of Episode 3, Cooper claims to have forgotten, who killed Laura, denying Truman and the viewers immediate satisfaction of curiosity. Nonetheless, Cooper has resolved to understand his dream's meaning, stating that the key to solving the murder lies in decoding his dream: '...my dream is a code waiting to be broken. Break the code, solve the crime.'

The series maintains audience curiosity and links the resolution of the central question of 'Who killed Laura Palmer?' to the resolution of the numerous questions that arise from

Cooper's dream, such as: 'Who are BOB and MIKE? Where did they come from? What is the Red Room? Why does the Dwarf say all the things he does?' This invites the viewer to follow Cooper's advice and decode the dream's message by watching subsequent episodes of the series, then placing them in context with the vision through retrospection and re-cognition. As I mentioned previously, multiple shots in Part 1, all of which reference Laura's murder and BOB, are from the previous two episodes. By showing them alongside new material of MIKE, BOB and the Red Room, the dream vision establishes a connection between the events they reference and indicates that it has a direct connection to Sarah's waking vision of BOB.

One can infer from all this that BOB knew Laura, has been to her bedroom and ultimately murdered her. Additionally, every passing episode reveals that Cooper's dream symbolically foretold multiple future narrative developments. For example, the Dwarf has a cryptic line of dialogue concerning the girl who resembles Laura: 'She is my cousin, but doesn't she look just like Laura Palmer?' In hindsight, one can see that the Little Man was obviously referring to the first appearance of Laura's identical-looking cousin Madeline Ferguson (also Sheryl Lee) in Episode 3, underlining her status as both Laura's relative and doppelganger. Later on, Cooper tracks down Gerard, the One-Armed Man first seen in his dream. He initially denies any knowledge of Cooper's dream or the name MIKE. Subsequent episodes, however, establish that MIKE is a spirit that takes over Gerard's body, confirming that Cooper's dream was a vision.

MIKE corroborates his suspicion that BOB, whom MIKE defines as a spirit similar to himself, is Laura's killer. Similarly, BOB swears that he will kill again in the dream. In Episode 14, he fulfills this claim by murdering Madeline. Finally, Cooper's appearance in the Black Lodge as an older man strongly implies that he will travel there in the future, foretelling his real-life journey in the series finale. As both visions' information is repeatedly validated by real-life developments, the series gives the impression that everything in the narrative is known or planned in advance by the vision sources. This makes evident that visions result in an unconventional temporality that compounds the present time, in which a visionary learns of an event's occurrence, with the time a past event had occurred and/or the time a future event will occur within the story.

Multiple shows of the 1990s-early 2000s clearly build on the *Peaks* model. However, only a few, such as *Babylon 5* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, use visio-narrative for serial narration. Instead of creating non-chronological linkages across disparate episodes, visions in procedurals like *Millennium*,

Angel and *The Dead Zone* paradigmatically serve a key role in the set-up and resolution of an enclosed hour-long plotline anchored by a shaman detective.[2] The need for episodic closure resulted in these shows' visions largely lacking in narrative ambiguity and, in turn, the ability to elicit audience curiosity or foster speculation and decoding.[3] As viewers can rest comfortably knowing that an episode will have fully explained a vision's literal meaning by the end, they have no reason to actively engage with the text. This 'vision-of-the-week' format dominated until the debut of HBO's 1930s period fantasy drama *Carnivàle.*

Focusing on the conflict between Oklahoma carnie Ben Hawkins (Nick Stahl) and Californian evangelical minister Justin Crowe (Clancy Brown), who represent the opposing forces of good and evil, the show marks the return of visions to seriality and ambiguity. Of all the shows that utilize the model, it possesses arguably the highest number of serial visions to date, with a frequency of at least one per episode. While *Twin Peaks* had only three visions in the entire first season, *Carnivàle* features four in the pilot episode alone. Most prominent is the 'cornfield dream', which recurs in numerous variations throughout the entire series. Each depicts two characters, one of which stalks the other on a dark, stormy night through a cornfield. As a rule, the pursuer is Justin, while the man he chases is either Ben or his father Henry Scudder (John Savage). This allows for a division by character into Ben variations and Scudder variations.

For this study, I will focus on the very first vision – a 33-second long Scudder variation from the premiere episode *Milfay*. Following a cryptic prologue, the series immediately throws the audience into the dream without any character or plot set-up. Featuring extremely rapid editing, it intercuts 12 shots depicting the cornfield narrative event with about 21 shots depicting different events from subsequent episodes in the series. Each cornfield image lasts two-four seconds, allowing one to make out that a Tattooed Man is chasing a man clad in a white shirt in a cornfield. The cornfield images appear to progress sequentially. However, the series hasn't yet established the identities of either character, the specificity of the time and place of the event depicted or the reason for its occurrence, deliberately confusing the viewer. Moreover, the intercutting heightens the confusion, as the non-cornfield images appear non-sequentially.

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2   *Angel* largely dropped this structure by the end of its second season.

3   While *The Dead Zone* has a long-running arc focused on a nuclear apocalypse Smith sees in visions, it is predominantly an episodic series.

Each lasts anywhere from a few frames to a second, making it difficult to make sense of what exactly they depict. By going over them frame by frame, I've identified ten of them and pinpointed the episodes they appear in. Figure 3 positions them in order of their appearance in the vision, comparing it to the order of the episodes they originate from and the order of the events they depict in the chronology of the story as a whole. The lack of correspondence between all three orders illustrates that the vision previews literal events up to the ninth episode of the series, but arranges them in a seemingly random fashion, constantly jumping back and forth through time. Like in the case of *Twin Peaks*, this compounds multiple tenses, blurring the distinction between past, present and future. But it also intentionally challenges the audience to carefully watch the future episodes and use them to construct a proper chronological sequence of the events the vision represents.

SHOT	DESCRIPTION	EPISODE	CHRONOLOGY
1	Scudder stumbling in a WWI trench	6	A
2	Scudder and Russian Soldier in the café	2	E
3	Sofie turning over the cards	1	D
4	People gathering over a coffin	3	F
5	Scudder on Babylon miners' photo	6	G
6	Tattooed Man rapes Appolonia	9	C
7	A girl with crab claw-like hands	8	J
8	Ben in the trenches	7	H
9	Russian Soldier fires	7	B
10	Ben wakes up without legs	8	I

△   FIGURE 2

The episode then cuts to Ben waking up in a brightly lit, dusty house, indicating the sequence beforehand was a dream. This creates a visible contrast between the vision and the non-vision sequences. Whereas the montage jumped across multiple timeframes, locations and events, the scenes that follow depict interconnected events in a specific time and space. When it cuts to an exterior shot, captions that specify that the story takes place in Oklahoma, 1934. [the present] Whereas the vision featured visible, rapid cutting, this scene utilizes continuity editing with longer shots and a slow pace. And whereas the vision had no context, this one establishes some clear plot details – we learn Ben Hawkins is an escaped

convict, who joins a travelling carnival after his mother dies and his farm is repossessed.

After establishing a dominant classic realist style and spatio-temporal specificity, the series proceeds in this mode for about 16 minutes until Ben has another variation of the cornfield dream. The third variation, meanwhile, cuts to Justin waking up, establishing that he too experiences visions and can have a version of the same dream, as Ben. Notably, Justin's version features more shots of the Tattooed Man, which reveal that he and Justin are one and the same. It also creates a paradigm, according to which Ben and Justin encounter each other only in visions until the final episode, suggesting an inevitable intertwining of the disparate plot threads. The show demonstrates that it gradually doles out information and fills in the gaps regarding the various events we view in the visions. This encourages active viewing of subsequent episodes.

The cornfield event's significance would only become fully clear by the end of the second season. In the episode *Cheyenne, WY*, Justin captures and then murders Scudder after he tries to flee. Notably, Scudder never runs into a cornfield, so Justin's pursuit in the vision does not directly correspond to literal events. This signifies that the Scudder variation symbolically foretold Justin's pursuit of Scudder and his attempt to kill him. However, the series finale *New Canaan*, where Justin pursues Ben into a cornfield, intent on killing him, literally fulfills the Ben variation. So the vision corresponds to both versions, to the first instance connotatively and to the second denotatively. This hybridity allows it to foretell multiple possible outcomes, rather than one particular future event, as well as produce multiple effects on its viewers.

As a connotative vision, it can make viewers curious about its actual significance and later surprise them with its reveals. As a denotative vision, it can continuously generate suspense over two seasons by presenting 'rival scenarios about the future' (Sternberg 2001a: 117 quoted in 327), specifically the outcome of the cornfield chase. This illustrates how by mixing denotative and connotative visions, a serial generates all three narrative universals simultaneously, while giving a strong sense of the overarching plot's simultaneous predetermination. By using shots from future episodes, the series gives the impression that its vision source is omniscient and knows all possible outcomes of events long before the characters experience them. At the same time, the variability of the cornfield dream suggests that the source doesn't know, which outcomes will actually come to pass. This illustrates the ability to visio-narrative to mask instances of evident authorial manipulation ('EAM').

AGENTS OF CONTROL AND AUTHORIAL MANIPULATION

Authorial manipulation is a fundamental aspect of plot construction. The majority of classic stories operate utilizing causation. They center on goal-oriented characters, which, in pursuing a certain goal or desire, perform actions that will have narrative consequences, leading from one set of plot points to the next in a cause-and-effect chain. In doing so, the realist text attempts to convince audiences that what they are watching or reading is real and manages to '…camouflage the ultimate extradiegetic causal level of the author (who actually writes the text and thus causally manipulates all events within it) by constructing a narrative world with its own intradiegetic connective systems.' (Dannenberg 25) This renders authorial manipulation invisible. EAM manifests when this camouflage proves unsuccessful, allowing the audience to notice the text's fictional nature and consequently regard its narrative events implausible. This can occur when certain events contradict others, resulting in 'holes' that disrupt the plot's unity, or when a series abandons or drops various plot threads without resolving them.

And then there are obtrusive 'coincidences', constellations of '…apparently random events in time and space with an uncanny or striking connection.' (Dannenberg 93) A common assumption is that the best examples of classic storytelling avoid such issues, with many critics and professional writers viewing signs of EAM negatively. Marie-Laure Ryan, for instance, decries the presence of plot holes as a consequence of an author's ineptitude at creating logical connections between events and situates coincidence as an example of the many 'cheap plot tricks' that 'blatantly serves the interests of the story and the goals of the author at the expense of verisimilitude.' (59) In a similar vein, Lewis Herman insists that to avoid poor plotting writers must ensure that 'every hole is plugged' and 'every coincidence is sufficiently motivated to make it credible…' (88) Despite such attitudes, EAM tends to appear within the story arcs of numerous prestigious serialized dramas.

One reason for this is that television screenplays are usually products of collaboration between a show-runner and a group of full-time and staff writers. Multiple voices can result in conflicting ideas and directions for a long-form story that nonetheless have to work towards a common goal. Many writers also attest that the development process is organic and unpredictable, with rigorous pre-planning often giving way to improvisation and evolution. The normal solution to this is to

revise earlier scripts, ensuring episode-to-episode consistency. However, this is contingent on specific production schedules. Network TV writers especially have very tight deadlines. As a full season is typically 22-26 episodes per year, the development and production phases soon begin to overlap. (Douglas 56) As episodes air, writers script later installments of the ongoing work-in-progress story, unable to revise what has already appeared onscreen.

J. Michael Straczynski, who was responsible for writing much of the *Babylon 5* five-year story arc, once summarized such issues in response to a fan on a CompuServe posting by comparing the production of serialized television to the chapter-by-chapter publication of a novel:

> Let's say I'm writing a novel. I start with a fairly clear notion of where I'm going. Six chapters in, I get a better way of doing something, so I go back and revise chapters 1-5, so it now all fits; you never see what went before. Now, compare that to a situation where you're publishing each chapter as you go, and you can't go back and change anything (personal communication, May 10, 1996).

Additionally, the ongoing narrative must accommodate external factors. As Macdonald points out in discussing television production of a serial, 'Scheduling of actors, availability of studio sets and location sets... may restrict options.' (96) Under these circumstances, the construction of a coherent singular narrative with little to no sign of EAM is virtually impossible. Admittedly, the degree to which such authorial manipulation is actually visible is a subjective one. Casual viewers may overlook or forgive signs of EAM within a given episode. However, as a serial's episodes also function as a greater whole, the more holes, coincidences, etc. a serial accumulates per episode, the more it risks shattering the transparency of the overarching whole.

The visio-narrative model, however, offers a built-in countermeasure against such issues – the vision source. An internal agent of causal manipulation, it fits the description of a 'control level' presence, whose integration is a common way of maintaining suspension of disbelief in classical plots. The visibility and motives of such agents can fluctuate from highly explicit to utterly incomprehensible. While more recent examples are contemporary rational forces, epic gods remain the earliest and most visible control agents. (Lowe 56-57) Through visions, especially dream visions, the gods offer guidance to the hero, such as by directly foretelling fu-

ture actions he must undertake to fulfill his ultimate destiny. (Russel 26) Depending on the program, the source or sources can be explicitly divine, extraterrestrial or ambiguous.

The sources in *Peaks*, such as the Little Man, BOB and MIKE, parallel the gods of classical epics, who function 'not as abstractions but as conscious, intervening characters' (Gregory 1) within the plot. Supporting this is Carroll's comparison between Cooper, who ventures into The Black Lodge, and ancient epic heroes that journey to the realm of the dead, such as Odysseus and Aeneas. (288) If Cooper is a contemporary equivalent to an ancient Greek hero, the Lodge beings are the equivalents of the Olympians. In *Carnivàle* the controlling power doesn't directly participate as a tangible character, remaining invisible and unknowable. This portrayal is in line with the Renaissance epics, such as *Paradise Lost*, which assumed the existence of only One True God, whose actions and motives were often inscrutable. (Gregory 4-9) Given that the series' central premise rests on a Manichean conflict between good and evil and that the show directly explores Christianity, one can infer that the Christian God is the source.

Whatever the case, it camouflages the author's causal level, naturalizing coincidences, unresolved plotlines, etc. by disguising them as signs of intradiegetic divine manipulation. Numerous plot points in both case studies hinge on random confluences of events without a strong causal precedent. For instance, while searching for a girl with crab claws to join the carnival in episode 9, Ben encounters Phineas Boffo (John Doe), a rival carnival manager, who is searching for her as well. During a handshake, Ben touches Boffo's ring, triggering a vision that reveals a connection Boffo possesses to Ben's father. Ben was not deliberately searching for his father, so his chance encounter with Boffo seems like an improbable coincidence. However, the series had previewed his meeting with the crab girl in its first vision, indicating that his meeting with Boffo was fated to happen.

Similarly, Cooper initially assumes that his former mentor Windom Earle (Kenneth Welsh) arrives in Twin Peaks to pursue a personal vendetta, only to uncover that Earle seeks the Black Lodge that Cooper is searching for at the same time. Moreover, Earle turns out to have a previous connection to the character of Major Briggs, whom Cooper only met in the course of investigating Laura Palmer's murder. These revelations prompt Cooper to reflexively remark: 'Coincidence and fate play a large role in our lives.' On the extradiegetic level, the improbable series of events Cooper finds himself in is a result of the episode's writers contriving the situation. By explaining it as coincidence and/or fate on the intradiegetic

level, Cooper disguises the EAM on display and prevents viewers from realizing the text's artificiality. Coincidences then evince that the god-figures are the architects of fate within each show's fictional universe.

Nothing is actually coincidental – everything that happens is part of their master plan. *Carnivàle* marks the point when visio-narrative becomes predominantly the province of prime time serials.

In *Lost*, *Heroes*, *Kings*, and *Battlestar Galactica*, all of which revolve around visionaries, who wonder about the concept of fate and the roles of higher powers within their lives, visions link together events separated by anywhere from a few on-screen minutes to several seasons, as well as naturalize numerous improbable coincidences, abandoned developments and illogical plot twists among other signs of EAM. *Flashforward* perhaps takes the reliance on visions to its logical extreme, as the central enigma rests on unraveling the inexplicable occurrence that has caused every person on Earth to briefly experience a vision of his or her future.

CONCLUSION

By using visio-narrative, by regularly violating the classic realist mode, shows strengthen the illusion that their episodes altogether provide 'a completely unified, satisfying tale of events' (Herman 87) intrinsic to classic plotting. They demonstrate a sense of divine control, intrinsically suggesting the existence of a long-term plan and a definitive conclusion. At the same time, they break away from linear storytelling and craft a temporality that compounds multiple tenses. A prime time serial that ascribes to the mode fits the description of an epic as a long narrative that features deities intervening in the lives of mortals (Gregory 1- 9). In that sense, visio-narrative distinguishes a show from conventional television by adopting the conventions of epic poetry. On the other hand, it's possible that *Peaks* and the shows that follow it actually draw on the popular cultural associations between visions, dreams and deities.

The majority of the world's religious traditions differentiate between mundane dreams and revelatory dreams that connect to 'God, the Divine, or to some other transpersonal power or spiritual realm.' (Bulkeley 1999: 23-24) Whether the point of inspiration is the epic poem or the religious contexts, *Peaks* has clearly influenced the ways that stories are told on television, popularizing visions, visionaries and vision sources. By drawing on these elements, television writers receive multiple benefits,

including distinction in terms of structure and temporality, opportunity for formal experimentation and a mask that disguises evident authorial manipulation. This has evidently resulted in an overall narrativization of dreams and their disassociation from the realm of the subconscious. In a way, visio-narrative promotes the notion that dreams must be products of a higher power and convey external, rather than internal, knowledge in order to be relevant within a television narrative.

One could connect this to the notion of legitimation postulated by Newman and Levine. Their argument is that cultural discourse routinely elevates certain television programs, while denigrating others. In particular, what we consider *quality* or sophisticated programming among achieves this status 'in part through its ability to mark itself off from the soap opera.' (99) We can see this in the mode's emphasis on formal experimentation. Ian Macdonald's account of the production of the soap opera *Emmerdale* suggests that any deviation in a soap opera from the dominant aesthetic results in 'bad soap.' As he puts it, 'A freer, more creative production environment allows writers space to tell the story backwards, use subtitles and other technical devices... but draws attention to the production and to that writer.' (96) So, the visio-narrative mode's emphasis on editing, sound and other formal aspects frequently elevates a series above the formally invisible soap opera.

Soap operas also tend to lack closure, while quality shows are perceived to be those serials that have a specific and definitive conclusion. (Newman and Levine 92) As visio-narrative suggests a definitive ending and an ultimate destiny for its characters as per the epic, the mode's usage arguably convinces audiences that a show rejects the soap's perpetual deferral of closure. In actuality, however, a show cannot always meet these expectations. Both *Peaks* and *Carnivàle* were cancelled during their second seasons, leaving numerous plot points without resolution. Signifying that neither series' overarching narrative would reach full completion, the cancellations worked against the visio-narrative mode's illusion of narrative unity and predetermination.

With this in mind, the mode's capacity to elevate a show's cultural status may very well be dependent on the series' ability to deliver the definitive closure its use of visions promises to the audience. The premature non-ending of *Peaks*, for instance, has damaged its reputation, contributing to its consideration as a "failure" within many critical and industrial discourses. (Newman and Levine 92) One has to wonder then, if reactions would be different, had the series not employed visio-narrative. That is, if the show had not suggested that ev-

erything was predetermined, then perhaps reactions towards its abbreviation would not be so negative.

While many have examined the role of dreams in *Twin Peaks* in connection with Lynch's aesthetic, one of the show's most notable contributions to television storytelling has largely gone without recognition and analysis. I have shown how the visio-narrative mode functions, how it has changed through appropriation and offered certain reasons for its popularity. This study, however, cannot manage to touch upon the sheer variety of specific ways in which visio-narrative has been utilized. It would help to have examined some of the more procedural series that have adopted the model, such as *Hannibal*, which uses visions for both serial and episodic plotlines. Hopefully, this will help shed enough light on the subject of visions and bring them more into popular discourse to inspire more in-depth examinations in the future. What I hope have to illustrated is that, thanks to *Twin Peaks*, visions are a highly prominent aspect of modern television storytelling and that ancient mythological heroes along with epic gods now regularly find their equivalents in modern TV visionaries and vision sources.

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"COME TOGETHER": A FANVID INSIGHT ON *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER* AND FANDOM

LUCIA TRALLI

ABSTRACT

Through the in-depth analysis of a single fanwork, Luminosity's concept-vid *Scooby Road* (2005), made with images appropriated from the acclaimed TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, this paper will investigate the strong and complex relationship between fan communities and media. A *vid* is a form of remix that consists in appropriating clips from movies or TV shows, and setting them to music. The author of the remixed work, the vidder, uses editing strategies in order to comment upon the sources, criticize them or praise them. Building on the concept of fandom ecology, and providing an overview of the main characteristics of the vidding community, this paper will focus on how the shared knowledge of both the original work and of fannish interpretations of such work, combined with fannish conventions and modes of media consumption, shape fandom creative productions. After examining the relevance of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* for the vidding community and its history, we will then focus on *Scooby Road*'s peculiar context of creation and distribution, and proceed to analyze several of the fifteen vids that compose this peculiar, 42- minute concept-vid.

KEYWORDS

Vidding; fandom; ecology of vidding; vidders; vidwatchers; fan culture.

*Buffy is the beginning and end of it all.
You've reminded me of all the reasons I loved Buffy, for
which I thank you!*[1]

In this paper we will discuss the strong and complex relationship between fan communities and the media texts they love and appropriate through their fanworks. We will focus on a specific community, the vidding community, and on a peculiar and unique fanwork: a fanvid called *Scooby Road*. Our analysis will begin with an overview of the specificities of the vidding fan community, its functioning, and some of the more frequent topics discussed by its members. We will then proceed to examine the relevance for the vidding community of the original media text *Scooby Road* appropriates, the acclaimed TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003). Lastly, we will discuss this vid as an example of how the vidding community experiences serial media products through their fan activities as remixers and producers of derivative works. Building on the concept of *fandom ecology* (Turk and Johnston 2012), we will especially focus on how the creative productions of fan communities are informed by the shared knowledge of both the original work and of fannish interpretations of such work, combined with fannish conventions and modes of media consumption.

Scooby Road, a unique, 42 minutes long "concept-vid" premiered during the 2005 edition of the annual vidding convention *Vividcon,* in a special show (a *vidshow* in vidding terminology[2]). The author, vidder Luminosity, put together this very unusual vid using all the fifteen songs[3] from the celebrated Beatles' album *Abbey Road* (1969) and scenes from all the seven seasons of *Buffy*. The title of the work is a wordplay that combines the name of the album and the self-appointed nickname of Buffy's group of friends, the *Scooby Gang* or the *Scoobies* – a reference to the well-known 1970s cartoon *Scooby-Doo*.

As we will see in paragraph 4, *Buffy* fandom has been one of the most discussed and analyzed fandom of all time.

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1 The first statement is from vidder Luminosity aka sockkpuppett, (2006b), the second from a user comment to sockkpuppett (2006a).

2 Vidshows usually consist in the screening of a playlist composed by a dozen of fanvideos, made by different vidders. In this unique case, the entire screen time was dedicated exclusively to this vid.

3 *Abbey Road* contained ten tracks, six on the first side of the album ("Come Together", "Something", "Maxwell's Silver Hammer", "Oh! Darling", "Octopus' Garden", "I want you (She's so heavy)") and four on the second side ("Here comes the sun", "Because", "Medley", and "Her Majesty"), although "Medley" was indeed a 16-minute medley of eight short songs ("You Never Give Me Your Money", "Sun King", "Mean Mr. Mustard", "She Came in Through the Bathroom Window", "Golden Slumbers", "Carry That Weight", "The End").

Building on vidders' discourses and interrelations with one another through their blogs, and focusing on a single and specific fanwork, we will try to provide a new glimpse on the peculiar ways in which members of this community share their mutual passion for the show. *Scooby Road* differs from *typical* vids in many ways: its duration, composition, narrative and public are unique in the entire fanvid corpus. Its distinctiveness constitutes a precious tool to gauge the peculiarity of its reference community, its functioning, and its media consumption habits.

01 THE ECOLOGY OF VIDDING

The term vidding refers to the practice of appropriating clips from movies or TV shows, editing them in new combinations, and setting them to music, usually pop songs. The author of the remixed work, the *vidder*, uses editing strategies in order to comment upon the sources, criticize them or praise them. A *fanvid* (or, more briefly, a *vid*) is "a visual essay that stages an argument" where "music is used as an interpretive lens to help the viewer to see the source text differently" (Coppa 2008). Vidding is "a form of in-kind media criticism: a visual essay on a visual source" (Coppa 2011: 123).

Fanvids are frequently confused with other forms of audiovisual remixes, such as mashups: however, the latter usually entail an ironic or satirical purpose, which is not necessarily present in fanvids. Moreover, fanvids share a possibly confusing resemblance with music videos, yet the two types of texts functioning antithetical ways: whereas in music videos the images are used to illustrate the music, in fanvids the visual source is the core of the remix, and the music - especially the lyrics - "narrate and contextualize the reedited sequence, telling a new story or making an argument" (Coppa 2011: 124). Fanvids are a form of *affective aesthetics* (Busse 2010) because the way they are conceived, created and experienced is an expression of fans affection for and engagement with a media product, but also an instrument of connection and a community-building tool for fellow vidders.

Vidding has always been a female-dominated field in productive fandom (see, among others, Busse and Lothian 2011 and Coppa and Tushnet 2011), whereas other forms of audiovisual fan production, such as fan films, are often male-centered (see Brooker 2012: 173-198). Vidding communities are not a product of the so-called digital revolution: like many other fan communities, they have a very long "analog" history. The practice of vidding dates from the late Seventies, when people who attended fan conventions started to create their

first vids using polaroid slideshows projected on a wall syncing them with music. Later, during the 1980s and the 1990s, when the VCR prompted an irreversible evolution in domestic modes of consumption, female vidders who lived in the same area formed small collectives of women who watched and vidded TV shows together, sharing equipment and videotapes, skills and techniques, and "teaching each other how to vid and, more importantly, how to see" (Coppa 2011: 124), in an unceasing process of mutual tutoring. After the mid-1990s vidders started to relocate their activities online, gradually taking advantage of the many opportunities provided by the ever-growing World Wide Web: mailing lists, websites, web hosting platforms, social networks, streaming services, etc[4]. In many ways we are experiencing a new phase for vidding and vidding practitioners, marked by their online "headquarters" of choice. Nonetheless, there is still a strong tradition carried on by those that "were there" before the Internet (see Bury et al. 2013). And, more importantly, most communities still share crucial traits such as mutual tutorship and mentorship; a strong sense of belonging and kinship; common vocabulary, interpretive logics, and narrative codes; and a shared knowledge of editing tools and practices.

As Tisha Turk and Joshua Johnson argue in their essay dedicated to the 'ecology' of vidding, the vidding community is an important part of the whole vidding process, because it works as a dynamic and resilient system that informs the practice both on the production and on the consumption side.

> The ecology metaphor helps us to think of fandom as a system (or series of systems) within which all fans participate in various ways: as readers, writers, vidders, vid watchers, posters, commenters, lurkers, essayists, artists, icon makers, recommenders, coders, compilers of images and links, users and maintainers of archives and other fannish infrastructures, and so on. An ecological model thus offers an alternative to the theoretical models of fandom that, as Matt Hills has shown, define fans solely as producers and so "attempt to extend 'production' to all fans'. (Turk and Johnson 2012 quoting Hills 2002: 30)

Therefore, what we may call the vidding experience is the outcome of a mutual exchange between vidders and

vidwatchers who constantly share information, opinions, technical advice and interpretive readings of both the original texts and the remixed ones.

02 KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE AND KNOW YOUR SOURCE: A VIDDER TOOLBOX

The act of watching a fanvid requires an entire set of skills and types of knowledge: in order to appreciate and enjoy a fanvid, the vidwatcher has to engage with and have a certain amount of understanding of the visual, contextual, syntagmatic, narrative and thematic meanings that the vid tries to convey. It is not mandatory to have an all-embracing knowledge of the source, but different kinds of vid require different degrees of understanding of the contextual meaning of the images used by the vidder. As Truk and Johnson (2012) recall:

> Recognition of context requires familiarity with the source, and familiarity requires repetition. That repetition may take the form of an individual fan rewatching entire episodes or specific scenes [...] but it can also be communal or collaborative: for many fans, it includes reading and/or posting episode recaps, fan fiction, or informal analyses. All of these interpretive acts help not merely to define fan readings of a text but to establish particular on-screen actions and conversations as evidence for those readings.

Vidders (and fans in general) are usually deeply invested in creating their own vocabulary, which they use to discuss the specificities of their activities.
As Nancy Baym argues (2010: 77):

> Online communities share ways of speaking that capture the meanings that are important to them and the logics that underlie their common sensibilities. Groups share insider lingo including acronyms, vocabulary words, genres, styles, and forms of play.

Fans can usually be seen from the outside as "struck by a vocabulary complex" that compels them to find different terms to underline differences that appear negligible outside their specific community. This could be somehow confusing for a non-fan, as well as intimidating for the so-called newbies, but this shared common language is a very important

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4   Regarding vidding historical development, see Bacon-Smith (1991) and Jenkins (1992: 223-249).

aspect of the community-building strategies adopted by many fandoms.

One of the most important issues for vidders is to find a mutual consensus over a common taxonomy for different kinds of vids. Vidding taxonomy, vidding audience, and the vidding process are deeply related[5].

For instance, a vidwatcher will probably be able to enjoy and "understand" a *multifandom vid* even without recognizing every single remixed clip[6]. This type of vid, created with sources drawn from multiple texts, is usually built on thematic associations and resonances between the visual content of different frames. Viewers do not need to possess a contextual knowledge of the source to be able to grasp the vidder's intention, "and additional interpretive guidance is usually provided by the lyrics against which the visuals are set, the tone of the music, and the mood or message of the song as a whole" (Turk and Johnson 2012). Conversely, vidwatchers need to be extremely familiar with the original source, but also with fandom interpretations and analyses of that source to be able to fully "get" a *meta vid* regarding a specific series or movie and providing a commentary on both the text and its fandom at the same time. This is the case of vidder counteragent's *Destiny Calling* which Cupitt (2008) describes as "a snapshot of the fannish zeitgeist of that moment", or of *Still Alive,* by the same author, discussed by Katharina Freund (2010).

During the creation of their vids, vidders should not only consider the contextual knowledge of their potential vidwatchers but also the conditions in which the vid will be seen by the public. In 1995, Sandy Herrold, one of the most influential figures in the 1980s and 1990s vidding community, wrote a brief essay titled 'Structuring your vid' in the *Virgule-L* mailing list[7], in which she described the differences between three kinds of vids: the *promoter vid,* the *con vid*, and the *liv-*

ing-room vid. The first type refers to vids made for a public completely unaware of the source with the goal to promote a show or a film. A *con vid* is made for a potential convention public, therefore is made "with clear, obvious lyrics and clips that can be understood on the first viewing with people chatting in the row right behind you". Lastly, *living room vids* are

> the ones that can require close attention, take multiple views to 'get' all the different things the vidder was trying to say, that take really thinking about the context of each shot to realize why they used each one. The trick for the vidmaker is to give them enough on the first viewing so that they'll be willing to watch it enough times to figure it out. (Herrold 1995).

Even if cons attendance importance has decreased in fandom life, and even if the use of *living room vid* has almost disappeared in ordinary fandom language, this distinction still marks an important moment for vidders awareness of the community structures and audience practices, and still resonates in the community discourses.

We will later see how a deep knowledge of this process informs Luminosity's choices regarding *Scooby Road.*

On her part, the vidder has to evaluate her audience's potential familiarity with the source text(s) and to build her narrative in a way that is both as clear and effective in conveying her point of view. This dual need is probably one of the most discussed topics within the vidding community. Discussions regarding narrative usually entail discussions about editing practice, vidding composition, the different phases of vidding process and of vidding taxonomy. As Turk (2008b) recalls

> when we use narrative in the vidding genre we're usually thinking about *plot*, whereas the narrative theory perspective lets us think about it in terms of *narration* [...] Vids don't have to worry about story, because the story is already there in the source, to be borrowed or subverted or undone; vids are not meant to stand alone.

Many vidders agree upon the distinction between three kind of vidding structure, "the narrative, the lyric, and the argument. Each has its own major organizational principle: story (narrative), image (lyric), and what for lack of a better term I'll call thesis statement (argument)" (here's luck 2003). Vidders usually associate the "narrative structure" of vids to a

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5 Some examples of debates regarding vid terminology can be found, among others, in here's luck and cereta (2004) e here's luck (2004).

6 Vidder Luminosity, e.g., describes a fan that watches a vid unaware of its source as a "non-contextual fan". This term is quoted on a Jason Mittell's blog post that generated a dense debate on the topic involving both scholars and vidders. See 'Understanding vidding' (2007). On the same issues, please see also Turk (2008a, 2010). Mittel argues in his post that he doesn't usually "get" vidding due to its lack of knowledge regarding fan conventions and subculture, but he enjoyed *Scooby Road* because: "Much of why this vid works so well for me, besides it just being a spectacularly impressive work of editing, is that I come to it with strong emotional connections to both works – I've been a lifelong Beatles fan, and Buffy stands as one of the great works of television art".

7 An all-female, slash mailing list, active between the '90s and the '00s, that frequently focused also on vidding. For more information, see 'Virgule Mailing List' (n.d.).

simpler way of telling a story. A *narrative vid* is a vid in which the vidder do not add her personal point of view or tries to make an original reading of the source but instead she simply retells a part of the story or some of its core elements.

> [A]s viewers, we tend to *make* narrative in vids because we know context: we fill in story around what we actually see. That's not a bad thing: That's not a bad thing; many vids rely on exactly that kind of filling-in. But there are other ways of mentally. I think narrative is the most intuitive to create and watch; it's the default setting for most of us, not only only because it's a familiar pattern in general but because it's the mode of most (if not all) of our source texts for vids organizing the relationships among clips in a vid. (here's luck 2003)

An *argument vid*, on the contrary, is frequently a *meta vid*, or a vid that builds on a specific and elaborate idea.

> Vids that exist on a meta level, working in more ways than one, often suggesting a basis beyond the individual fandoms of the source and more about a larger concept and/or fandom itself. Vids that go beyond the narrative of their source, commenting on the nature of that narrative, connecting with outside meanings, or placing the story in a larger culture context. (kiki miserychic 2009)

This reasoning, and the constant circulation of ideas, debates and "collaborative interpretation" (Turk 2010) is inherently part of the vidding community ecology. In the case of *Scooby Road*, we will later see how the dialectic between narrative and argumentative vidding choices plays its role in the creation of some of its most representative vids.

03 THE COMMUNITY, WHICH IS NOT ONE.

It would be misleading to present the vidding community as a monolithically cohesive and all-inclusive space where all fans interested in audiovisual editing are in connection with one another in the same space. If that is still a misrepresentation, even in the era of the boundless virtual space provided by the Internet, it was certainly far less representative of the vidding network back in the analog days. Like many communities built around a shared interest in a specific activity more than around

an interest in a single product, the vidding community is a *multifandom* community, that is a group of people that are interested in multiple fandoms. Nonetheless, people who are fans of - and use materials from - the same show or the same genre of shows or movies are more likely to be found together in the same groups. Moreover, the platforms where vidders gather are indeed pivotal in determining the composition of the sub-communities. For example, the communities that revolve around social blogging platforms such as Livejournal or Dreamwidth are inherently different from the vidding communities rooted in the microblogging platform Tumblr or from the ones based on the video-streaming platform YouTube. The preeminent use of these platforms also tends to shift over time and to reflect the predominance of different age groups: while Livejournal was one of the first social networks inhabited by vidders (since its launch in 2003), and provided a digital home for all the vidders active by then with its accessible text-driven design and functioning, Tumblr (launched at the beginning of 2007) has proved to be more suitable for younger users and vidders, more comfortable with its image-driven approach. While the community is still quite varied and mixed in terms of age, there are of course many differences regarding editing tools and techniques (software used, digital effects, editing strategies, etc.) and media taste and preferences that depend on the era in which one approaches vidding. Groups formed in the 1980s were usually fans of shows such as *Starsky and Hutch* (1975-1979) or *The Professionals* (1977-1983), while the ones from the 1990s preferred shows such as *Stargate SG-1* (1997-2007) and *The X-Files* (1993-2002) and those formed in the early 2000s usually liked to use shows such as *Supernatural* (2005 –) and *Battlestar Galactica* (the Re-imagined series, 2004-2009). However, certain media texts prove particularly relevant for larger sections of the community and are somehow inter-generational. One of them is the "fandom-that-started-it-all", the *Star Trek* franchise, and another one is *Buffy,* even nowadays, after more than a decade from its official ending. Lastly, attending or not attending fan conventions is another key element that shapes fan sub-communities, once again partially related to age of their core members (in the pre-digital era, conventions were one of the few ways of sharing one's passion with others and meeting fellow fans). Different kinds of conventions obviously bring together different kinds of people and fans interested in different things[8]. The part of

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8   A major discussion regarding vidding multiple communities, and community issues regarding race, gender and general inclusivity during *cons* occured after the 2009 Vividcon. Some aspects of this debate can be found in Laura Shapiro (2009a, 2009b), and bopradar (2009). bopradar's post summed up some of the main con-

the community more grounded in the tradition of the 1980s and 1990s is also responsible for the creation of the first convention entirely devoted to vidding, *Vividcon,* which started in 2002, and this part of the vidding community is the one we will look up to in our reasoning around *Scooby Road.*

04 BUFFY'S FORTUNE IN THE VIDDING COMMUNITY

Buffy is probably one of the most adored media products in the global fandom community, probably also because it started airing in 1997, at the dawn of the Internet boom, and thus its fandom was one of the first to be able to actively engage with the show online. The success of the series is well-known in academic circles as well, with the so-called *Buffy studies* and *Whedon studies,* validated by a "Whedon Studies Association" and numerous publications (among them Levine and Parks 2007, Wilcox and Lavery 2002; and dedicated to the online fandom Kirby-Diaz 2009, and Stuller 2013).

As regards the vidding community, the series was somehow crucial in its development during the switch between offline and online activities between the late nineties and the early two thousands. The first mailing list dedicated to vidding in a single fandom was *Nummy Treat,* a Yahoo Group mailing list founded in 2002[9], which boasted hundreds of subscribers. There are still many websites and blogs dedicated to *Buffy* and *Buffyverse* vids, but one of the most important was the *BuffyVerse Music Video Database*[10], which in 2012 (after almost a decade of activity) contained 2235 vids made by 391 different vidders.

During the first twelve years of Vividcon (2002-2013), 97 over the overall 2149 vids presented were about *Buffy* and 165 were about the so-called *Buffyverse* (which includes spinoff

series *Angel the Series,* 1999-2004), making it the most represented fandom in the con.

Moreover, *Buffy* includes some themes and elements in which fandom communities, and the vidding community with its almost all-female members in particular, are deeply invested into. The series pertains to the supernatural genre, which is one of the most appreciated by fandom (as Williamson puts it, the vampire is "an enduring figure in the Anglo-American cultural imagination" since it "entered the English language over two hundred years ago", 2005: 1). It marked important development in television storytelling and gender representation, by portraying for the first time a lesbian couple in a teen TV series. And, lastly, Buffy is a well-rounded, compellingly written "strong female character", that overcomes the clichés linked to this trope proving to be one of the most complex female character in television[11].

05 SCOOBY ROAD. 'THE GREAT FANNISH WORK OF ABSOLUTE LOVE AND TOTAL COMMITMENT'[12]

> See, Lum decided to vid the album 'Abbey Road' to Buffy the Vampire Slayer and along the way she makes brilliant observations about the nature of both the album format *and* serial storytelling. This *builds* upon itself and *everything* is related and needed and necessary and the entire 42 minutes is all a single vid - it is, as Lum has noted, of a piece. (sisabet 2006).

As previously stated, fanvids are an expression of love and passion for a visual source, which use music in order to convey their message and commentary on said source. In commenting on the vidding process, vidders usually are usually divided into those that start conceptualizing a vid from an idea and then find the music that goes along with it, and those who listen to a song and find it perfect for a show, a couple, or a storyline and then build their narrative around the lyrics and rhythm of that song. Of course, vidders tend to vid to music they like,

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cerns shared by vidders: 'we're not the only vidding tradition', 'we're not all in the US [...] But the hardest one for me personally is Vividcon and how central it is to this fandom's self-definition and to relationship building within the community'. 'For instance, we celebrate different vidders within the community, particularly those with certain status or in the 'in crowd', but we collectively look down on other vidders, like, for instance YouTube vidders (some of their vids are awesome! and they may not even be part of ANY community, they may be self taught)'.

9   For further information see 'Nummy Treat' (n.d.).

10   This Database was one of the first searchable databases: it contained links to vids produced inside a specific fandom (this means that in 2002, when the website was launched, there were already enough vid distributed online to make this kind of list useful. It can be still accessed through Wayback Machine at https://web.archive.org/web/20100422214059/http://buffy.fanvids.co.uk/browse.php?type=titles.

11   About gender related issues in vidding and *Buffy*'s importance in the vidding community see also Coppa (2009), Busse (2009), Coppa and Tushnet (2011), Tralli (2014).

12   The statement is from reccer thefourthvine review of *Scooby Road* (2006). The term 'reccer' in fannish language indicates someone who is a critic and reviewer of fanworks and recommends the ones she prefers to other fans through short reviews.

but they are mainly fans of the images they use. Conversely, the author of *Scooby Road* started from a precise and beloved music source[13] and part of the decisions she had to make in order to create the vid pertained to finding the part of the story that fit the lyrics and sounds of *Abbey Road*'s tracks. This is an unusual practice in vidding composition and entailed additional constraints that vidders rarely have to face. The material is vast and rich: seven seasons, one hundred and forty-four episodes, each of which lasts about 45 minutes. One of the main challenges for the vidder was to decide which parts of the story was suited for each song, which parts should be "vidded" and which parts had to be discarded, even if they were highly important for the *Buffy* mythology.

In a blog post (2009a), vidder Luminosity recounts that her project actually started in 2002, when she vidded the first song, "Come Together", and then a first version of "Something" and "In the End" in 2003. After these first attempts, another vidder, suzecarol, suggested she should "vid the entire thing". Following an unsatisfying first draft, the project was put aside until 2004, when Luminosity started to vid all the remaining songs, from October 2004 to August 2005. Although the long gestation of the project is partially due to its anomalous size, its timing is not very unusual. Luminosity's recount of the large amount of discussions and debates held with many other vidders (sockkpuppett 2009a) is very common in the first stages of vidding composition: every step is discussed with fellow vidders, ideas are tested and validated or discarded, narrative and clip choices are examined collectively, and the lyrics are nitpicked collaboratively. The people who help the vidder get through all the vidding stages are called "betas" in fandom lingo: the term, borrowed from the IT jargon, designates someone who helps the author in all the different stages of creation, from the initial concept to the final proofreading before the public distribution of a fanwork. Even if Luminosity only mentions one beta for her project, the one that helped her review every single vid, she also names almost a dozen other people who helped her during the entire project.

We will now examine some of the vids assembled in *Scooby Road*, in order to investigate the role of the above-mentioned concepts: potential type of audience, contextual knowledge of the source, fandom interpretations of a media product, and meta reasoning about fandom and TV series.

5.1 Come Together

> I thought that it would make a great vid about how the spirit of the First Slayer infused Buffy. And I wanted to say a little something meta about the entire project, which was why I put in clips of the First Slayer's group of "watchers" with subtitles: "we know who you are" and "we know why you're here." Those clips were going to be directed at my audience. (sockkpuppett 2009a)

The first vid created for the ensemble is *Come Together*: a vid mostly based on images from the closing episode of season four, "Restless" (4.22), a dream-state episode in which the First Slayer[14] makes her first appearance, and "Intervention" (5.18), in which Buffy finally meets with her spirit guide in the desert. *Come Together* opens with an iris that shows a pendulum clock used to induce a state of hypnosis; a close-up of Buffy, smiling; another shot of the clock, and a second close-up of Buffy, her face covered in grey mud and gradually morphing into the First Slayer's face, also covered in black stripes of mud. The vidder sets up the POV (point-of-view) of the entire vid: the slayer, both in her first incarnation and in Buffy's eyes.

> Also, I wanted the First Slayer to "speak" so I made it her POV. Then, okay, it's her POV, but it's her spirit that has imbued Buffy with such power, so the POV could shift "legally" from the First Slayer to Buffy. Because Buffy and the other Scoobies were sharing dreamtime, I could shift POV back and forth till it became irrelevant. And YAY! Okay, true, I counted on the viewer to know about Restless, and I wanted to utilize that (unconscious?) knowledge that the viewer had about the dreams shifting from person to person--that the viewer would flow with the shifting PO (sockkpuppett 2009b)

From its opening shots, *Come Together,* thus explicates its function as a meditation over the "Origin Story" of the entire series, and of Buffy's character: the First Slayer.

Buffy is the Chosen One among many other so-called potentials; she becomes the only slayer of vampires and evil

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13   "This is the music of much of my life. I have personal connections to all of it, and I've been moved by it since I was a kid. I know this album better than any other, and the challenge was to convey the depth of my feelings about *the music* through the video." (sockkpuppett, 2009c).

14   The First Slayer was chosen during prehistoric times by three powerful shamans to become the first in the line of slayers. She was coercively gifted with supernatural powers that helped her fight the evil forces, at the expense of her humanity. She had also the ability to project herself into the dreams of her successors. This is how Buffy meets her both in "Restless" and in "Intervention".

creatures of her generation. Slayers are always young girls, and they are designated from an unknown authority to become powerful beings. Their "gift", however, comes mostly as a curse, as they are destined to devote their entire lives to their mission and often to die young fulfilling their duty. When the First Slayer is introduced in the end of the fourth season, the audience learns that in the beginning there was a powerful group of shamans who forced the first young girl to become the protector of humanity against her will. Throughout the entire series, Buffy struggles to come to terms with her destiny, and these episodes are the ones in which she starts to understand where her powers come from, and how much they were coerced on her and on every slayer before her.

> And Buffy had to know, had to come to intimately understand how her power came to be, and that her feelings of being "imprisoned" by her calling weren't false. They were true, they were right, but now that she knows that, she has to move on and deal. (2009b)

One of the main themes of the series is friendship: as a way to cope with life's struggles and trials; as a chosen family of like-minded people who provide true support and understanding; as a source of strength and power; and as a safe space in which one can truly express oneself without restrictions. In "Restless" the dream-state is induced not only in Buffy, but also on every member of the Scooby Gang: Buffy's best friends Xander, Willow, Tara, Anja and her Watcher, Mr. Giles. Every character is involved in Buffy's exploration of her origin, because in the end every one of her friends will be involved in her battle to save mankind. During the dream-induced hallucinations, we see all of Buffy's friends attacked by the First Slayer (a powerful metaphor of how much Buffy's presence in their lives put them in serious danger) and we see also every one of them involved in some surreal activity that is nonetheless linked to their personality. All of these scenes are well represented in the vid. *Come Together*, therefore, immediately summons every important figure of the show, of Buffy's journey, and proves to be the perfect opening of the entire *Scooby Road's* journey.

> So, what is Come Together really about? [...] Well, it was about joining each other, becoming more powerful together than apart. (sockkpuppett 2009a).

Thus the vid also represents a powerful *meta* statement about fandom, about Buffy's fandom and about the vidding fandom. As vidder sisabet states in her review of the vid (2006), this shift is made possible by viewers extensive knowledge of the show.

Any viewer of the show knows immediately that we are in a dream state - this is the hypnosis scene from "Restless" and we are immediately cued to relax our brains just a wee bit because this well-known song, combined with this well known piece of canon, signify some serious mental meta shit is about to go down.

The above-mentioned qualities of friendship are also the ones people usually look for in their fandom experience. Fandom is a place where people find like-minded fans with whom they share their passions; where they feel safe to truly express themselves; where they form friendships and alliances that have a huge impact on their non-fandom lives; where everything is done *collectively*. We can consider *Come together* a sort of a hymn to fandom: as Buffy was forced to call her friends to "come together/ over me", to follow her lead and help her in what ultimately proved to be a common battle, so is Luminosity calling her fellow fans and vidders to follow her in this journey to explore their beloved show together once again.

5.2 *That (unconscious?) knowledge:* the use of known and unknown source in *Scooby Road*

In her commentary about *Come Together*, Luminosity affirms that she "wanted to utilize that (unconscious?) knowledge that the viewer had" about "Restless" to work with entangled issues regarding the series and its main characters. The same process – one that builds on the potential viewer's in-depth knowledge of the most detailed elements of the source – is at the bottom of many choices regarding the vidder storyline choices for the majority of the tracks. *Buffy* is not only a beloved media product, but also one of the most "vidded" texts: every aspect of the story, of its characters, of its themes and iconography have been celebrated and scrutinized in endless fanvids. Therefore Luminosity is not compelled to make any *series vid* or *ensemble vid* (which summarize all the main elements of a series, usually to celebrate it). Being disengaged from this kind of task, she could explore subtler nuances of *Buffy*'s storylines and lesser-known characters and episodes, and make more elaborated arguments regarding the most explored topics and relationships (as we will see in the next paragraph in relation to *shipper vids*). As vidder Laura Shapiro

underlines, Luminosity can rely to "the viewer's memory to fill in the gaps, [and] the viewer's love for the show and its characters to add emotional resonance to the vidder's own"; for the reccer this "embody the glorious best of what fannish vidding can be" (2005).

This is particularly evident in the case of vids such as *Octopus' Garden* and *Mean Mr. Mustard*.

The first is dedicated to one of the many stand-alone episodes of the series, "Superstar" (4.17), entirely devoted to suicidal outcast Jonathan Levinson. The second is about Warren Mears. Both Warren and Jonathan will later become part of the infamous "Trio" (together with Andrew Wells), a supposedly evil league of villains which was actually just a group of nerd and vaguely misogynistic boys and who plotted to kill Buffy during the sixth season, only to incur in tragic consequences.

> My first thought was that this could be a Xander vid. Then I wanted to make an Initiative vid. Then I wanted to make a Xander's POV hero-worship vid to Riley. None of that really applied to Buffy. When I considered Jonathan, at first I considered his entire arc, from Big Gulp-sipping to bleeding over the Hellmouth, but dammit! This is Ringo! (sockpuppett 2009b)

Before the Trio, Jonathan was a classmate of the Scoobies at Sunnydale High, who happened to get involved in the Gang's charades, frequently as a victim of the monster of the week, or as the designated target for bullying activities. His self-esteem was so low that, during the third season, he tried to commit suicide in the school bell tower, saved *in extremis* by Buffy. "Superstar", which is set during the first season of the "college years" of the series, shows a very different scenario: Jonathan has become Sunnydale's true idol. A famous athlete, a true heartthrob, a best-selling author, an actor, a doctor, a musician and a singer, not to mention the inventor of the Internet, Jonathan is worshipped and admired by everyone. However, the entire storyline is then revealed to be the effect a spell, casted by Jonathan himself to avenge his "nerd and lonely" years in high school. "Superstar" opens *in medias res*: without giving the public any warning, the episode starts with different opening credits that show Jonathan performing heroic acts instead of Buffy (and also mimicking the iconic power shot of Angel that closes the spinoff series credits), and the audience has to wait several scenes before learning about the spell that is at the center of the episode.

Octopus' Garden is the only *episode-centric* vid of *Scooby Road* – that is a vid dedicated to a single episode – and has to deal with the scarcity of footage typical of this kind of vid. It uses the scenes from the episode almost chronologically, from the opening credits to the final resolution that breaks Jonathan's spell, associating the childish and playful lyrics of the song with Jonathan's somehow childish dream of finally becoming a superhero, visible and loved by all the people around him. *Octopus' Garden* was perceived as the "occasional whimsical turn" that "provide[d] breathing space between the explorations of deeper subjects, of personal trials, traumatic relationships, and violence" (Laura Shapiro 2005).

Conversely, *Mean Mr. Mustard* uses several scenes from almost every episode in which Warren appears during the Trio story arc, except from the "Seeing Red" (6.19) events that brought to Tara's death (whose consequences are hugely represented in the vid that precedes it, *Sun King*). His character is the epitome of the apparently harmless misogynistic person, who suddenly becomes a murderer, first killing his ex-girlfriend who broke up with him, and then Tara, Willow's girlfriend, whom he accidentally shoots during an attempt to assassinate Buffy. Warren is the only Big Bad of the entire series to be completely human, and happens to commit one of the most terrible crimes. His storyline of subtle gender violence is consistent with the series general interest in gender-related issues, and is a powerful remainder that the most dangerous and painful events in Buffy's life are not caused by supernatural forces, but are the result of very human conditions.

The choices in these vids are dictated not only by the correspondences between the lyrics and the story-arc (in the end, the entire series was filled with "dirty old men" that could easily fit in Mr. Mustard shoes), but also by the vidder awareness that these are very uncommon topics that were still unexplored in the *Buffy* vidding fandom, topics that could nonetheless be easily understood by a deeply informed audience. "And how many Jonathan vids are there anyway? I've seen only one other" (sockpuppett 2009b).

5.3 Shipping differently

The so-called *shipper* vids are one of the most common types of vids: these are the vids that revolve around a couple, either one that was already formed in the canonical text or one for whom the fan roots. Many shipper vids are a collection of topical scenes from the couple story-arc, and these are usually the scenes fans love to re-watch constantly, sequences that rapidly

become key-scenes for the fandom. In *Scooby Road* there are four vids that can be identified as *shipper*: *Something, Oh! Darling, You Never Give Me Your Money* and *Because*. The last one is dedicated to the relationship between Tara and Willow, before their breakup in "Tabula Rasa" (6.8), and is the most "conventional" one.

Something traces vampires Spike and Drusilla's relationship from its beginning to the moment when Spike began to develop feelings for Buffy (the last clip used in the vid comes from the episode "Crush" (5.12), in which Spike realizes he is in love with Buffy). This is another example of an uncommon topic explored by Luminosity through a vid: Spike will later become one of the main characters of the show, and Buffy's last love interest in the series, and although his character arc is a favorite topic among fans, his relationship with Drusilla is often set aside.

> I love Dru. She's so perfectly insane and yet... so sane. And she's funny in a terrifying way. I can see Spike's attraction to her, his obsession with her, his dark goddess. His nutcase. One of my favorite clips ever in a vid I made is in this one--where Dru is waving her fingers over Spike's head to George's beautiful guitar solo, right after she seductively rubs a rose across her cheek. Hey y'all! It's Dru. And Spike loves her. (sockkpuppett 2009b)

Spike and Drusilla were not only the main evil villains of the second season, but also provided comic relief that was perfectly in tune with the series' caustic humor. The song lyrics perfectly resonate with their tainted romance, and Drusilla's dramatic gestures and movements are synced with the song rhythm, providing the vid with the surreal and gothic atmosphere their scenes usually had. The somehow sarcastic commentary provided by some matches between clips and music was generally appreciated by the public, as an indirect homage to the show. "Some of the match-ups of songs and characters were very, very witty and reminded one that humour was a key element of the show along with the darkness" (selenak 2005).

You Never Give Me Your Money and *Oh! Darling* are dedicated to the two most important love interest of the main character, vampires Angel and Spike.

The former explores the two phases of Angel and Buffy's relationship in an unconventional way: from their first encounter and Angel's attempts to stay away from her to protect her from his vampire nature, to the events that follow Angel's transformation into his evil counterpart Angelus in

"Innocence" (2.14), in the aftermath of their first sexual encounter during "Surprise" (2.13).

> "Money" is all about love and giving of oneself completely and having it backfire on you over and over again. Buffy wants intimacy, and Angel withholds. Not because he doesn't want her but because he feels that he doesn't deserve her. In the second verse, he *does* give her his situation, and look what happens. (sockkpuppet 2009c).

Luminosity uses the word "money" in the lyrics as a metaphor for "intimacy" and "love", and takes advantage of the sudden change in rhythm in the first bridge of the song to mark the swerve between Angel and Angelus. The second bridge, on the other hand, is used to build the escalation of events that will bring Buffy to kill him in "Becoming (Part 2)".

Oh! Darling is dedicated to Spike and Buffy's relationship, but more than a *shipper* vid, it could be considered an *angst vid*, a vid that deals with unsatisfying and unnerving elements of a storyline. After the vidder decided to dedicate this vid to "Spuffy" (the portmanteau term with which the fans usually refer to Spike and Buffy as a couple) she was hesitant about the focus and tone of the vid:

> At first, I went back and forth, back and forth. Should it be funny, or should it be sad? Should I play it straight and make a sympathetic Spike vid? Well. *NO*. In a way, this is as much a meta response to fandom as it is a look at how Spike viewed his relationship with Buffy. A relationship of sexualized violence and degradation. That he relished. And loved. Spike was more of a vampire here in S6 than at any other time that we ever see him. (sockkpuppett 2009b)

In fact, we should consider *Oh! Darling* both as an angsty shipper vid and as a meta vid, because it provides some insights into the fandom's response to this relationship and tries to compel an argument for its inherent violence. When Spike started to develop feelings for Buffy, at first he tried to reject them. Then, when he succumbed to his sentiment, he started to behave in an obsessive, stalking manner towards her, true to his vampire nature. After the events at the beginning of the sixth season (Buffy's resurrection after "The Gift", 5.22, and her becoming detached from life and un-emotional), Spike seemed to be the only one who understood Buffy's feelings and they started a sexual relationship which Buffy

experienced mostly as shameful and degrading (after all, he has been for a long time one of her enemies, and he is an un-reformed vampire completely different from Angel). After the umpteenth episode of ill-concealed violence, in an attempt to put her life together, she put an end to her liaison. Spike's desperate reaction to her abandoning was extremely vicious: he tried to rape her in an infamous scene of "Seeing Red" (the scene that concludes *Oh! Darling*).

In this vid, Luminosity comments not only on these usually hidden nuances of Spuffy's relationship, but also on the fandom's response to it. Spike's actions, as excessive, controlling and overpowering of Buffy as they could be, are usually perceived as symptoms of his true, passionate love for her. And, even if extensively discussed, the attempted rape scene is usually omitted in the majority of the debates regarding his character redemption, as something he deeply regrets. The song's lyrics "Oh! Darling/ Please believe me/ I'll never do you no harm" are skillfully edited with ambiguous scenes in which Spike's double nature – the pining desperate lover and the brutal vampire – is clearly displayed. The numerous love scenes between the two that inevitably ended with a fist fight (from "Smashed", 6.9, and "Wrecked", 6.10, to "Dead Things", 6.13) are also used to convey the vidder's point of view on the troubled couple.

> There's an underlying sense of, I don't know, *desperation* in the lyrics. A subtext of panic. When the panic finally manifests, the singer (Spike) does exactly the wrong thing. Every time. His intentions are good, but he's *EVIL*. It can't end well. (sockkpuppett 2009b).

5.4 Maxwell's Silver Hammer: Faith and the con vid

Maxwell's Silver Hammer is the ultimate *con-vid*. It's a catchy tune, with a perfect refrain for a sing-a-long (the vidder recalls hearing people singing the chorus during the Vividcon vidshow). In this vid Luminosity takes advantage of the context of the first - and most important – collective viewing of her vid, the *Vividcon* vidshow dedicated to *Scooby Road*. She knows that her vid will be shown in a room full of fellow fans, a room crowded with noisy and excited people and she creates a very funny and ironic vid with a real karaoke built-in text with a bouncing little hammer to sing the song's refrain. For this vid, she chooses a very well-known and beloved character's story arc, the third season story arc of Faith, the other slayer

appointed when Buffy supposedly dies for one minute in the first season's finale. It was indeed one of the most complex and obscure trajectory for a character in the first part of the series, since Faith is everything Buffy isn't: she is wild and reckless, she enjoys her slayer duties as a manner to put off steam, she is clearly attracted to the dark side of the slayer job and she likes to kill vampires so much that she ends up killing a human by mistake. Her association with the Maxwell character of the song brings justice to the opposite sides of Faith personality: on the one hand, her joyful and vivid approach to life - and the breath of fresh air that she is for Buffy when she comes to Sunnydale - and on the other hand, her inner psychopath that will ultimately bring Buffy to deadly wound her in an attempt to capture her. *Maxwell's Silver Hammer*'s structure and editing function both as a *con vid* and as a *living room vid*, because the vid contains several layers of complexity that can be experienced differently based on the consumption context.

5.5 **Coda: Carry That Weight and In the End**

> There is a central theme on BtVS and that is basically we-are-stronger-together-than-apart. Simple and effective and the show keeps coming back to it again and again. Buffy thinks it is all about Power and she is right and wrong. It is all about *sharing* the power. (sisabet 2006)

Scooby Road – and *Abbey Road* - closing vids are *Carry That Weight* and *In the End*, in which Luminosity returns to *meta* consideration about the series as a whole and about its main character's journey. The first is the ideal closure for *Come Together*, as the vidder recalls "it encompasses Buffy from A-Z, showing her predicament, her curse (weight) of being the Slayer and her victory and acceptance of it". While the first verse is a montage of Buffy's most painful moments, directly linked to the preceding *Golden Slumbers* (which is dedicated to the painful unwanted resurrection storyline that dominated the sixth season of the show): Buffy's struggle at the end of the first season with the prophecy of her death, Angelus rising and her obligation to kill her first love at the end of the second season, her watcher Mr. Giles leaving her alone to fight her battles in the sixth season, and finally her failing attempts to save the other potential slayers during final season. At the change of rhythm in the middle of the song Buffy is shown with Angel, taking from him the amulet that will save the world from the dark forces in the beginning of the show's finale "Chosen" (7.22). Following the vidder's intentions, this

was the moment when we see Buffy "picking up the weight and carrying it, from The Harvest to End of Days. She fights the good fight, she breaks the chains that the first watchers put on the First Slayer" (sockkpuppett 2009c). This moment is followed by a powerful montage of Buffy's power shots and victorious battles during all the seven seasons of the show, a powerful moment that ends with Luminosity's "favorite clip in the entire project [...] where Buffy drops from the manhole, stakes the ubervamp with the scythe *and turns around*, fully integrated into Woman and Slayer" (sockkpuppett 2009c). While this vid is ultimately dedicated to Buffy's solitary journey to find a way to take her faith in her own hand, the following is a celebration of the powers of community and friendship. After the last shot of *Carry That Weight* the viewer is directly brought to the last vid of *Scooby Road*, which is a *series vid*, a vid that sums up all the significant moments of the entire show. Fast-paced and skillfully edited following the song beats, *In the End* is "a recap of the entire project and of the show itself" (sockkpuppett 2009c) and contains all the moments and scenes that, as Turk and Johnson argue "encapsulate events and even whole story lines" (2012): from Buffy's entrance in the library in the pilot (1.1), to her sister's Dawn arrival in "Buffy vs. Dracula" (5.1), from her mother's death in "The Body" (5.16) to her sacrifice jump in "The Gift" (5.22). The vid's ending shot is the series' ending shot: Buffy standing on the edge of the crater that has swallowed the entire Hellmouth and her town, Sunnydale, smiling at the thought of being able to finally live her life as she wants it.

In our analysis of *Scooby Road* we have tried to focus on all the pivotal issues concerning the complexity and intricacy of vidders and vidwatchers relationship with the narrative material: characters, stories, events and feelings that, mediated through the images, affected them deeply. We have also tried to provide an overview on the process through which these mutual and constant exchanges, between vidders and vidwatchers, but also between fans and media - which we have called the ecology of vidding - shape the way the community produces and consumes both original and derivative media objects.

Through fanvideos such as *Scooby Road*, vidders manage to express not only how much they love a media product, their thoughts about its characters and storylines, their excitement or discontent for appreciated or unwanted elements, but they also show the impact of these stories on their personal life (in the end, they spend weeks or even years working on these projects), the communities they build around them and their collective engagement with them. *Scooby Road* is not just a homage to a beloved TV show, and a beloved character, but is also an insight on fandom in its entirety, an ode to friendship and belonging.

> You love for Buffy and the show shines through for us all to see and... it's one of those things that makes me love fandom. We make beautiful things and share them with each other (vidder par avion comment to sockkpuppett 2005).

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SAINTS, COPS AND CAMORRISTI. EDITORIAL POLICIES AND PRODUCTION MODELS OF ITALIAN TV FICTION

LUCA BARRA, MASSIMO SCAGLIONI

ABSTRACT

Contemporary Italian TV fiction production is the result of both a long historical tradition and a complex broadcasting scenario. In recent years, three different models clearly emerged, following the divergent goals and needs of public service broadcaster Rai, commercial television Mediaset and pay-TV operator Sky Italia: respectively, with a pedagogical approach resulting in hagiographic miniseries, socially committed fiction and relevant comedies; with procedural and legal dramas following the US commercial models and romance-filled prime time soaps; and with a cable-oriented tension towards anti-heroes, high-budget productions and "quality television". The paper reconstructs the main traits of each model, focusing on their main titles and most emblematic genres, as well as on the national production companies that helped the broadcasters in defining and establishing peculiar "fiction styles" and editorial policies.

KEYWORDS

INTRODUCTION

The umbrella term *fiction* took root in Italy and the rest of Europe in a crucial phase in television's development across the Old Continent. As Jérôme Bourdon (2011) observed, it was in the 1980s, the decade of deregulation and the systematic arrival of the commercial networks that "besieged" public-service broadcasting (Barra and Scaglioni, 2013), that "fiction" became professionals' and scholars' broad label for a genre that would become increasingly important for the small screen. Indeed, it replaced the earlier narrative-production experiences that drew on first theatrical then cinematic traditions and typified the public-service broadcasting monopoly era. In Italy, these were the halcyon days of TV miniseries or serials (Grasso and Scaglioni, 2003).

But this was a change in more than just name. Initially – essentially during the 1980s and early 1990s – European television was "invaded" by ready-made fiction products mainly from North America, with some South American *telenovelas* and Japanese animations. Later, audiovisual production industries developed throughout Europe to meet the growing demand for narrative-fiction products, as much from the public-service broadcasters as from their private and commercial counterparts.

As for Italy, the domestic TV fiction production sector evolved over nearly two decades into a segment of increasing importance for the national economy and culture. From 1996, and more vigorously from the late 1990s through the 2000s to the present day, Italian fiction became an essential genre, and not only on generalist television (Buonanno, 2010; 2012b). As in other European countries, Italy's incentives for producing TV fiction sprang from EU policies (such as the 1989 "TV without borders" directive) and national initiatives. In particular, in 1998, the Italian parliament passed an important act (Law no. 122) earmarking 10% of the networks' broadcasting time and advertising revenues and 20% of the licence-fee proceeds for independent productions. The effects were immediate. Investment from the public-service broadcaster – the Rai – and its private competitor – Mediaset – in new Italian fiction grew strongly; by the turn of the millennium, annual programming time reached 650 hours, up more than 360 in four years (Buonanno, 2010). This was not just a nominal change; but it was about more than a quantitative increase in output, too. Rather, it established a new model that gave TV fiction a prominent position on the national television scene. Indeed, in the nearly twenty years since 1996, Italian-made TV fiction has grown in importance from several perspectives.

First, of all the content types, fiction is among the most prestigious (including in a purely "national" sense) in the main generalist networks' schedules, especially for the two market leaders, Raiuno (public) and Canale 5 (commercial). Both for the number of prime-time evenings dedicated to this genre (over 200 a year, on average) and for ratings (Geca Italia, 2005-2012), TV fiction content is strategic for the schedule and is essential for attracting large, broad audiences and hence significant advertising investment. Although the revenue from home-produced TV fiction has dwindled in recent years because of the recession, it still stands at an estimated Đ500 million a year (Barca and Marzulli, 2008).

Second, fiction has been an important spur for change and growth in Italy's audiovisual production sector. At the end of the 1990s, few independent production companies yet worked for television, but during the 2000s they gradually became more numerous and varied. Indeed, a roster of "major" production houses (the 8 most active companies – Freemantle, Endemol, Taodue, Publispei, Lux Vide, Albatross Film, Ares Film and Cattleya) was complemented by numerous "minor" players whose product has nevertheless sometimes had a significant economic and, above all, cultural impact. One such is Palomar, which has been producing the Raiuno ratings-toppers *Il commissario Montalbano* [*Inspector Montalbano*] and *Braccialetti rossi* [*Red Band Society*], since 1999 and 2013, respectively.

Third, from the perspective of genres and languages, too, the domestically produced fiction scene has progressively become more diverse and fertile. While, for cultural reasons, Italy has no established tradition of making serials, especially long ones, the TV fiction of the last twenty years has undoubtedly been an arena for innovation and experimentation. Although miniseries (normally two-partners) or short series (often termed "*serie all'italiana*" or Italian series, in four to eight episodes) are a traditionally fundamental strand, long series have gradually gained ground, in various forms: first as "Italian soaps" (e.g. *Un posto al sole* [*A Place in the Sun*], *Vivere* [*Living*] and *Centovetrine* [*A Hundred Windows*]); then as US-inspired "serialised series" over several seasons, with interweaving running plots and anthology plots, especially in the crime and police genre, from *Distretto di polizia* [*Police District*] to *Squadra antimafia* [*Anti-Mafia Squad*]; or in the domestic adaptations of long formats (mainly comedies, from *Un medico in famiglia* [*Doctor in the Family*] to *I Cesaroni* [*The Cesaronis*], both localised versions of Spanish scripted formats).

The current TV fiction scene, then, is particularly complex and varied. Since 2009, the recession that has affected all

production sectors – including, therefore, audiovisual production – has blighted growth in this segment for five years now (Barca and Zambardino, 2012). Nevertheless, TV fiction remains one of the most important areas for Italy's cultural industry for economic and socio-cultural reasons (thanks to the genre's enduring popularity, as the healthy viewing figures confirm) and for the languages of TV (with an ample range of genres, formats and aesthetics). In this broad and complex scenario, at least three major models have emerged; albeit with some overlaps, they still remain fairly well differentiated.

The first model regarded the TV fiction made for the public-service broadcaster, the Rai, the sector's major commissioner. The public broadcaster sets its own editorial line, in an attempt to enact its mandate while addressing its difficulties as a player that must reconcile this mission with the need to stay competitive in the advertising-revenue marketplace. A second model arose with the editorial policy developed by Italy's main commercial broadcaster, Mediaset, especially from the early 2000s, primarily to maximise ratings and advertising revenue. The picture has become more complicated with the emergence of a third model, a part-alternative to the first two, when the pay broadcaster Sky Italia began producing fiction in 2008. Its "trial and error" approach was driven by different needs of its own that shaped another editorial policy, largely concerned not with ratings and advertising revenues but with using fiction production to create visible and "newsworthy" events. The aim was to augment the value of its pay offering as perceived by both existing subscribers (around 4.5 million families) and potential ones (*prospects*). Each of these three models embraces a different mix both of specific genres and formats and of various "premier" production companies that best seems to serve that model or editorial policy's purpose. This article aims to delineate the fundamental characteristics of these models, detailing both their strongest and most emblematic genres and the main Italian production companies' more or less established "styles".

HAGIOGRAPHY, SOCIAL COMMITMENT, AND COMEDY. THE RAI EDITORIAL POLICY

The national public-broadcasting service is the most important and most traditional entity in the fiction production sector. The most important, because it invests the most money in fiction – Đ180 million in 2011 (Barca and Zambardino, 2012) – and dedicates the most evenings to the genre. And the most

traditional, because the Rai's is still the editorial policy most closely anchored to the established, recognisable forms of fiction, regarding not only formats (with a substantial selection of two-part miniseries, the least "serial" type of fiction) but also genres (with an emphasis on celebratory biopics, social commitment, and comedy) and audience (still generally with the highest proportion of adult and older viewers). "Hagiography", "social drama" and comedy therefore remain the genre strands most typical of the Rai fiction production model.

Domestically made miniseries have found their natural form, and to a certain extent their destiny, in the "hagiography", which has been a pillar of the Rai model. Etymologically, it denotes the "writings on the lives of saints", and in some cases, that is exactly what is aired, sometimes even accelerating the process of beatification and sanctification in real life, as with the 2005 biopic *Giovanni Paolo II* [*John Paul II*]. But also, and more generally, it involves telling the story of an exemplary figure, whatever their profession or art may have been. A nation traditionally made of "saints, heroes, poets and explorers" unavoidably tends to cherish and celebrate its leading exponents and to unite around the deeds of those who have shone the brightest; even foreigners may feature, too. Hagiography, sometimes with a historical or religious bent, is largely typified by the style of a production house that works primarily, if not exclusively, for the public-service broadcaster: Lux Vide, established in 1992 by the historic figure of early Rai director general Ettore Bernabei. Lux Vide productions enact and renew the old public-service broadcasting mission – centred on the "educational" imperative – in a new context characterised first by competition from commercial TV only, then by the explosion of the multichannel offering. The miniseries events telling the story of the greatest personalities in 20th-century history – from *Papa Giovanni* [*Pope John XXIII*] (2002) to *Madre Teresa* [*Mother Teresa*] (2003), *Padre Pio* [*Father Pio*] (2000) to *Giovanni Paolo II* (2005), and *Enrico Mattei* (2009) to *Coco Chanel* (2008) – aim to construct a pantheon of figures who lived exemplary lives with robust values, narrated with the hagiographic linearity of an illustrated book. In historical-religious cycles, too, (first of all, *Bibbia* [*The Bible*], 1993-2002) the production house's style maintains an artless schoolmasterliness that sacrifices complexity for accessibility. Indeed, an edifying tone, unadventurous plot structures, and a certain ethical Manichaeism that sharply separates good from evil are the defining characteristics of a model that perfectly fits a specific offering (Raiuno prime time) and audience (popular family, aka "grandparents and grandkids").

The Rai model is sustained not only by the historical and religious content but also by a second pillar of challenging drama, modern-history fiction, and social drama. Because of its remarkable popularity, "socially committed" drama is a central element – perhaps the most mainstream one – in the national output. Reading between the lines, we discern a trait peculiar to Italian culture, a decidedly unique view informed both by distant traditions, e.g. from America, and by experiences closer to home, e.g. in Europe. "Challenging" fiction (these labels always oversimplify to some extent) is the hub of a firmly established virtuous circle running from production to the audience – happily for the public-service broadcaster, which can attract large audiences while justifying its cultural mission. The social-drama genre has a celebrated forebear in a cycle produced by the Rai between 1984 and 2001, *La Piovra* [*The Octopus*], ten miniseries recounting the tentacle-like expansion of mafia and organised crime and a tenacious police chief's struggle against it. *La Piovra* represents, on one hand, the national response from the public-service broadcaster to the wave of imported series that invaded the networks after the commercial TV networks' arrival and, on the other, a genuine "media event" drawing peak audiences as large as 17 million viewers and 60% share (Buonanno, 2012). From *La Piovra* onwards, Raiuno in particular has kept renewing and refreshing its challenging social-drama strand, often through miniseries, from the story of Giovanni Falcone, a judge martyred by the mafia (*Giovanni Falcone. L'uomo che sfidò Cosa Nostra* [*The Man who Stood up to the Mafia*], 2006) to that of lawyer Giorgio Ambrosoli, murdered because he knew uncomfortable truths about the links between politics and organised crime (*Qualunque cosa succeda* [*Whatever Happens*], 2014). Television uses social drama to unravel the story of the nation. Italy is a country in somewhat strenuous pursuit of a shared narrative, one that can fill the voids – and the dark corners – of an identity that is permanently a work in progress and continually called into question. It is the country of the mafias but also of the "reluctant heroes", martyred simply because they refuse to comprise over values and duties. It is the country of terrorism but also of people who sacrifice themselves for the democratic rule of law. Social drama's popularity reflects the incessant need to find a shared story to represent the nation, in the absence of a solid shared past. It is a genre engaged in a piecemeal struggle to construct a national epic. Normally enjoying great ratings success, social drama is often a "media event" for an "imaginary community" to recognise itself in. This is the main reason that it often becomes the test bed for various production companies, a terrain criss-crossed by rather different styles, including commercial TV (as with *Paolo Borsellino* by Taodue for Mediaset, 2004).

A third pillar of the public-service TV fiction model is comedy, a vessel with various subgenres and formats. As a subplot to crime or detective stories in an idealised Italian provincial setting barely affected by crime (which is always punished, moreover), the light element becomes central to the narrative within the popular strand of family comedy. Typical examples include the five seasons of the miniseries *Il maresciallo Rocca* [*Sergeant Rocca*] (1996-2005), the nine long seasons of *Don Matteo* [*Father Matthew*] (2000-present) and the more recent *Che Dio ci aiuti* [*God Help Us*] (2011-present), the last two being Lux Vide productions. Family comedies have a long tradition in both film and television (Barra and Penati, 2011), animated by grafted-on scripted formats from abroad and by a more contemporary approach. The production company Publispei is the main specialist in this genre, principally with the Italian adaptation of the Spanish format *Médico de familia*. Indeed, *Un medico in famiglia* (1998-present) is one of the longest-running and most popular long series made for public-service television, having run to nine seasons spanning the entire period of "rebirth" in Italian fiction. Publispei specialises in this strand of comedy – it also makes *I Cesaroni* for Mediaset. It tried to "freshen up" the formula by offering an original hybrid with the musical genre in the three seasons of *Tutti pazzi per amore* [*Love Drives Us All Nuts*] (2008-2012), a story laced with continual irony and with musical numbers based on old domestic and international pop hits (Barra, 2010). Its writers (Ivan Cotroneo and Monica Rametta, with Stefano Bises) have followed up with other projects: the dramatic canvases of *Una grande famiglia* [*One Big Family*] (2012-present) and *Un'altra vita* [*Another Life*] (2014).

Finally, besides the three pillars of the Rai's fiction model – hagiography, social drama, and comedy, especially of the family variety – mention surely must be made of a genre that is different in many ways, even though public-service television started it off. The first move towards the long-series format, until then foreign to Italian cultural tradition, came in the mid 1990s with the Grundy (now FremantleMedia) production of the first national soap opera, *Un posto al sole* (1996-present). It was made as a daily early-evening fixture for Raitre in over 4,000 25-minute episodes. After that came *Vivere* and *Centovetrine*, produced for commercial TV, and *Agrodolce* [*Bittersweet*], made for the Rai again. Italian soaps can boast an identity of their own, despite having borrowed elements from British, Australian and North-American programmes. From the original US soap model, they have inherited the

format, the daytime schedule slot, and the rigidly industrial production machinery; from British experiences, the propensity to everyday realism and settings and the discussion of social issues, aspects that lend cultural legitimacy to a genre considered "lowbrow" and "trivial" (Grasso and Scaglioni, 2003; Cardini, 2004; Barra, 2014).

AMERICA AND "STRAPAESE". THE MEDIASET EDITORIAL POLICY

Whereas the public-service broadcasting editorial policy was rooted in a tradition as long as the story of Italian television itself, the commercial networks began to produce original fiction only later. From the late 1980s, and especially in the 1990s, in a now-stable television sector, the imported American TV series and the much-trawled cinema library were complemented by domestic series, sitcoms and soaps. In any case, among the private networks, only Mediaset had the financial means for those kinds of new production. They aired mostly in prime time on the flagship network, Canale 5, except for a few soaps and sitcoms in the same network's daytime schedules and for a handful of cautious experiments, often still with sitcoms, on Italia 1, the group network targeted at younger audiences.

On one hand, especially in the beginning, Mediaset's fiction output aped the public-service broadcasting genres and languages and followed the model of the Rai's miniseries and family comedies, in direct competition with them. A typical case was Il Papa buono [The Good-Hearted Pope] (2003), aired a few short months after Raiuno's Papa Giovanni (2002). On the other, the commercial editorial policy gradually developed its own identity, often making Mediaset programmes into an alternative capable both of broadening Italian productions' appeal to reach a larger, more varied audience and of engaging in a dialogue (through a commercial filter) with the experiences involving the most advanced American network and European series. Mediaset's original fiction productions comprised elements that were to some extent contradictory, often closely linked to a single production house and its "style", and that combined to form a picture that was rich, composite and – above all – extremely recognisable for Italian television audiences.

An early thread, one that runs through Mediaset programming, is the American-style action cop show in many episodes across multiple seasons (and, sometimes, spin-offs). It is modelled on the US network crime series, especially the typical CBS kind, with an Italianised format (of not 60 but 90 minutes' duration, or as two episodes paired together) and at least sometimes with a few lighter storylines to vary the dramatic register. Taodue – the production house founded by Pietro Valsecchi in 1991 and taken over by Mediaset in 2007 in a vertical-integration process – has developed an original, distinctive style and refined it over the years. It has various hallmarks: stories of criminals and uniformed heroes, of mafia clans and law-enforcers, in exhaustive variations on the theme of the struggle against evil, told with clear references to the film and television action genre; a pacy, spectacular story structure that holds the audience's attention and negotiates the inevitable advertisement breaks unscathed; and a powerful narrative tension that develops in parallel with emotional engagement. Distretto di polizia (2000-2011) is a long-running ensemble police show, where each episode's cases interweave with a dramatic horizontal narrative line, often concerning organised crime, and with lighter storylines where the police station becomes a workplace family reflecting the relationships and problems of everyday and police life (Buonanno, 2012: 97-98). RIS. Delitti imperfetti [RIS. Imperfect Crimes] (2005-2009) and its spin-off RIS Roma [RIS Rome] (2010-2012) adapt the concept of an international franchise such as CSI to an Italian setting. They tell, respectively, of the happenings in the Carabinieri scenes-of-crime departments in Parma and the capital. Squadra antimafia. Palermo oggi [Anti-Mafia Squad. Palermo Today] (2009-present) portrays the battle between the institutions and the mafia, transforming it into a clash between two female authority figures – a deputy chief of police and a clan member (Scaglioni, 2010, 2012). Il capo dei capi [The Boss of the Bosses] (2007) and Il clan dei camorristi [The Camorra Clan] (2013) adopt a shorter format, focusing on the power dynamics within the mafia and the Camorra, respectively, turning historical events surrounding such figures as Totò Riina or the Casalesi clan into an action story where the state is nonetheless always there and triumphs in the end. Through these shows, a new take on the police genre becomes the key to a language that can introduce innovations major and minor (such as the dual female leads, or a cast of virtually unknown actors) into the generalist and mainstream audience arena. Little by little, the family flavour and hearty sentiment typical of Italian public-service-broadcasting fiction are allowing room for a rawer worldview, for pure, unleavened action, for the criminal viewpoint, for teamwork, and for a crisp, precise style. The attempt to re-present a very "American" set of genres on Italian commercial TV, which was a complete success with the police and crime shows, has also

prompted experiments of more limited compass by the same production house, Taodue: the local adaptation of the teen drama in *I liceali* [*The High-schoolers*] (2008-2011), the comedy on a forced clash of cultures in *Benvenuti a tavola. Nord contro Sud* [*Welcome to Dinner. North vs South*] (2012-2013, in collaboration with Wildside), and *Il tredicesimo apostolo* [*The Thirteenth Apostle*] (2012-present), the supernatural fantasy with a religious backdrop. Although they did introduce new features into the national drama panorama, they were more conventional and less successful. Indeed, they have not (yet) managed to broaden Italian television's spectrum of regular genres, partly because Italian audiences are unaccustomed to more focused stories, and partly because of certain production constraints.

Canale 5, like the public-service broadcaster, has adopted the miniseries format, often in two episodes, for one-shot stories that hit the spot and create an event. However, compared to the Rai's educational-hagiographic tendency, Mediaset adopts an original perspective of "social drama with added spectacle". Biographies of remarkable people, stories that unite a national audience into an "imagined community", and even (the few) adaptations of literary classics are chosen according to dual criteria of pop success and action content. Once again, Taodue has also responded best to this editorial line from the commercial networks. It has been successful not only with subjects of a more classically religious stamp – e.g. *Francesco* [*Francis*] (2001), *Karol. Un uomo diventato papa* [*Karol. A Man who Became Pope*] (2005) and *Karol. Un papa rimasto uomo* [*Karol. A Pope, Still a Man*] (2006) – but also when interpreting events from the nation's civil history, some recent, as with *Paolo Borsellino* (2004), *Nassiryia* [*Nasiriyah. Lest we forget*] (2007) and *Aldo Moro. Il presidente* [*Aldo Moro. The President*] (2008). Add to that the hit series re-examining true crimes or anti-mafia struggles: *Ultimo* (1998, with numerous sequels), *Uno Bianca* [*The White Fiat Uno Terrorist Group*] (2001), *Il sequestro Soffiantini* [*The Soffiantini Kidnap*] (2002) and *Il delitto di via Poma* [*The Crime on Via Poma*] (2011). The hero is always a loner, and good usually wins out, but the commercial miniseries leave room for extra nuances, often breaking away from the genre's traditional tenets and customary formulas to make the story spectacular.

Alongside the American model and the action genre, another cornerstone of Mediaset's editorial policy for fiction, one that in a sense radically contrasts with Taodue's productions, is what may be called a "*fotoromanzo filmato*" [photo story on film], the emblem of a mega-popular mass taste infused (more or less consciously) with camp and kitsch elements. These shows give the easy-reader tradition a melodramatic make-over, presenting "strapaese" parochialism in its "original purity" while harking back to the post-war years and the 1950s and 1960s. The production company that has made this national-popular fiction its signature style, a distinctive and exclusive trait, is Ares Film, essentially a partnership between screenwriter Teodosio Losito and producer-director Alberto Tarallo. *Il bello delle donne* [*The Ladies' Hairdresser*] (2001-2003), a women's story that was part melodrama, part comedy, set in the present day started a new genre in its own right, including shows such as *L'onore e il rispetto* [*Honour and Respect*] (2006-present), *Il peccato e la vergogna* [*Sin and Shame*] (2010-present), *Pupetta. Il coraggio e la passione* [*Pupetta. Courage and Passion*] (2013) and *Furore. Il vento della speranza* [*Fury. The Wind of Hope*] (2014). The stories' bold, theatrical tone, the making of actors such as Gabriel Garko and Manuela Arcuri into big fetish stars, and the warm, textured cinematography have reinvented the melodrama in a contemporary style that adds a cult-like dimension to their "lowbrow" popular perspective.

Between the two extremes of American-style action à la Taodue and Ares's popular melodrama, the prime-time fiction on Canale 5 typically belongs to two other major strands, once again partly dependent on the individual production houses' particularities. One strand is family comedy. It can attract an inter-generational audience through a multi-strand storyline featuring characters in various age groups, hybridising genres to piece together a genre-world that blends different types of humour, teen and adult storylines, and even some murder or mystery elements (Barra and Penati, 2011). Mediaset's biggest hit from this perspective is *I Cesaroni* (2006-2014), produced by Publispei, the company that made *Un medico in famiglia* for the Rai. *I Cesaroni* also adapts the format of a Spanish drama (in this case, *Los Serrano*); it follows the story of a family resulting from the union of two others, where teenage romance, misunderstandings and Rome-flavoured popular humour are the order of the day (Penati, 2010). Another frequently used editorial line comprises sentimental drama featuring stories of love and passion in prime-time soaps, often in period costume, mainly for female audiences. Examples include *Elisa di Rivombrosa* (2003-2005), a smash-hit costume drama that ran to several seasons, and the low-budget experimental production *Non smettere di sognare* [*Don't Stop Dreaming*] (2009-2011), a tentative attempt to use the industrial soap-opera machine first for a TV film and then for an entire season. The sentimental side has become a fertile specialist area for the Endemol Italia production company, part of an international

group controlled by Mediaset from 2007 to 2012, and now independent again. Shows such as *Le tre rose di Eva* [*Eva's Three Roses*] (2012-present) are hybrids heavily based on romantic stories with some thriller components, in soap form.

Indeed, the soap opera, this time the afternoon variety, is the arena for another long-term collaboration between Mediaset and Endemol that has spawned two shows – *Vivere* (1999-2008) and *Centovetrine* (2001-2015) – that occupied Canale 5's early-afternoon schedule for years (and to some extent still do), alongside soaps from America, such as *Beautiful* (*The Bold and the Beautiful*, 1987-present) and Spain, with *Il segreto* (*The Secret/El secreto de Puente Viejo*, 2011-present). Unlike *Un posto al sole* and its British-inspired social stamp, Mediaset's afternoon soaps offer a world of sentiment and intrigue, electing to depict great northern cities and aspiration lifestyles (Cardini, 2004). Based on industrial-type routines aimed at optimising time and resources and on the use of various ad hoc production centres, e.g. at San Giusto Canavese (Barra, 2014), the production model transforms daytime soap into "current", everyday, always vivid dramas.

Mediaset's fiction offering is completed with some situation comedies, although this output has been almost abandoned in recent years. On one hand, Italy had a strong tradition of home-grown sitcoms dating back to the late 1980s, most resoundingly typified by *Casa Vianello* [*At the Vianellos*] (1988-2007). Shot entirely in the studio on a low budget, using "easy" humour based on repetitive, rather thin plotlines and topics, these shows were often little more than a narrative vehicle for major Italian comedians (such as the couple Raimondo Vianello and Sandra Mondaini, or Gino Bramieri) or for Mediaset presenters' acting debuts (such as Gerry Scotti's, as just one example). On the other, various sketch shows based on international formats, such as *Camera Café* (2003-2012) and *Love Bugs* (2004-2007), were produced during the 2000s in house or with the aid of production companies such as Magnolia. While Italian sitcoms found a home in the Sunday schedules on Canale 5, sketch shows often aired on Italia 1, although budget cuts at these networks have brought those productions to a halt.

Italian sitcoms, family comedy, spectacular miniseries, daytime and evening sentimental drama, American-style action shows, and mega-popular melodrama for the masses all helped commercial fiction to distinguish itself from its public-service-broadcasting counterpart in both genre and tone. It went on to establish a contrasting yet complementary model while enriching the original mainstream fiction offering for Italian audiences.

BAD GUYS.
THE SKY EDITORIAL POLICY

On the Italian fiction scene, alongside the public-service broadcaster and its main commercial competitor, both with decades of production experience, a third way has opened up in recent years, with the original fiction produced by satellite pay-TV operator Sky Italia, broadcast exclusively as premium subscriber content (Scaglioni and Barra, 2013). Sky's editorial policy (or at least its aim) embraces a principle of quality TV, modelled on similar European experiences and on American cable series. On one hand, the production output is smaller than the generalist networks', with a limited number of titles. On the other, for that very reason, Sky fiction programmes are meticulously produced not only in their conception, scripting, filming and editing but also in how they are promoted and scheduled, to maximise the return on investment.

The pay-TV original productions are explicitly and inherently different from the generalist networks' offerings in their style and subject matter: they represent an alternative "in terms of languages, styles, themes and target audiences" (Carelli, 2014: 431) to the genres, narrative *topoi*, and linguistic stereotypes adopted by much Rai and Mediaset fiction. Its distinctive editorial characteristics are various: the representation of evil in its violence and, in a sense, banality, depicted without mediation or counterbalancing; the emergence of the anti-hero as a main character (with ensuing controversy); attention to narrative construction and visual detail typical of quality television aimed not at mainstream audiences but a (real or presumed) élite; an ironic, detached or otherwise different take; a crude, realistic language that can express or represent tones and content out of bounds to TV made "for everyone". The stylistic differences reflect an original production model, still a work in progress, that, as in the American one, gives control of the entire project to a showrunner (or the head writer and director together). This arrangement is based on the strong relationship forged between broadcaster and production company, and seeks, moreover, to transform fiction programmes into fully fledged brands, using creative and operational levers from image building to promotion (Scaglioni and Barra, 2014).

Sky's first fiction experiments were actually led by Fox Italia, working with the production company Wilder (now Wildside), which was founded by Lorenzo Mieli and Mario Gianani. The biggest hit of this period was *Boris* (2007-2010), a unique and heavily metatextual cult sitcom located on the film set of a "classic" generalist Italian fiction, satirising

its stereotypes, tics, habits and general sloppiness (Pezzini, 2008; Innocenti, 2013). The Fox–Wilder collaboration continued with fiction programmes in very different genres: an anthological series / docu-fiction hybrid in *Donne assassine* [*Women Who Kill*] (2008), the serialised adaptation of a film comedy in *Non pensarci* [*Don't Think About It*] (2009), and a crime miniseries based on a true story in *Il mostro di Firenze* [*The Monster of Florence*] (2009).

Initially in parallel, and from 2010 exclusively, Sky produced original series itself for its channels (Sky Cinema, then Sky Atlantic), exploring different paths before settling on a fairly clear model. While Fox confined itself to a few forays into what anyway was niche terrain, Sky built its alternative to the generalist offering by taking the most popular genres and "reinventing" them to emphasise its different approach. Hence its output of miniseries, often biographical, dealing with deviant themes and characters, a world away from the generalists' saints and civic heroes, from satanism in *Nel nome del male* [*In the Name of Evil*] (2009) to biopics of a porn star in *Moana* (2009) and a criminal in *Faccia d'angelo* [*Angel Face*] (2012). Meanwhile, the longest-format (often the most ambitious) series shook up the commercial channels' action genre, recasting it from the "bad guys'" perspective or at least blurring the distinction between good and evil. An early example was *Quo vadis, baby. La serie* [*Quo vadis, baby. The series*] (2008), adapted from Gabriele Salvatores's film of the same name and produced by Colorado Film, a *noir* set in an ethereal Bologna.

This approach was echoed in the productions for Sky Italia by Cattleya, a company set up by Riccardo Tozzi. They set the style and the template for several "art-house" TV series solidly underpinned by a literary and cinema hit that they liberally reinvented; they brought evil to the screen, giving it a mythical air; and they pushing back the boundaries of what could be depicted and watched. The two seasons of *Romanzo criminale* [*Crime Novel*] (2008-2010) reconstruct the doings of the Banda della Magliana criminal organisation in a dramatic and sinister light, with an ensemble narration where the actors playing Dandi, Freddo and Libanese are virtual debutants (D'Aloia, 2010; Pisoni, 2011; Galvagno, 2013). And the more recent *Gomorra* [*Gomorrah*] (2014-present) even cuts out all guardians of legality from the story, in a no-holds-barred close encounter with the Camorra underworld that turns its hierarchies, rites and recurrent language into legend in a reading akin to US cable-network productions (which partly explains why the show has proved a hit export in many foreign countries – uniquely among Italian productions).

Completing the Sky fiction scene are the Wildside productions, which explore alternative genres other than action and re-present them as quality TV. The annual Christmas comedies and, above all, the ironic mystery *I delitti del BarLume* [*The Bar Lume Crimes*] (2013-present) are a not-always-successful attempt to apply the "Sky template" to lighter themes. The Italian edition of *In Treatment* (2013-present) faithfully reproduces the format and many storylines from the Israeli original and its American reprise, adapting some characters and casting some very famous Italian actors. Finally, the new reading of recent Italian history in *1992* (2015) adopts the tone of a political and social review.

All told, it is "a whole new kind of fiction" (Scaglioni and Barra, 2013): although limited in number and still a work in progress, Sky original productions have opened up a "third way" in Italian serial drama, contrary in some ways and complementary in others to Rai and Mediaset, positively affecting not only the entire national industry but also the quality and variety offered to viewers.

CONCLUSIONS. NOT JUST TV

The fiction production (and broadcasting) scenario on Italian television therefore evinces three major models or strands (sometimes seen as practical policies, sometimes as ideal guidelines or intentions) informed by distinct editorial lines, precise positioning relative to competitors, and different creative and economic objectives. First, the public-service broadcaster, Rai, seeks to build as inclusive an offering as possible for the general public, without neglecting the dimension of educating and "shaping the citizenry" through its stories. Second, the Mediaset commercial networks' products follow a broader principle of undiluted, sometimes even shameless, entertainment, following the example of the American networks or Italian mega-popular mass tastes. Third, Sky's pay offering aspires to make more sophisticated, complex (in a word, premium) fiction to differentiate itself radically from the mainstream and to justify the subscription cost to its viewers.

These three models must not, however, be considered stable and set in stone. On one hand, indeed, as we have tried to outline, the evolution in fiction production (and in Italian television in the round) fuels a constant reappraisal and refinement of editorial policy. On the other, the strategies adopted by one network are mirrored, "overturned" or opposed on the other channels: the three models continually overlap,

mix and cross over, and innovations in one are reprised in the others, or at least cause knock-on effects. The picture also becomes even more fluid with the presence on the fiction scene of two linked but to some extent independent groups: besides the broadcasters, the production companies operate within the market, reshaping their editorial and commercial strategies, often working for all three players and thus within all three models. The presence of competing and fully formed production styles thus does not preclude – and could even stimulate – a broad variety of hybrid ideas or innovations.

On the fringes of the three models, finally, digital media and the web offer scope for new forms of (para)television fiction production and original languages, partly as newer professional skills develop and budgets inevitably shrink. In recent years, numerous shows (and as many "viral phenomena") have flourished online, especially in satirical and comic genres, albeit with constant reference to the languages of television. As web series become fragments inserted in TV programmes or give centre stage to personalities and stars who then conquer other media, various experiments in "planned cross-fertilisation" between TV and the web may prove more interesting, where the production companies and creative people from traditional fiction look to shorter formats and original narrative structures. *Una mamma imperfetta* [*An Imperfect Mum*] (2013-present) is a partnership between the daily newspaper *Corriere della sera* and the second Rai network, which has broadcast the various episodes; *Una grande famiglia. Vent'anni prima* [*One Big Family. Twenty Years Before*] (2013) is the prequel of the Rai drama of the same name, devised specially for the web; and *Il candidato* [*The Candidate*] (2014-present) is a comedy sketch lasting just a few minutes during political talk show *Ballarò*. But there is still a long way to go.

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1992 (2015)
Agrodolce (2008-2009)
Aldo Moro. Il presidente (2008)
Benvenuti a tavola. Nord contro Sud (2012-2013)

Boris (2007-2010)
Braccialetti rossi (2014-present)
Camera Café (2003-2012)
Casa Vianello (1988-2007)
Centovetrine (2001-2015)
Che Dio ci aiuti (2011-present)
Coco Chanel (2008)
Distretto di polizia (2000-2011)
Don Matteo (2000-present)
Donne assassine (2008)
Elisa di Rivombrosa (2003-2005)
Enrico Mattei (2009)
Faccia d'angelo (2012)
Francesco (2001)
Furore. Il vento della speranza (2014)
Giovanni Falcone. L'uomo che sfidò Cosa Nostra (2006)
Giovanni Paolo II (2005)
Giovanni Paolo II (2005)
Gomorra (2014-present)
I Cesaroni (2006-2014)
I delitti del BarLume (2013-present)
I liceali (2008-2011)
Il bello delle donne (2001-2003)
Il candidato (2014-present)
Il capo dei capi (2007)
Il clan dei camorristi (2013)
Il commissario Montalbano (1999-present)
Il delitto di via Poma (2011)
Il maresciallo Rocca (1996-2005),
Il mostro di Firenze (2009)
Il Papa buono (2003)
Il peccato e la vergogna (2010-present)
Il sequestro Soffiantini (2002)
Il tredicesimo apostolo (2012-present)
In Treatment (2013-present)
Karol. Un papa rimasto uomo (2006)
Karol. Un uomo diventato papa (2005)
L'onore e il rispetto (2006-present)
La Bibbia (1993-2002)
La Piovra (1984-2001)
Le tre rose di Eva (2012-present)
Love Bugs (2004-2007)
Madre Teresa (2003)
Moana (2009)
Nassiryia (2007)
Nel nome del male (2009)
Non pensarci (2009)

Non smettere di sognare (2009-2011)
Padre Pio (2000)
Paolo Borsellino (2004)
Papa Giovanni (2002)
Pupetta. Il coraggio e la passione (2013)
Qualunque cosa succeda (2014)
Quo vadis, baby. La serie (2008)
RIS Roma (2010-2012)
RIS. Delitti imperfetti (2005-2009)
Romanzo criminale (2008-2010)
Squadra antimafia. Palermo oggi (2009-present)
Tutti pazzi per amore (2008-2012)
Ultimo (1998)
Un medico in famiglia (1998-present)
Un posto al sole (1996-present)
Un'altra vita (2014)
Una grande famiglia (2012-present)
Una grande famiglia. Vent'anni prima (2013)
Una mamma imperfetta (2013-present)
Uno Bianca (2001)
Vivere (1999-2008)

MAPPING *ROMANZO CRIMINALE.* AN EPIC NARRATIVE ECOSYSTEM?

MARTA BONI

ABSTRACT

Romanzo Criminale is one of the few recent Italian media products that has emerged as a societal phenomenon and as a vehicle for the exportation of a national culture. It is a complex narrative which extends in time and space due to its various adaptations and intermedial crossovers. Following the path of complexity, drawing on Edgar Morin's work, *Romanzo Criminale* will be thought of as a complex system. As precedent studies on the intertwining of official and grassroots discourses show, *Romanzo Criminale* becomes a complex world, with its boundaries and internal organization. This paper will show that *Romanzo Criminale* can be studied as a *semiosphere* (Lotman 2005), or a semiotic space defined by and which encourages the intertwining of texts and audience appropriations, creating an epic process. Some methodological perspectives used for mapping this phenomenon will be discussed, namely Franco Moretti's distant reading.

KEYWORDS

INTRODUCTION

Romanzo Criminale (2008-2010) is one of the few recent Italian media products that has emerged as a societal phenomenon and as a vehicle for the exportation of a national culture. The story of Il Libanese (Francesco Montanari), Il Freddo (Vinicio Marchioni) and Dandi (Alessandro Roja), petty criminals who decide to take over the illegal drug trade in the city of Rome and develop ties with the mafia and the highest powers, is taken from actual historic events. The basis of this epic narrative is not a text, but a rich collection of multiple stories and suburban legends, which became a collective Italian heritage. *Romanzo Criminale* portrays a topical moment within Italian history, the Years of Lead[1], that are still an obscure chapter and space for discussions about political identity for many Italians [2]. Due to its various adaptations and intermedial crossovers, it is a complex narrative, which extends in time and space. In my hypothesis, this phenomenon can be compared to a neo-epic process, because of its multi-layer composition, its oral features and its role in the definition of a national identity. In fact, when analysing the impact of *Romanzo Criminale* in Italian culture, a strong interaction of official and grassroots discourses can be underlined (Boni 2011, 2013). Through parodies, discussions in boards, and fan fiction, viewers prolong the pleasure of the text, reinforce their social links with fellow fans by finding and sharing information about the content and by working out collectively new interpretations.

This paper will show that *Romanzo Criminale* can be studied as a *semiosphere* (Lotman 2005), or a semiotic space defined by and which encourages the intertwining of texts and audience appropriations. My aim is to understand how the interaction of texts and audiences causes the emergence of a complex system: drawing on Edgar Morin's work, methodological tools will be considered for the analysis of this phenomenon, in order to understand how it can be mapped (Morin 2007). The concept of epic will be explored for the description of this cultural and semiotic process and a methodology fit for its description will be defined. Some perspectives will be examined, focusing on Franco Moretti's work on *Distant Reading* (Moretti 2000, 2005, 2013). In the hypothesis

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1   The Years of Lead was a period of socio-political disorder in Italy that lasted from the late 1960s into the early 1980s.

2   As seen in a "certain tendency" of national cinema starting at the turn of the century: *The Best of Youth* (Marco Tullio Giordana, Italy, 2003)*, Good Morning, Night* (Marco Bellocchio, Italy, 2003)*, My Brother is an Only Child* (Daniele Luchetti, Italy, 2007).

carried out here, distant reading can be the answer for such thing as an epic process. More broadly, it could be of use for the analysis of the interaction of television series, films and their audiences.

01 SEMIOSPHERE AND POLYSYSTEMS

Romanzo Criminale is a novel (De Cataldo 2002), a film (Placido 2005), and a TV series (Sollima 2008-2010). The series can be studied as a complex narrative (Mittell 2006, 2012), which is typically found in the contemporary media panorama, not only because of its stylistic features, but also because it makes good use of convergence culture strategies, like transmedia (Jenkins 2006). In *Romanzo Criminale*'s vast and multi-layered storytelling, production, distribution and brand strategies converge, thus complexifying its seriality. Therefore, terms such as adaptation and transmedia do not suffice if we want to explain the pervasiveness of *Romanzo Criminale* in social discourse, resulting from the intertwining of industrial and fan practices. Also the strength of the story, which is firmly rooted into Italian culture has to be considered as a main reason for the success of this media phenomenon. Over the years, *Romanzo Criminale* has been reworked, imitated and remixed by fans who have transformed it into a constantly growing environment, sparking debates about history and politics (Boni 2011 and 2013). Various forms of grassroots textuality such as fan fictions, parodic videos, homages and artefacts of a heterogeneous nature build up *Romanzo Criminale* as a culture and as a world. From a pragmatic viewpoint, these activities have the role of domesticating the work: they are "deliberations" which build up the film— the book and the TV series — as a text and as a discourse (Soulez 2011). These activities also expand the work in the social sphere by constantly "deferring" its meaning and reframing it in localized contexts.. Beyond textual, productive, distributive and branding mechanisms, typical of contemporary Italian "quality television" strategies (Scaglioni and Barra 2013), the permanency of these discourses in the public sphere can be analysed.

The elements that make up *Romanzo Criminale* are interconnected in a semiotic space, each one of them is linked with the others. Official texts, such as Giancarlo De Cataldo's novel, Michele Placido's film, and the series produced by Sky Cinema, share the same space (the world of *Romanzo Criminale*) that each of them help to define. In this environment, grassroots productions have the right to exist as well. Consequently, a

viewer's experience will not always be influenced by each text, but it *could be* at any moment. This influence could produce localized and specific interpretations.

It is worth noting that Yuri Lotman's notion of semiosphere is characterized by different speeds of functioning: notably, the borders, space of translation and creolization, always transform faster than the center (Lotman 2005). If we consider *Romanzo Criminale* as a semiosphere, we can see how fan practices contribute in creating a transformation or adaptation process to local contexts, that nevertheless define the identity of the whole. For example, fan dubbing in regional dialects does not have the same impact for every viewer. Yet, every time that these videos are watched on YouTube, it is possible to *relocate Romanzo Criminale* into a local culture through the use of language. Regional dialects bring out particular interpretations that shift, be it imperceptibly, the global meaning of the whole system, *for that one user*. Thanks to *spreadability* (Jenkins et al. 2013), predominantly through online channels, individual interpretations can proliferate and reach broader audiences than originally targeted. YouTube videos and discussions in boards function as entryways that guide how the work is read and contribute to differences in meaning.

User comments are often the space for sharing knowledge concerning more than one field, and are, for the fan, necessary for understanding whether the movie is worth the price of the ticket or the DVD, or for sharing their ideas after the viewing experience. They are *paratexts* (see Gray 2010, see also Mittell 2012). Using a systemic approach, though, they can be thought of as mini-worlds that, as a whole, build up *Romanzo Criminale's* semiotic space when paired with the official texts and constitute it as a world. Therefore, *Romanzo Criminale* emerges as a process that comes in a variety of meanings, emerging in specific moments and according to an individual's experience. At the same time, a global image of it, a systemic image, consolidates over time, due to the superimposition of single processes. In my example, up to this point, *Romanzo Criminale*'s spatialization can take the form of a *polysystem*, or a set of concentric circles.

The concept of polysystem, elaborated by Itamar Even-Zohar, implies that the study of groups of canonic and non-canonic works highlights the appearance of organizing instances that are mainly contextual, resulting from shared practices from communities and institutions, within a larger semiotic space. Literary works are not considered separately, but as parts of the literary system. And each system can influence others, notably in the case of translation, phenomenon that

has to be considered within a network of effects and causes, instead of a transition from a source to a target text. The coherence of *Romanzo Criminale* is a matter of point of view, as it appears when considering the following phenomena:

- circulation and migration of fragments across discursive environments;
- remix and mash-up practices;
- counterfactual and counterfictional worlds in fan productions;
- translation phenomena.

Romanzo Criminale is an environment in which a culture's values are reworked. It is a moment of culture, perfectly working, sometimes incoherent, but systemic. It is important to mention that, from a pragmatic viewpoint, in order to study mechanisms of meaning-making, researchers should think intermedially and transmedially. A viewer's experience is built within a network. For example, links with a certain "poliziottesco" cinema should be considered: poliziottesco has become, over the years, a cult genre as user comments show[3]. Moreover, *Romanzo Criminale the series* has to be interpreted as a product of Sky, whose brand is adopted. The intermedial nature of the series requires the viewer to travel across many worlds, and cultures: viewers are "cultural omnivores."

02 **A NEO-EPIC PROCESS**

The contemporary media panorama is characterized by the flow of information, opinions, comments and emotions in online networks. The elaboration of our experience of a text is determined by its expression and through community exchanges. For example, a growing number of people share their opinions about a film online. Therefore, emotions are no longer intimate; they leave a visible trace that can be reinterpreted by a global community. Within this conceptual framework, fan productions have to be studied as forms of knowledge that give a new media form to the filmic experience. They incarnate an emotion within a network of discourses.

These actions are indicative of the convergence era as described by Jenkins: storytelling is collective, marked by multiple authors through various platforms, and by the circulation of media fragments. It can be interesting to compare the contemporary phenomenon to a resurgence of the epic form (see also Wu Ming 2008). In ancient epics, as it is known, bardic

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3   See discussion boards such as Gente di rispetto: http://www.gentedirispetto.com/forum/showthread.php?17828-Romanzo-Criminale-la-serie (2014/12/26).

performances took place during banquets and contributed to the passing on of mythical songs. Bringing together heterogeneous fragments, bards' songs were collective memories, distinct from personal recollections of individual events, and gave a sense of global belonging. In his *Lectures on Fine Art* (1820-1829), Hegel defines the term "epic" as any event that is connected to a world and a nation, and expresses a nation's conscience (Lafaye 2003: 238). Indeed, *Romanzo Criminale* seems to function as a "song of a collectivity which attempts to gain a coherence, in the sense that a nation is progressively acknowledging its place in History"[4]. Notably, the oral dimension of the epic seems to be a feature of contemporary media. The interweaving of individual memories and collective experience is also at the core of today's grassroots activities that can be found on the Web, like the production and exchange of memes, often used in spreadable culture. Henry Jenkins compares transmedia storytelling to Bible stories (spread through stained-glass windows, frescos, and medieval performances): this new form of storytelling, typical of contemporary culture, possesses characteristics of a new orality, because it is free from the "logic of writing". Performance, and not only reading, is at the core of transmedia experiences: more similar to Lego bricks than a text, the narrative is pieced together by users, through the matching of fragmentary elements. Ideally, in a transmedia phenomenon, the journey across the multiple media devices that build it up is as important as an encounter with a single piece of narrative.

This oral dimension is central in epic phenomena (Dupont 1998): banquets were, for Ancient Greeks, a main ritual of civil society, and their ephemeral nature, that no book could frame or write down, was part of their cultural role. Within these collective performances, *how* a story was told was as important as the content of the storytelling. Consequently, not only the aesthetics of epic narrative can be underlined, but also the fact that epic is a cultural process. The transmedia nature of contemporary media ecosystems enhances the performative feature, bringing the story closer to users: parodies and discourses in boards show how a story can be constantly retold, without losing its cultural meaning.

The genealogy of epic phenomena is complex: in order to understand its composition, we need to take into account a process that grows over time, a process that is constituted by multiple, local, ephemeral fragments (Lord 2000). Over

the years, and thanks to its link to Italian history, *Romanzo Criminale* has become a polyphonic space, able to gather various texts, by multiple authors, functioning as a catalyst of grassroots productions, and providing answers concerning viewers' identity. For example, young viewers admit they felt closer to the characters because they looked like their parents in old pictures, or that, starting to collect information about one of the many songs that appear in the TV series, they discovered a part of Italian history that they did not know. Moreover, many discussions in boards expand from the analysis of the movie or the series to discussions about contemporary politics. Another reason for considering *Romanzo Criminale* a neo-epic phenomenon is because it provides answers to every member of the society in which it is made, functioning and spreading within a digital network that complicates its already transmedial nature.

03 THE HYPOTHESIS: FOR AN EPISTEMOLOGY OF COMPLEXITY

Our object can be compared to a serial ecosystem, or a product characterized by continuous replicability, an open structure and a permanent ability to expand (Pescatore and Innocenti 2012, Bisoni 2013, Pescatore et al. 2014). Its expansion is made both by narrative and non-narrative elements: fans' emotions, for example, have a central role, if we consider them as performances. Within this framework, the nature of fan appropriations and rewriting practices can be studied, and a typology can be built. If we choose to limit ourselves to a textual approach, it would be possible to use the grid of hypertextual practices (Genette 1982), which would allow us to interpret the various forms of fan discourse through the categories of imitation and transformation. However, considering the phenomenon's transmedia features, the limits of such an approach are revealed. In fact, Genette assumed the existence of a hypotext (a source text) and at least one hypertext (a derivative text). As a narrative like *Romanzo Criminale* was reworked over the years by various players, its hypotext – the book – became lost in a serialization of linked adaptations, and was eventually replaced by a world. Instead of referring to only one text, derivative works refer more often to *Romanzo Criminale*'s world, following a process of transcendency of the work (Genette 1994, see also Re 2012). When we study parodies that imitate *Romanzo Criminale* with a serious or satirical intention, the object is not only a text, but a set of characters with transfictional lives (Saint-Gelais 2011); for

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4 "Chant d'une collectivité qui cherche à acquérir une cohérence, dans la mesure où un peuple prend progressivement conscience de sa place dans l'Histoire" (my translation), Bafaro, 1997.

example, Il Libanese, Freddo, Dandi, and their actions have become mythical through the texts that depict their story. Not one text, then, but a network of discourse, a polyphonic and polycentric space.

The heterogeneous features of media devices, the storytelling longevity and its dilation in directions that often are unpredictable for its authors require researchers to adopt an epistemology of complexity. According to Edgar Morin, to adopt complexity means to conceive the different parts of a system as intertwined. Complex (from the Latin, *complexus*) is what is woven together. If one chooses to think of *Romanzo Criminale* as a complex system, or as an ecosystem, a method has to be found, capable of singling out the study of different parts (medium-specific questions) from the study of the whole (the movements through which the serial phenomenon is understood as a world). Unquestionably, the two perspectives are linked together: one cannot be thought of separately from the other.

The hypothesis of *Romanzo Criminale* as a neo-epic process brings me to look for a way to keep together a vast set of objects of various nature, but especially two kinds of perspectives. In order to understand the process and its serial complexity, then to validate the neo-epic hypothesis, a microscopic and a macroscopic perspective are needed. On the one hand, Jenkins' ethnography of fan practices can be considered a tool for a microscopic view: it will help describe the interaction of audiences and texts. For example, a close analysis of the parodies, remixes, and discourses in fan discussion boards can shed light on a variety of appropriations and rewritings. On the other hand, it appears from the results of a genettian typology that the single fragments do not offer enough insight concerning the evolution of the transmedial whole: following the path of complexity, one needs to know how the whole develops over time. In this sense, Franco Moretti's work on distant reading can be useful in order to understand the serial phenomenon (Moretti 2000, 2005). Distant reading means

> to undertake the analysis of small phenomena from afar, so that messages reveal little more than positions and linkages within social space [...] distance is [...] not an obstacle, but a specific form of knowledge: fewer elements, hence a sharper sense of their overall interconnection. Shapes, relations, structures. Forms. Models (Moretti 2005: 1).

04 **SPATIAL THINKING**

In the *Atlas of European Novel 1899-1900* (1998) Moretti considers the potential of a model for a geography of literature. Fernand Braudel's total history, developed in the cultural framework of the *Annales*, claimed that geography could explain cultural and economic history, since it focuses on long-term processes instead of single events, and it highlights phenomena taking place in geographical areas. Notably, Braudel raised the importance of the need for artistic atlases (Braudel 1959). According to Moretti, this is true even for literary history: atlases, or collections of maps, are visual representations that make connections visible, thus changing the way researchers look at texts. They make visible relationships and patterns that would otherwise be missed. Maps are not inert containers or boxes in which history "takes place", but active forces that fill and shape the literary field.

Moretti suggests the interpretation of relationships, patterns and recurrences within big literary corpora, and their visualization through maps. In *Maps, Graphs, Trees* (2005) he uses diagrams in order to model the evolution of features across a large corpus (i.e., all the occidental novels written in the nineteenth century). Moretti describes the result as a deliberate process of reduction and abstraction. In fact, when the object of knowledge takes the form of a tree, or a spectrum of variations, its structure no longer has similarities with any of the real objects that constitute it, and cannot emerge from any of them taken individually. The virtues of this modelling operation, giving visibility and coherence to a network of elements, underline the "systematic correlation between form and history".

The origins of cartography in art history can be found in Malraux's imaginary museum, and in Benjamin's and Warburg's atlas projects. These projects result from a model or a new mode of thinking, which was born with the photographic archive, and is able to represent space or sorting out information (i.e., gathering, classification, disposition in series) (Castro 2009: 2). Starting at the end of the 1990's, a geopolitical or topographical turn in Film Studies investigates the localization of film space. Within this field, researchers study, from a geographical perspective, new platforms, the omnipresence of digital images, and the growing role of world cinema. At the same time, it highlights the mechanisms through which informal logics shape the circulation of media content beyond centre-periphery connections, invading lateral spaces, and different places (Lobato 2012).

The renewed academic interest for serial phenomena in audiovisual research is complemented by some significant

attempts that validate, at least in part, the cartographic model. This is what cartographic software such as *Lignes de temps,* created by the Institute of Research and Innovation at Pompidou Center, tries to do. The software lets the user visualize a film on a timeline, and gives her or him access to each shot, represented as a segment. The user can colour code each segment to create an immediate view of the studied variation. In an experimental analysis carried out in parallel to my doctoral research in 2009, I attempted to map out, on a timeline, *Romanzo Criminale,* the film and first season of the series, by selecting meaningful variations such as the presence of female characters, sequences of "male bonding", and the "music clip" sequences that appear at the end of each episode.[5] The observation of the timeline helps measure, through a graphic form, how frequently variations occur. This operation can be thought of as a sort of distant reading. This approach proves to be consequential, especially with regards to the TV series, thought of as the sum of episodes (many timelines can be superimposed in order to compare the frequency through the different episodes). Despite having a certain distance from the text, this software did not allow me to verify the validity of my "epic" hypothesis, since it does not allow the user to work with extratextual material (such as fan fictions, fan art, etc..). Even if some attempts were made (the option to visually compare a shot and a painting, for example), *Lignes de temps* is not a tool for intermediality since it does not allow for the comparison of heterogeneous media. Therefore, *Lignes de temps* is not appropriate for the analysis of TV series' real uses. For a series, rumours that surround it have a central role: anticipation, obsession and anxiety that circulates among fans between episodes. An epistemology of complexity requires researchers to look for an object's internal and external links. Therefore, how can distant reading be used for a television series?

It should be noted that, in 1997, Barbara Klinger raised the potential qualities of a Braudel-inspired total history. Methodologically, this approach would require, according to Klinger, a joint study of the various fields that define the role of a film within an epoch and a culture (Klinger 1997). For *Romanzo Criminale,* this would mean employing an analysis describing the variations and recurrences within a complex serial object (by definition, made up of many fragments and having a duration over time).

5 http://www.iri.centrepompidou.fr/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/
RomanzoCriminale_annotations.pdfhttp://www.iri.centrepompidou.fr/wp-content/
uploads/2010/11/RomanzoCriminale_annotations.pdf

05 MAPPING THE IMAGINARY WORLD'S SPATIAL CONFIGURATION

According to Moretti, maps can be two very different things: on the one hand, they are tools which can be used to study a literary chronotope, or the fictional space-time configuration, (Bakhtin 1981) – and in this case what matters are boundaries, geometry, spatial taboos and main roads shaping a novel's internal processes, or the semiotic sphere around which a story aggregates and organizes. On the other hand, maps are tools used for studying literature in the historical space. Moretti suggests three models of diagrams: spatial, quantitative, and morphologic.

First, from a textual perspective, mapping can be considered a tool to define the environment corresponding to the story. Analysts extract pertinent elements from the narrative in order to make maps and diagrams, constructing a model of the fictional universe. The same idea can be found in Mark J.P. Wolf's study of fictional worlds, described through the concepts of immersion, saturation and overflow (Wolf 2012). In this framework, a first answer to the epic hypothesis can be found if we consider that epic is an aesthetic form or narrative process. For example, think of the strong connotation of environments as spaces of conflict in *Game of Thrones* (HBO 2011-): the imaginary continent of Westeros is a theatre for battles between individuals or groups that aim at conquering the central power. Fans map the space identifying the different centres in constant struggle. The essential geography of *Romanzo Criminale* – made up of real spaces, such as Tor di Nona, Infernetto, Testaccio, San Cosimato, Trastevere, the Magliana bridge... – corresponds to Il Libanese's dream of conquering the city and shapes the characters' relationship to their opponents and allies, coming from different regions in Italy. Also, Libanese's Rome is built through intertextual references that allow viewers to add nostalgic meanings to a (mostly cinematographic) past they know, especially for what concerns references to the "poliziottesco" style.

It is also worth mentioning that mapping is a very common fan practice. Maps are grassroots forms of knowledge that viewers like to share online, probably because there is a need to organize the complex set of textual, intertextual and intermedial information. Maps allow fans to dispose of a form which is more than the sum of the various texts and that can explain interrelations of disparate elements, their localization in real-life spaces and their role in the evolution of the narrative phenomenon. Also, maps are easily spreadable online. The collaborative organization of textual information under the form of a map can be found on the fan-made website

Davinotti, constructed using fans' local expertise[6]. In this website, maps of *Romanzo Criminale*'s universe present the gang's favourite bars, crime scenes, and historical events mentioned in the novel, in the film or in the TV series (with unavoidable overlapping). They also give fans the opportunity to go and find actual film or series locations[7].

Spatial cartography helps confirm my hypothesis. The epic model provides a collective answer to political issues (see also Goyet 2006), emerging from struggles of opposing factions or the struggle of an individual against stronger forces. Epic is a titanic venture, told through a reworking of legendary material, concerning historical places and events. Maps could make these struggles apparent. However, tracing the itinerary of a specific chronotope is not the only type of mapping that can be studied (also, the example of Rome lived in by the TV series could be considered mainly a geometrical rather than a geographical impulse). It shows how a text's world is built, yet it offers a partial image of *Romanzo Criminale* as a complex intermedial and transmedia phenomenon.

06 QUANTITATIVE DIAGRAMS

In the second case, Moretti studies the system of novel genres as a whole. A distant reading is made possible, here, through visualizing charts and graphs of complex data, extracted from large corpora.

Quantitative diagrams could explain a literary genre's tendency to mutate over time, and in *Romanzo Criminale*'s case, the intertwining of centres and peripheries characteristic of a semiosphere, and of an epic process. The analysis has to move away from the single event, and the text. Instead, if it focuses on cycles and duration (an operation encouraged by serial phenomena such as TV series, transfictional characters or cultural series), and on sets of textual productions superimposed over time, the emerging image is quite different. Richard Saint-Gelais suggests models in the form of trees in order to explain such phenomena in literature (Saint-Gelais 2011), such as the long-lived Emma Bovary and Sherlock Holmes.

Sarah Sepulchre, researcher at the University of Louvain, wrote about a *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) "constellation," a term

used to explain the set of official digital platforms that accompany the famous AMC TV series. For *Romanzo Criminale,* a similar type of cartography can be observed in producers' strategies, like sharing infographics with chronologies on the official Sky Cinema Facebook page. When considering the transmedia nature of the phenomenon, it appears that there is a delicate balance between fragments and a whole. Cycles can be found in transfictional phenomena, expanding over time. By definition, transmedia storytelling cannot be reduced to the sum of their parts: it transcends the medium, and is conceived as a complex universe. Therefore, a transmedia phenomenon can be mapped, starting from the inventory of its existing forms. It is worth noting that transfictional phenomena such as expansion, modification and transposition (Ryan 2013) can also include user-generated content (Scolari 2009). Following this approach, notions such as author or textual analysis shift to the periphery of the analysis. Yet, cyclic effects can be studied: they take place over the long term, and often beyond any author's control, such Morin's emergences. For *Romanzo Criminale*, we can think of the consolidation of the emotional power of nostalgic music, started in the choice for the movie soundtrack, and culminating in the massive reuse of the TV series' clip sequences by Youtubers[8].

Cycles that are built from temporary structures within history's continuous flow may or may not result in repetition, but they always result in regularity, order, and shape (e.g., literary genres). Within this framework, *Romanzo Criminale* cannot be interpreted as the sum of individualized entities, but instead as a life cycle, determined by a set of texts *and* their interpretations, stratified over time, the validity of which depends on generations (of readers, of viewers) and on "general mutations of the spiritual climate." Also, these forms have to be studied together, following reciprocal filiations. Over time, the microlevel of stylistic mutations can be observed. This articulation has to be done, for serial phenomena, over an extended period of time.[9]

07 MORPHOLOGICAL DIAGRAMS

Texts are not adequate objects of knowledge for history and literary theory, according to Moretti. Instead, diagrams can be

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6   http://www.davinotti.com/index.php?forum=80013765 (26/12/2014).

7   Such a geographical obsession can be found in the game *RC-The Game*, developed with flash technology as a part of the marketing strategy carried out for the first season of the series in 2008. Players take the role of one of the criminals and have to perform different missions in various cities of the Italian peninsula.

8   Multiple clips featuring the death of Il Terribile (Marco Giallini) circulate on the Internet and have from 6.700 to 210.000 views (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=klXBBMrck6Y (27/12/2014).

9   Braudel's « longue durée » (1959).

considered objects of knowledge, since they allow researchers to grasp a large set of data, and to permit evolutionary processes appear. The fourth chapter of *Graphs, Maps, Trees* describes morphological diagrams that have the function of making literary mutations visible. Moretti notes that, differently from Darwinian evolution, cultural change is made from syncretism and divergence. It receives a strong push from the assemblage of different traditions. Comparing this thought with the importation processes studied in media theory, a complementarity with Jenkins' description of spreadable media emerges. Using Appadurai's concept of commodity, Jenkins remarks that, within Internet networks, the exchange value of media content differs from their use value (Jenkins et al. 2013).

In evolutionary theory, morphological analysis and historical reconstruction are two dimensions of the same tree. The vertical axis marks the passing of time, and the horizontal the entity of the morphological diversification. Both axes show an endless unfolding of separation and distinction. A species' characteristics, by branching out, create a morpho-space, ceaselessly growing. For example, Moretti identifies "clues" as the morphological feature specific to English detective novels.

A research project on "narrative ecosystems" carried out at the University of Bologna (Pescatore and Innocenti 2012, 2013, 2014) uses morphological diagrams inspired from Darwin's work. The biotic model suggested by Guglielmo Pescatore examines the evolution of a TV series' element, such as characters, over time. The frequency of a character's appearances onscreen, their place in the narrative, and their relationships to each other are studied using an approach that considers the series as a form of life. The model shows that a series' existence, just like an ecosystem, is guaranteed by mutations and adaptations to external clashes, over time.

Morphological diagrams, in this case, help identify the directions a series takes. Within this framework, the intermedial phenomenon of adaptations is interpreted as an evolutionary adaptation to historical context and to environmental pressures. This is always true if one thinks in terms of genre. For example, when considering *Romanzo Criminale* within a "neo-epic" genre, from an aesthetic and semio-pragmatic point of view, variations of this genre could be studied within Sky serial productions[10].

Also, and more interestingly, this model could be proven valid for the analysis of a series' transmedia extensions and for the intertwining of official and grassroots productions.

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10   See also Eugeni 2014.

Textual variations across different aids can be intersected with social discourse. In the case of *Romanzo Criminale,* microscopic features can be found within each of its various media incarnations. Therefore, the variations of these features, and adaptations, including grassroots productions can be studied.

08 AN EXAMPLE: VIEWERS' EMOTIONS, A TRANSVERSAL FEATURE

Romanzo Criminale's world was created from the superimposition, over at least eight years, of various authorial figures, intertwined social discourse, and fragments having a relational nature (think of the following relationships: viewer-text, viewer-world, but also viewer-other viewers). *Romanzo Criminale* as a system made up of these many (narrative and non-narrative) intersections keeps its vital strength over time. From my observation, the role of emotions in defining the neo-epic phenomenon and its spreadability over time appears. Grassroots productions can be considered as traces of emotions: thus, the neo-epic process at the core of *Romanzo Criminale*'s system can be analyzed starting from their presence.

The hybrid nature of emotions, between narrativity and non-narrativity, raises interesting issues when analysing the case of *Romanzo Criminale*. Emotion is always present in viewers' comments. Declarations of love and hate are frequent (several fans propose to Dandi; others produce fan art *against* Donatella (Giovanna Di Rauso), a female dealer introduced in the series' second season and absent from the movie. Furthermore, some fan fiction authors state that the reason they started writing was the need to overcome Il Libanese's death.

In playful productions, such as parodies or pastiches, emotions also play an important role, which emerge in the choice of language. Editing techniques and the addition of strongly connoted music reveal and communicate pathos, violence, romantic love, or nostalgia, but also the desire to produce fan art in order to expand the story world (some fans state that they write in order to participate in the "achievement of the work's beauty"). Media content is not modelled by viewers' emotions; on the contrary, emotions have an influence on the appearance of "emergences," or unforeseen results. Emotions are not always considered acceptable in users' discourses. In some "poliziottesco" film fan communities, coolness may be considered a quality, and first-degree fan emotions are seen as the proof of an excessive affection that blinds critical skills. Thus, in expressing their opinion on the novel, the film, or the TV series some

fans declare war on emotion. According to these users, opinions are based on impartiality and universality, as well as on the desire to contribute to the growth of a collective knowledge. Acknowledging the limits between personal and universal does not always go without misunderstandings. Some fans claim to have control of their emotions, despite the fact that a part of context always has influence in shaping our emotions and determining our interpretations. A qualitative study can show that emotions are always present in meaning-making processes. Even when the user wants to maintain a "rational approach," various emotional levels appear in online discourse whose content is not only conventional exchange of information. It is important to remember that emotions are elements that shape our imagination, since they are effects of meaning inscribed and codified in language (Greimas 1991/1993). According to Murray Smith, emotions are situated both in the text and in the viewer (Smith 1995). If emotions are considered as traces of a "passion," though, and not as something that viewers passively feel, but also as something that they express, their localization is inevitably to be found in a space which is neither the text nor the viewer. Where do emotions leave the traces of their ungraspable existence? In the semiotic space that is created with texts and around them: a work's world. Emotions are linked to individual experiences; therefore, they have to be studied "in situation" because they are detectable in the form of performances. At the same time, they can be shared, resulting in their attaining their full meaning.

Emotions activate these situations similar to what Dayan and Katz (1992) call media events: Il Libanese's death at the end of the series' first season, for example, is an event which catalyses most discourses and fan fictions [11]. Moreover, during summer 2010, a teaser between the first and second season helps keep online discussion alive, raisingthe possibility of the central character coming back, maybe as a ghost, and encouraging many discussions in fan comunities .

A quantitative work on actual uses of television in the age of convergence could be done with a distant reading. Although Moretti concentrates on long periods of time, even a shortened timeframe such as the aforementioned media event can be selected and observed in its constitutive micro-traits. Big data of audiovisual consumption could be observed such as the number of tweets on the *Breaking Bad* (AMC) finale [12]. The participation of a large number of viewers during a specific time-slot or on a determined day can tell researchers something about the impact of the series in fans' social lives that close readings cannot display. An example of a distant reading, in this case, could be represented by sentiment analysis or semantic discourse analysis. This method could underline qualitative features and mobilise a large number of data: recurrences and variations in a series' perception by audiences could be highlighted through the analysis of a vast corpus of comments, on a national or transnational scale.

Modelling data coming from sentiment-aware software could take the form of graphs or maps and could be a tool for the study of emotions in a neo-epic phenomenon. Distant reading could show how a serial system is made of many voices, even contradictory, and is not always narrative (can we consider memes or Facebook comments as narrative elements?), that rewrite old myths, and that, therefore, epic processes are at the same time the result of convergent technological and cultural practices, and a new oral form, based on collective sharing.

CONCLUSION

In this article, *Romanzo Criminale* was first compared to a semiosphere, allying this perspective to polysystem theory. Within this framework, audience interpretations and official texts appear linked, creating a cultural continuum. Fan made fragments should not to be considered rhizhomatic entities because they are not merely spreadable materials; on the contrary, hermeneutic operations and appropriation practices emerging within *Romanzo Criminale*'s narrative give life to a space for discourse. In addition to the internal serialization process typical of transfictional phenomena, and of narrative complexity (Mittell 2006, 2012), *Romanzo Criminale* is a complex system because of the rich semiotic processes happening over time. The very nature of *Romanzo Criminale* can be found in the notion of the neo-epic process because of its main feature: it becomes the space for the reinterpretation of the values and the identity of a society. Reworking recent historical events through a novel, a film, a TV series and a set of transmedia devices, it allows new audiences to discover a part of Italian culture, namely the Years of Lead, and it becomes the interpreter of contemporary political tensions. For these reasons, *Romanzo Criminale* is able to gather the multiple ways a society thinks itself, but also to lay down answers for renewing it, highlighting contemporary contradictions in politics and historiography.

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11 Comparable to the famous "Who shot J.R.?" at the end of the 1979-80 season of *Dallas*.

12 September 29th 2013.

Even if *Romanzo Criminale* certainly is a very specific phenomenon in Italian culture, hardly comparable to other TV series or films, we can note that other TV series succeed in producing an epic work similar to what was discussed in these pages. *Gomorrah*, for example, has a similar genesis: it is a literary best-seller inspired from real events (Saviano 2006), a film (Matteo Garrone, Italy, 2008), and a TV series (Sky Cinema 2014) which have all acquired enormous popularity over time. Also, *Gomorrah* uses a hybrid enunciation technique, between documentary and fiction. The same composite feature can be found in the American context, in which *The Newsroom* (HBO, 2012) plays on the ambiguity between real news and fiction, and encourages debates that surpass the space of the text.

Beyond textual mechanisms, but also due to some internal features such as genre, themes, or address to the viewer, epic emerges as an interesting form. Within the framework of complexity, its specificity can be understood as the result of texts and grassroots productions. Epic benefits from the serialization of a TV series or an intermedial relationship concerning transfictional characters. Within a play of variation and repetition, viewers find a space for reflection on their position in history.

An epistemology of complexity for media studies has to find its basis on the principles of order and disorder, and highlight emergences, those forms and meanings that appear only through the interaction of seemingly disjoined elements. It can then be helpful for understanding the interaction of different elements of television serial programmes, but also films, and their audiences. A distant reading, using maps and diagrams, can be a methodological tool for describing these complex processes and help in the study of such complex worlds, worlds that are increasingly at the core of interest of producers and creators.

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RESEARCHING TELEVISION SERIAL NARRATIVES IN ITALY: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

In the essay the authors would like to review the main Italian studies that have focused on the television series, including both studies that have dealt with national production, and those which have looked to foreign markets and its serial products. In the multiplicity of disciplinary approaches, the authors will focus on studies related to the language and narrative of serial products. The essay is divided into three large blocks which cover three specific periods (the eighties, the nineties and the block from two thousand to present). Each of the three sections will try to give an account of the extent of Italian studies on Italian products, on foreign products and on more theoretical studies, which focus on innovative formulas of the story. At the end of the survey, it is possible to observe positive and thorough input regarding the status of studies on the subject. From the eighties to present, in fact, the studies have not only increased in number, but they have spread out over different fields and divided themselves between the analysis of the national scene and the analysis of international scene.

KEYWORDS

Television serial narratives; narrative ecosystems; Italian television studies; television criticism; European television.

FIRST LEVEL HEADINGS

In this essay we would like to review the main Italian studies[2] that have focused on the television series, including both studies that have dealt with national production, and those which have looked to foreign markets and its serial products, particularly the Anglo-Americans.

In our country, studying television means dealing with a diversity of approaches (defined by different methods and points of view) that have tended to follow six paths:

1. Television as a mass medium, capable of reflecting, emphasizing and in some cases promoting dominant ideologies. It is one of the original ways to gain insight into the understanding of television, as well as being one of the most enduring traditions of academic approach due to the interdisciplinarity that characterizes it (Ortoleva 2009; Menduni 2002b).
2. The peculiar role of the public service and its dialectic with commercial television. In 1976, the judgment delivered by the constitutional court in favor of the liberalization of radio and television frequencies led to an increase in competition between public and commercial television; a competition particularly evident in the consequent production and importation of serial entertainment for both sectors (Grasso and Scaglioni 2003).
3. The development of technology has always constituted one of the most important strands of research, from the invention of the medium to the synergy and competition with new media. The television has been increasingly at the center of analyses that have tied technological aspects to the redefinition of the national and international economic balance and to the change in the media scenario after digitalization (Scaglioni 2011; Menduni 2008).
4. Analysis of Italian and international television audiences related to the tradition of audience studies in film and television (Anania 1997; Livolsi 2005). Television consumption has undergone radical changes due to the changing nature of technology that has made contemporary television viewers something entirely different from those of the past.
5. The differences between broadcast, commercial, thematic and satellite television and their effects on the production of the series.
6. Analysis of the narrative and aesthetic specificity of the television series.

In this multiplicity of disciplinary approaches, in which emerges the difficulty of talking about television in a comprehensive manner, we will focus on studies related to the last two points. In fact, points five and six are those in which the language and narrative of serial products are put at the center of the investigation and therefore they identify the studies most pertinent to the objective of this essay. For the sake of clarity we have decided to divide our essay into three large blocks which cover three specific periods. In this way, respecting a chronological order, we can have an overview of the studies as clear as possible. Nevertheless, these three periods have their specific characterizations: in the eighties we have denoted the departure of the Italian studies on the television series, in the nineties the period in which some lines of research are imposed on others and different approaches have seen a systematization and the block from two thousand to present characterized by a proliferation of studies and their specificities. Each of the three sections will try to give an account of the extent of Italian studies on Italian products, on foreign products and on more theoretical studies, which focus on innovative formulas of the story.

01 THE EIGHTIES

The studies on intertextuality and hypertextuality in literature have led, in the field of film studies, to an overriding of the concept of the closed narrative, and more generally, to a major challenging of the concept of uniqueness. In light of these changes, in the film studies field, adaptation, remake, and the sequel have been understood as practices that characterize the period. These new studies have paved the way for a series of analyses that have subsequently proved to be enlightening in the understanding of the function of the television series. In 1984 some Italian scholars questioned the concepts of repetition and seriality in an attempt to bring order to the vastness of the serial productions that in those years began to populate the Italian schedules. Given this crucial and radical change within the schedules, the questions that scholars were posing, acquire a substantial weight. In particular, *Ai confini della serialità* (lit.trans. *The*

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2   Note to the reader. To ensure legibility, citations from texts are always translated into English by the authors. The original quote is reported in the footnotes. When necessary, a literal translation has been made for the Italian titles of books and television programs.

Edge of Seriality) by Alberto Abruzzese (1984) and *La serialità nel cinema e nella televisione* (lit. trans. *Seriality in Film and Television*) by Angelo D'Alessandro (1984), which pose as pioneering and fundamental works. Among these initial texts, it is also important to point out *L'immagine al plurale* (lit. trans. *The Image in the Plural*). The text edited by Francesco Casetti in 1984 can be attributed to the origins of the theoretical path. One of the most important points brought into focus by this collection of essays is the basic distinction between seriality and repetition. The term repetition signifies the return to or re-use of elements already known and in particular with a "new occurrence that combines recall and originality" (1984a: 9);[3] now, the term seriality proposes a sequence of textual objects organized in order to form a "list" which allows the emergence of a homogeneous group. Casetti adds a third element: expansion. The expansion of the elements that compose the serial forms is, according to Casetti, the element that distinguishes the seriality. This element depends on both the continuous procrastination of the ending and the atrophy of the recurring elements, given their need to occupy the maximum space possible.

Within the book edited by Casetti, we can also refer to the essay 'I replicanti' (lit.trans. 'Replicants') by Omar Calabrese and the essay 'Tipologia della ripetizione' (lit.trans. 'Types of Repetition') by Umberto Eco, which will be resumed in 'L'innovazione nel seriale' (lit.trans. 'The Innovation of the Serial'). Calabrese's essay focuses on the illustration of the aesthetics of repetition. Assuming that the uniqueness of a work of art, an idea largely overcome by the creative and productive practices of contemporary culture, Calabrese aims to demonstrate through the tools of linguistics and semiotics, the existence of an aesthetic based on "organized differentiation, love to polycentricity, the pace as aesthetic behavior" (1984: 79).[4]

Eco's essay presents rather a taxonomy of the complex relationships between original, copying, replication, repetition within the narrative or creative production in the broadest sense, leading to an outlining of different types of serial forms: recovery (ripresa), tracing (ricalco), series, saga and intertextual dialogism. Looking at the cinematic, television and literature production, Eco builds a useful case series to reflect on repetition and seriality, a typology of relationships and possible links between serial texts. The features highlighted

by these essays make evident a number of elements that correspond perfectly to narrative models of the television series and the structures of production, distribution and promotion that these products put in place.

If the studies described above helped shape the theoretical framework on the notion of seriality – at the same time – it is necessary to highlight the significant contribution of a series of studies conducted by Rai-Radiotelevisione Italiana, the Italian public service. This series of studies, which were subsequently named Verifica Qualitativa Programmi Trasmessi - VQPT (Qualitative Testing on Transmitted Programs) at the end of the seventies focus mainly on information and political discussion. In 1984, Casetti was the curator of Un'altra volta ancora. Strategie di comunicazione e forme del sapere nel telefilm americano in Italia (lit. trans. One more time. Communication Strategies and Forms of Knowledge in the American TV Shows in Italy), which is dedicated to the American serial market. Four years later, Alessandro Silj was the curator of the book A Est di Dallas, Telefilm USA e europei a confronto (lit. trans. East of Dallas, USA and Europe TV Shows).

It is only from the Nineties that the editorial series VQPT, began to focus, as we shall see, on the Italian and European television fiction in a systematic way. By the end of this decade it was therefore possible to note the peculiarity of the Italian publishing scene. On the one hand the studies proceeded along a more analytical and speculative line (working on the systematization of the concept of seriality), on the other hand, an important part of publications were concerned with the observation and analysis of the television offer. Only in the twenty-first century, have these binaries that proceeded separated, begun to overlap.

02 **THE NINETIES**

In the nineties, it is relevant to recite the activities of the Permanent Observatory[5] on Italian Television Fiction. In particular, in 1991, Milly Buonanno with Il reale è immaginario.

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3   'Nuova occorrenza che mescola richiamo e originalità'.

4   'Differenziazione organizzata, l'amore per il policentrismo, il ritmo come comportamento estetico' (Calabrese 1984: 79).

5   Created in 1986 by sociologists Giovanni Bechelloni and Milly Buonanno, Permanent Observatory is a center of sociological studies that conducts research, analysis, consulting and training in the field of media communications, with attention to the Italian and European television industry. The research centre employs proven systems for monitoring the quantity and quality of the production and consumption of television, and publishes continuous and ad hoc reports that target the decision making, professional environments, scholars and the media public <http://www.campo-ofi.it/chi_siamo/chisiamo.php>.

La fiction italiana. L'Italia nella fiction (lit. trans. The Real is Imaginary. Italian Fiction. Fiction in Italy) presents the results of a research started in 1988. From the 80s, the success of American serial, a key element in the affirmation of private broadcasters in Italy, contributed to a lively debate on what was then called 'telefilm'.

In the early nineties the Permanent Observatory highlighted some positive and negative aspects that still represent the preferred areas of investigation for Italian studies. In 1991, from the point of view of production, it became clear that among the variety of programmes and information, fiction was one of the most appreciated genres by the television audience and was the only one able to be sold to foreign markets, establishing a national independence in production (Buonanno 1991: 14). Therefore during those years, fiction became the field on which the huge battle, or rather imbalance, between import and export was played out in favor of the latter (14). The importance of the Observatory was also to analyze not only the production of serial narrative in Italy, but above all to relate these products to changes in economic, financial and infrastructure.

These studies pose both as a reflection of the panorama of production, but also as a projection of possible lines to be developed. For example, at the beginning of the nineties, it was perceived that the serial narrative might be the testing ground for Italian television. With it you could increase production capacity and inaugurate network strategies and affirmation. In addition to the comprehensive overview of national productions, the Observatory, in its first report, provided an up-to-date review of the studies on serial storytelling. These reports also serve to highlight the 'bardic' characteristic of television. Moreover in 1991, since serial narratives began to be perceived as the most impressive narrative corpus of our day, it was imperative that the centrality of television drama as storyteller be stressed. The Observatory also seeks to work on the disruption of prejudice with respect to the concept of a formula tied to the serial narrative which in those years was deeply rooted in Italy (Buonanno 1991). Relying on a series of studies by international figures such as Horace Newcomb (1974), John Fiske (1987), Robert Clyde Allen (1992), it is possible to see how the fiction provides valuable material for understanding the culture and the society of which it is an expression.

Milly Buonanno continued the path of analysis on Italian seriality with the volume of 1994, Il bardo sonnacchioso (lit. trans. The Sluggish Bard), dedicated to the 1992-1993 television season, the Observatory's fifth year of research. It is

possible now to understand that the most lasting results of the Permanent Observatory are those of creating a systematic historical background of the Italian television drama which can be drawn on for study and research, or for purposes connected with the professional practices of producers and programmers. In the five years between 1988-93, for the first time in production policies and programming the fiction was recognized as having a strategic role thanks to the presence of serial production of private television stations that redefine profiles and positions of traditional networks.

As regard contents, the Observatory was concerned with both drawing up tabs of the programmes aired, and producing insights into genres or themes that emerge as dominant (eg. family comedy and police drama in 1992-93 report). The first five years of investigation were already sufficient enough to draw up the results of the Observatory; for example, as regards the year 1992-1993, there was a certain weariness of inspiration and a lack of brilliance and in the following years, a drastic reduction of the investments in the field since in the hierarchy of forms of expression was considered the most irrelevant. The nineties also saw the release of two essential books for broader history of television in the nation. From 1991-1992 Aldo Grasso and Franco Monteleone, with their texts on the history of television, subsequently updated year after year, started to cover the evolution of Italian television certifying the growing importance of television series from a historical perspective.

During that period, the television series began to be studied in other disciplines. The 1994 publication, Le passioni nel serial Tv. Beautiful, Twin Peaks, L'ispettore Derrick (lit. trans. Passions in TV serial. Beautiful, Twin Peaks and Derrick Inspector) by Pier Luigi Basso, Omar Calabrese, Francesco Marsciani, and Orsola Mattoli is dedicated to investigating, from a semiotic perspective, the thematic and passionate dimension.

As for the Italian studies on international television serial productions, the year 1997 is of great importance, as the first Italian report on the production of original television drama in Europe was published, based on a monitoring and analysis of all original programmes of television drama, produced and broadcast in first-run from the public and private television companies of the five largest European countries: Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Spain and Italy. The 1997 Eurofiction Report is the first volume and follows the structure of the reports of the Observatory. In addition to the comparative analysis of the data relative to the five national television systems, in which Italian production is systemati-

cally compared with other European countries, the Eurofiction Report is also a stimulating read on genres and formats used, on industrial and commercial, political and cultural strategies. Through the comparison with international television systems and their production, the importance of thinking about the impact of serial fiction on the proliferation of channels and the consequent increasing complexity of the television offer emerged. This analysis began to impose the need for increased investment in original productions in order to achieve national serial products that could compete with those coming from the United States. In the 1997 publication, Analisi della televisione (lit. trans. Analyses of Television), Francesco Casetti and Federico Di Chio investigate the complexity of television outlining the need to delineate the object of study in three major themes: production, supply and consumption. Under production falls the whole analysis of the technological aspects related to the study of the properties of the signal (emission techniques, coverage, utilization of bands and frequencies, types of support, production equipment, post-production); aspects of economic enterprise (organization of the television, logical, commercial and financial, production routines); of cultural and social aspects of production (types of channels and networks operating in the area, established communication systems); aspects of political institutions (political control over the media, different editorial lines). In terms of what television has to offer, different dimensions are outlined: programmes, programming, scheduling, TV flow, TV market. And finally in the category of consumption, the two scholars focus on the analysis of audience data, demographics of audience, practices of vision, processes of understanding and appreciation of programmes.

The final part of this study is dedicated to the identification of some objects endowed with their own stability and autonomy 'linguistic and communicative creations [...] [that] obey strict rules of composition' (209),[6] thus highlighting the need to focus more on the elements that characterize them than on the content of the programmes. In this way, it is possible to highlight the architecture and the functioning, the discursive drive of the text and the strategies that unfold in these types of programmes. The authors identify a first change of perspective that attempts to rewrite the limitations of content analysis: if the latter tended to operate on units isolated from one another, it is clear that television texts mobilize much more complex configurations 'build true own

worlds that tend to amalgamate the various suggestions offered and cover the whole of reality presented' (211).[7] The nineties are also the years in which the television series began to be the subject of specific case studies. In 1996, Franco La Polla dedicated several essays and books devoted to *Star Trek* both the classic series (1966-1969) that *Next Generation* (1986-1994). In particular, Foto di gruppo con astronave (lit. trans. Group Photo with Spaceship) (1996), the edited volume Star Trek. Il cielo è il limite (lit. trans. Star Trek. The Sky is the Limit) (1998) and Star Trek al cinema (lit. trans. Star Trek in Cinema) (1999). The only Italian scholar to have worked in a systematic way with *Star Trek,* highlighting its important transmedial potential and how it helped to bring science fiction into its adulthood.

To draw some conclusions we can say that during the decade of the nineties the studies on Italian television serial narratives have seen the rise of essays intended to systematize the analysis of domestic and international serial productions, in particular thanks to the Observatory TV. At the same time in this decade, there is also the emergence, in the field of academic studies, of some of the first monographs concerning the television series, such as Franco La Polla's studies.

03 THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY AND TODAY

After having gone through the years in which the texts were founding and pioneering and years before systematization, we are now entering a period in which academic writing on the television series is on the increase. In continuity with the previous paragraphs, the contributions examined in this section will be presented in chronological order while trying to bring out the mutual affinity of the studies (and it is therefore possible to present the various contributions in an essentially chronological order.) In this climate where the concept of seriality in its breadth, enjoys widespread attention it seems important to mention another course of study that, while addressing the issue in a slightly tangential way, sheds light on some crucial features that will accompany the seriality up to the present day. We refer to the studies on the origins of serial films (Dall'Asta, 2009) which have revealed some of the dynamics of production, distribution and creativity (tie-in, cliffhanger, etc.) that similarly recur in the television series.

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6 'Realizzazioni linguistiche e comunicative [...] [che] obbediscono a precise regole di competizione' (Casetti and Di Chio 1997: 206).

7 'Costruiscono veri e propri mondi che tendono ad amalgamare le diverse indicazioni offerte e a coprire l'intera realtà presentata' (Casetti and Di Chio 1997: 211).

In Trame spezzate. Archeologia del film seriale (lit. trans. Broken Plots. Archaeology of the Serial Film) the connection between the sense of precariousness, which is the aesthetic character of the cliffhanger, and the concrete experience of workers in the film serial forced to ensure still very high productivity levels, is highlighted. In this same volume also highlighted is the way in which, in the cultural industry, the link between seriality and continuity emerges as a structural feature of the system, providing the most appropriate tools to optimize the performance of the intellectual workforce. From an analysis of the serial film of the second decade of the twentieth century emerges an already developed set of techniques that guarantees a rhythm of regular production, rendering the serial format a reservoir of standard formulas that reduce the variability of the process to a minimum.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the narrative complexity of serial worlds has become the main theoretical subject on which most academic studies focus. Serial television has become the real expression of our time where a great amount of apparently unreadable meanings collide with each other (Grasso 2007: 25). Scholars' interest in the TV series has been in continuous growth due to the sophistication of the *mise en scene*, elaborate promotional structure, increasing narrative complexity and a more intense audience participation. For example, in Ai confini della realtà. Cinquant'anni di telefilm americani, (lit. trans. The Twilight Zone. Fifty years of American TV series) Diego Del Pozzo (2001) using a typical approach of cultural studies in which creative texts are connected to the society and its imaginary, devotes an analysis to the U.S. TV series. From *The Twilight Zone* (1959-1964; 1985-1989) to *X-Files* (1993-2002), the products are analyzed in light of changes in society, taking into account that the imagined world of the great television tale is articulated in a highly branched and polyhedric way.

During the beginning of the twenty-first century, seriality was analyzed as a combination of *horizontality* (the development of the recurring plots and story arcs) and *verticality* (the construction of the drama within the single episode) (Thompson 2003). This structure is presented as an alternative to the traditional narrative format which provides in its text several hints to the viewer whose task is to collect and follow them episode after episode. This new approach implies the attempt to interpret the serial television language not as a series of cause-effect links, but as a world construction, not as a matter of *meaning* but one of *functioning*. Major attention is given to the study of genres in relation to TV seriality. On this matter, it is particularly important to mention

Giorgio Grignaffini's (2004) book, I generi televisivi (lit. trans. Television Genres), which deepens our understanding of the relationship between the narrative genre and the different serialization formats. The work of Grignaffini highlights the way in which the combination of genres, the flexibility of their features, composes one of the most important characteristics of the contemporary TV series.

In 2004 La lunga serialità televisiva. Origini e modelli (Long Running TV Serials. Origins and Models) was released. In the first part of the book, the author Daniela Cardini, reconstructs the beginnings of seriality and identifies American radio seriality as the real progenitor of the television serial form. In the second part the author approaches the notion of seriality starting from its definition and highlights a great amount of cultural prejudices. The third part is concerned with the development of long seriality in Italy. Starting from the description of the TV series from the origins (paleotelevisione) to new television (neotelevisione) it focuses on the changes that the Italian television system has gone through over the course of the nineties and which have led to the development of the long-running series, after decades of resistance. Daniela Cardini's contribution also reconstructs the debate on seriality, which had affected Italy in the seventies and the eighties. She focuses, for example, on some feasibility studies commissioned by Rai, the outcome being in favor of seriality production and the establishment of production studios (unfortunately, this innovative idea has not seen the light for both ideological resistance and low industrial capacity). In addition to the analysis of three Italian case studies *Un posto al sole, Vivere, Centovetrine*, Cardini sheds some light on the scheduling strategy of the foreign TV series. Thanks to the analysis of *E.R.* (1994-2009), *Beverly Hills 90210* (1990-2000) and *Friends* (1994-2004), Cardini demonstrates how different types of scheduling can influence the success of a TV series.[8] The work of Cardini aims to depict the progressive openness towards the long-running series and the clash with the resistance of the Italian television system and its inability to accept the mechanisms of industrial production, ie, long running times, long running series, the need to consolidate

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8 On the same topic, the monographic issue of Comunicazioni Sociali journal 'Moving at Different Speeds. The Commercialization of Television Systems in Europe and their Consequences', edited by Luca Barra and Massimo Scaglioni, presents an essay 'Dallas, Italia. Cronaca di un successo (non troppo) annunciato' (lit. trans. 'Dallas, Italy. A success (not so much) Expected') by Davide Bassi (2013, 1, 90-100), that focuses on the analysis of the scheduling of *Dallas*, both on Rai and Canale 5 and demonstrates how an understanding of the U.S. programming strategies, have turned a failure into a success.

the audience in a progressive and constant way and the slow construction of successful actors and characters initially unknown. In the same year another book was published on different types and formats of the TV series. Le logiche della televisione (lit. trans. The Logic of Television) edited by Gianfranco Bettetini, Paolo Braga, Armando Fumagalli offers in-depth analysis dedicated both to short seriality and long running seriality.

In the panorama of the critic's journal, Segnocinema is considered one of the first journals to have shown interest in serial language in a systematic way. Volume 138 (2006) gave birth to the Segno Serie TV column. The aim of the column was to elaborate a method of analysis and an evaluation of the most important contemporary TV series. The special issue entitled 'Mondi a puntate' (lit. trans. 'Episodic Worlds'), edited by Luca Bandirali and Enrico Terrone, covers production between 1999 and 2006. In that period the two scholars identified the birth of specific aesthetics and the original narrative structure and for this reason they argue that it is necessary to adapt the traditional analytic instruments to these new types of narratives. In 2006, as the Segnocinema special issue pointed out, 'There is a resounding absence of a continuative and methodic analysis for TV series'(12).[9] The special issue was divided into five essays, starting from the Paola Valentini one that is based on the relationship between TV series and genres and the strong cinematic influence (2006:13-16). In 'Le serie tv e l'esperienza del transito' (lit. trans. 'TV Series and the Transit Experience'), the author, Attilio Coco, underlines a primary theoretical point: the narrative world shows its essence during its progressive changes. From this perspective, the TV series places less importance on the traditional role of the author who controls the whole narrative world (24-26). In the Bandirali and Terrone essay, 'La Forma del Mondo' (lit. trans. 'The Shape of the World'), it is argued that the style of the TV series is more innovative than both past TV series and the average quality of contemporary cinema. To gain a better understanding of why the TV series reached this specific outcome, scholars have drawn on the relationship between TV series productive investments and their innovative elements (27-30). Among the other academic journals it is important to mention the sense of timing of Cinergie, in particular the eighth issue (September 2004), which started to focus on the TV series thanks to a special section dedicated to film and television called 'Speciale TV Files', where the column

TV Files was launched. This column was active until 2009, at which point it was integrated into a new, bigger section called Art& MediaFiles (issue 19, 2010) composed of theoretical researches and case studies in different disciplines. The attention surrounding the TV series is also addressed through the particular approach of the concept of cult television.

In 2006, Massimo Scaglioni in TV di culto. La serialità televisiva americana e il suo fandom (lit. trans. Cult TV. The US TV Series and its Fandom) worked mainly on the American context and went to the roots of the phenomena of cult, with the objective of explaining the various forms of fandom production. The starting premise is the description of a television scene in continuous expansion: starting from the tripartite division of the age of television (scarcity, availability and abundance), the volume focuses on the contemporary age, indicating the narrative complexity and the ecosystem structure as the most important reason for the cult phenomenon. Mainly dealing with the US context, where fandom studies are consolidated for several decades, (Matt Hills 2003), the book seeks to answer several basic questions: who generates the cults? Are they generated by a top-down or bottom-up dynamic? The answers contemplate both theories: the cult is derived from both particular design modes of serial products, and the adoption of different types of enjoyment and sharing. The work of Scaglioni is divided into two distinct parts; the first has a more historical and theoretical approach, while the second presents the results of an empirical research on fandom. Fandom is analyzed within the broader discipline of audience studies, and first investigated as a phenomenon capable of generating money, i.e. to create the specific markets that lie between the mainstream and niches then as a phenomenon linked to individual and collective needs that binds the viewer to the object of cult. The second part of the work, as mentioned above, is characterized by an empirical study conducted with ethnographic tools on a community of Italian fandom dedicated to Buffy The Vampire Slayer (1997-2003) and its spin-off Angel (1999-2004). Buffy is also the focus of several other studies, one being Buffy The Vampire Slayer. Legalizzare la cacciatrice (lit. trans. Buffy The Vampire Slayer. Legitimize the Hunter) edited by Barbara Maio (2007). In particular, the essay 'L'apocalisse come Weltschmerz. Le radici culturali di Buffy The Vampire Slayer' (lit. trans. 'Apocalypse as Weltschmerz. Cultural Roots of Buffy The Vampire Slayer') by Franco La Polla, a study on the cultural roots of Buffy and the concept of apocalypse in American culture. La Polla identifies in Buffy the elements of camp, popular culture and postmodernists (highlighting how Buffy can exceed post-

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9   "Permane clamorosa l'assenza di una riflessione continuativa, articolata e sistematica" (Bandirali and Terrone 2006: 12).

modernism itself) and shows how the series contains books, movies and television references and tributes, both past and contemporary.

Among the other academic journals, Link – Idee per la televisione published by RTI, deserves a mention. The project was born in 1999 and became available to public from 2002. The year 2007 marked the primacy of the presence of the TV series in Italian and European TV scheduling. Among the essays, there were some dedicated to the market of format and interviews with members of the television industry about the practices of Italian acquisition of foreign products or the selective processes that a script needs to undergo in order to become a TV series: the pilot the screenings, from production to programming. The following number, Link 5, published in the same year was focused on the transformation of audience behavior after digitization. Link 5 questions how new platforms affect ratings and what the editorial strategies outlined by the broadcaster in order to retain old and new audiences are. It is also focused on the increasing importance of shared viewing and the disappearance of the public in favor of audiences. In 2008, the book Mondi Seriali. Percorsi semiotici nella fiction (lit. trans. Serial Worlds. Semiotic Paths in Fiction) edited by Maria Pia Pozzato and Giorgio Grignaffini was published for the Link series. The essays originated from interventions made at the conference entitled Semiotica e Fiction held in San Marino in 2007. The starting concept is that semiotics should be actively focused on the television drama, because it could be a fertile ground for the scholars of the area. At the same time there is also the need to pay attention to these types of texts because of their wide international circulation, the increasing complexity of their formats and the social importance of this type of product. In the book the same approach for each chapter is used: each question is addressed with the help of one or more case studies, mainly US TV series. The main questions considered are on the evolution of genre and format, the cases of narrative originality, the relationship between TV series and national history, and finally the problems related to reception, investigating the reasons for the cult as well as the reasons for TV flops.

Regarding the systematization of the language, forms and genres of television series, in 2008 the volume Le nuove forme della serialità televisiva. Storia, linguaggio e temi (lit.trans. New forms of Seriality. History, Language and Themes) by Veronica Innocenti and Guglielmo Pescatore was published. In this publication the differences between series and serial are addressed, as well as the new form of serialized TV series and an attempt to overcome the reductive definition of 'telefilm', a word not used in the English-speaking world, but only in Italy with slightly derogatory connotations towards television series. In this volume a historical reconstruction is carried out that passes through the golden age of the sixties, the second golden age of the eighties, and reaches as far as the contemporary age with its medial and television system reconstructions. The book underlines the characteristics of each aesthetic narrative relating them to the respective production types and places importance on the economic modes of production and marketing related to TV series and their uses, as well as the systematization of the concept of High Concept TV series which cannot be analyzed without considering the different economic aspects of the media franchise. The book is divided into two distinct parts: in the first part the systematization of the concept of seriality from its origins up to the systematization of the mechanisms of the television series of the first half of the twenty-first century is explored; the second part consists of an anthology of essays that reflect on the discourse of seriality from its roots, in order to provide a mixed picture about the theoretical contributions on the subject.

Another scholarly journal that provides an essential contribution to the discourse on seriality, is Comunicazioni Sociali published by the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore di Milano. The first issue of 2009 entitled 'Arredo di serie. I mondi possibili della serialità televisiva americana' (lit. trans. 'Furnished TV series. Possible Worlds in American Serial Narratives), begins to concentrate on the specific ability to build worlds that are, with the new serial productions, amplified. Starting with Umberto Eco who, in The limits of Interpretation (1990) begins to explore the idea that the narrative is finding new ways to furnish its possible world. This definition of the narrative as a 'possible world' and cult like 'furnished world', refers to environments populated not only by the main characters but filled with figures in the background, with accessories animate and inanimate, and with minor but essential details which render the story plausible and engaging. In the same issue, a reflection on media convergence phenomenon that transforms the textuality of the series, making it extended among television, internet, video games and movies is also made.

The issues at play in the special issue of Comunicazioni Sociali are those which speak to us of contemporary seriality highlighting how its world-building activities have changed. In all the essays there is, on the one hand, the reference to the variegated universe of industrial television production, made by the creators, producers, writers and directors, but also - in a highly convergent context - screenwriters, game

developers, mediators of various kinds (adapters, translators etc.). And on the other hand, the equally kaleidoscopic ground of consumption, in which the figures of the casual spectator and that of the fan, avid collector of any item of serial franchise, mingle their faces. The various essays try to detect the way in which industry strategies and tactics of consumption of the audience are found in the text, such as in the fluctuating and unstable boundaries of extended text (which also includes secondary texts made by the production, such as mobisodes and webisodes, and tertiary texts produced by the fan). In the essay entitled 'Variazioni di mondo' (lit. trans. 'World variation'), Massimo Scaglioni analyses a particular mode of world building that is evident in all contemporary television series (from *Buffy* to *Lost*). A further two essays analyze how the 'possible world' of a series can be adapted and translated in cultural contexts different from those of origin. 'Restaurare i mondi seriali' (lit. trans. 'Restoring Serial Worlds') by Cecilia Penati explores the practice of reversioning, ie the creation from scratch of a product of fiction from a format produced in another cultural context (*Yo soy Betty, la fea/Ugly Betty*[10]). Meanwhile, in 'Lost in Translation, e oltre' (lit. trans. 'Lost in Translation and Beyond') Luca Barra takes into account the problem of the adaptation of an extended product (which is spread over other media and texts), for a different cultural context. So, how can a "furnished world", consisting of at least primary and secondary textuality, be translated for another audience? If the extended world of the series undergoes transformations and, for the most part, reductions, it's up to the viewer/fan to fill in the void. The last part of the journal contains one essay that address more directly the relationship between extended possible worlds, and the media on which this extension takes place. In the final paper 'Questioni di canone' (lit. trans. 'Matters of Canon'), Matteo Tarantino and Simone Tosoni illustrate how the relationship between the worlds of a series and those created by video games relating to the television franchise have changed. In particular, the authors focus on the definition of canon in relation to the expanded narrative universes. Furthermore Il testo espanso (lit. trans. The Expanded Text) by Stefania Carini, published the same year, focuses on the spatial and temporal extension of the television series. Through the analysis of products such as *Lost* (2004-2010) and *24* (2001-2010), Carini questions further the strategies which involve producers and audience. In particular, she highlights the close links between primary, secondary and tertiary textuality.

In 2010, Aldo Grasso and Massimo Scaglioni edited the volume Televisione convergente. La TV oltre il piccolo schermo (lit. trans. Convergent Television. TV Beyond the Small Screen) published in the Link Research Series. Right from the title it is clear that the two scholars will question the relationship between television, once considered the mass medium par excellence, and convergence culture, as theorized by Henry Jenkins (2006). Extension, access and brand are identified as the keywords for interpreting the phenomenon of convergence, and therefore the main questions are: What are the dynamics that characterize the convergent television? What results can we expect?

Though it is not the only driver of change, technology is identified as one of the major causes of the new TV assets, particularly because of the growing relationship between TV and the Web, and because of the overhaul which began with the digitization of the television signal. The multiplication of access to television also implicates the broadcasting station, which must evolve to take advantage of the opportunities of new platforms and new audiences. Another mutation is also that of text television, more and more detached from the concept of 'closed work' in favor of 'brand,'[11] constituted by a text matrix but also by many extensions able to position themselves in a more or less spatial and temporal independent way. The reticular dimension of the text expands even more if we take into account not only the top/down extensions but also the extensions produced by users that in many cases become to all effects part of the narrative universe of the TV series.

This volume was the result of a research (between 2009 and 2010) made by Ce.RTA - Center for Research on Television and Audiovisual at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore di Milano. Founded in 2008, the Ce.RTA. is led by Aldo Grasso and conducts research on issues related to the evolution of the media system with particular attention to the television series. The main lines of research are technological convergence, economic and institutional; the evolution of consumer habits; textual and linguistic features of various products; the reading of the schedules and the interaction between television and the web. Among the many scientific publications of the research center is the column which reports on the television series and can be found within the quarterly journal of film studies Bianco e Nero. As regards the work aimed at investigating the US scenario - and in particular

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10 *Yo soy Betty, la fea* (1999-2001); *Ugly Betty* (2006-2010).

11 In *Romanzo Criminale. Transmedia and Beyond* (2013) Marta Boni focused on the issue where the TV series is addressed as 'a galaxy of texts and performances which contribute to the transformation of an Italian narrative into a complex world or an epic work'(p. 7).

pay TV - the volume edited by Barbara Maio entitled HBO. Televisione, Autorialità, Estetica (lit. trans. HBO. Television, Authorship, Aesthetics) (2011) should not go without mention. The same author went onto edit the book Cult TV in 2013. Alongside the publications, and also curated by Barbara Maio, Osservatorio TV, an independent research project which publishes a free e-book each year in which TV series produced in the previous 2-3 years are analyzed, should also be noted. Drawing on a more philosophical perspective is, Filosofia delle serie tv. Dalla scena del crimine al trono di spade (lit. trans. Philosophy of the TV series. From the Crime Scene to Game of Thrones) by Luca Bandirali and Enrico Terrone, published in 2012. In the first part of the book, TV series are considered as objects worthy of a philosophical treatment. The fundamental thesis that the authors carried out is that the television series represents a synthesis of the two major contemporary narrative forms that have dominated previous centuries: the epic form of the novel and the dramatic form of plays and cinema. The most interesting television series – the authors are concerned with *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (2000-), *The Sopranos* (1999-2007), *24* (2001-2010), *Game of Thrones* (2011-), among others – are able to construct relevant philosophical discourses that help us to gain an in-depth understanding of the forms of our existence in the world in which we live. Also interesting is the attention that the authors give to the spoiler phenomenon and subsequent spoiler policies, linking them to the way in which the TV series is viewed by the community of fans. Several areas of study are dealt with, starting with the name "TV series" which suggests a very tight bond with the TV medium whereas in reality it is no longer so important due to the de-institutionalization of TV viewing.

Another focus is the comparison between television seriality and cinematographic seriality: if in the latter we have episodes that form a series, in the case of the television series we have a continuous narrative that is divided into episodes. Cinema and television series are often analysed together like, for example, in the book L'illusione difficile: Cinema e serie TV nell'età della disillusione (lit. trans. The Difficult Illusion: Cinema and TV series in the Age of Disillusionment) by Federico Di Chio (2013) which, following the evolution of the illusion in classic American cinema up to the contemporary TV series, analyses textual strategies and the forms of enjoyment that characterize them. In the form of provocation, Daniela Cardini in Serial tv. Come la televisione ha sconfitto il cinema (lit. trans. Serial TV. How Television Has Defeated Cinema) (2013) analyses the TV series as a text rich in intertextual references, comparable with movies for content and modes

of expression, and whose strength lies, among other things, in its ability to create group identity (evident in online activity) and to propose completely new ways of viewing unlinked to the traditions of the television medium.

3.1 From the Television Series to the Narrative Ecosystem

The studies that we have reported so far have moved forward the theoretical and critical discourse on television serial production. Some have highlighted fundamental connections with specific structures in American television and others have focused on alternative forms of consumption. Since 2005, the Italian debate has become more complex taking into account all the different aspects of the production of seriality, involving most of the Italian research centers. The increasing complexification of serial television production tends to make obsolete even the most precise definition of the serialized series. Guglielmo Pescatore and Veronica Innocenti focus, for example, on the transition from the concept of series to that of narrative ecosystem (2013: 57-72).

Since 2009 the University of Bologna has undertaken a fruitful path of research on contemporary mediality, viewed from different perspectives and with a marked interdisciplinarity, which finds its greatest fulfillment in the Media Mutations conferences.[12]

The contemporary TV series is no longer simple textual objects, but the result of an ecosystemic design, where the model is designed in advance as an evolutionary system with a high degree of density between the various components. For this reason, from the idea of text we arrive at the narrative ecosystem.

The narrative, which no longer has a single center of irradiation, tends to develop along different paths. The traditional tools of narrative analysis (semiotics, narratology), which once would have considered the story as something oriented and with a clear direction, even if complex and labyrinthine, are no longer sufficient enough to give an account for all the complex shapes of the television serial narrative. Watching a television series is now a distributed experience, which creates a new kind of participation and stimulates further consumption. Narrative ecosystems are non-procedural sys-

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12 The event editions have grown in their international dimension and their ability to attract major Italian and foreign media scholars. The first two editions were concerned respectively with contemporary cinema and its relationship with the web (edition of 2009) and the definition of the concept of popular in old and new media (2010 edition).

tems (Pescatore and Innocenti 2013: 68), meaning that they are not determined by a syntagmatic sequence of functions, but are determined by declarative elements that describe the environment, characters and relationships, making the narrative material a universe traversable by viewers, and where the experience can be reconfigured. The episodes are therefore textual objects that allow us to relate and connect to the narrative universe. The configuration of the fictional universe is a process of negotiation between the mode of use (enjoyment, experience and production) and the project (media delivery and marketing) and the proliferation of non-linear marks a point of rupture in the narrative "consensual" and a universe as an ecosystem is driven simultaneously by the industry and users (65).

In the context of media ecology, it is about giving an organic vision: The ecosystem perspective imposes a point of view that goes beyond the concept of *media specific* and considers the abiotic dimension as an integral part of the development of the biotic dimension.[13]

On the basis of these research advancements, 2011 and 2012 were highly relevant editions of the above-mentioned conference, in which, for the first time, the objective was to explore these forms of extended narrative. Ecosystem narratives became the privileged focus of the event, described as lasting worlds, persistent and sharable as places inhabitable and full of manipulable objects, which are investigated for both their structure and function. These two editions found their natural continuation in the volume edited by Claudio Bisoni and Veronica Innocenti (2013), which is a collection of the interventions.

In 2013, Media Mutations 5 was dedicated to Ephemeral Media. Time, Persistence and Transience Screen in Contemporary Culture (organized by Sara Pesce, Paul Grainge and Roberta Pearson). On that occasion and on the basis of previous editions, the nature and behavior of all the textual forms that make up ecosystem narratives, but which are not part of the matrix text, were questioned. The paratext especially, in all its forms and in relation to the main text to which it refers, proved to have a decisive influence [publication forthcoming].

The sixth edition of the conference, in 2014, entitled Modes of Production and Narrative Forms in the Contemporary TV Series (organized by Paul Noto, Veronica

Innocenti, Leora Hadas and Luca Barra), drew attention specifically to extended narrative in television, looking at systematic studies on the seriality. In particular, the perspective examined was the relationship between the modes of production and the different aesthetic-narrative characteristics of the products. With regard to the latter, both national and international forms of serial production were analyzed, taking into consideration the development of new technologies and their impact on serial products and their distribution (e.g. the advent of *over-the-top* channels and *straight-to-series* production), the relationship between the viewer and serial products and the role of video games in the design and sale of the vast narratives.

3.2 **Role of Criticism**

We have noticed that, with regard to the television series, academic studies have only in recent years started to pose specific questions regarding serial products. Studies belonging to the field of criticism, on the other hand, have acquired and are still acquiring a special dimension. For this reason, the last part of this paper will attempt to give an account of the vitality that surrounds the studies on the television series, also taking into consideration non-academic spaces, such as those of the online criticism. Currently, there are no printed journals focused primarily on the criticism of the television series, whether it is national or international, nor are there official spaces on the web. Not always the absence of an institutional coverage leads to a total vacuum, indeed, what occurs in Italy exactly reflects the ecosystemic and participatory nature of the contemporary television serial. The absence of a real critique on the television series has been filled by some blogs that, starting from the boundless passion of the fans, were able to offer unprecedented, great value. Now, the two sites that stand out for completeness, quality and competence of the reviews produced are Serialmente and Seriangolo, whose birth have a common origin: mourning. In the case of Serialmente, the founders of the site started from the series finale of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, presented the site as a place of mourning where the need for discursive discussion on serial products was so urgent that the it had to be created. A few years later, the same thing happened with Seriangolo: this time it was the turn of the series finale of *Lost* to act as a trigger for the birth of the site. In both cases, these are amateur writers, among whom there are people who study and work in the world of film and television, as well as others who write only for pleasure.

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13   'Ecosystems have a biotic and abiotic component. The biotic component is the narrative form, a living subject that underlies the processes of competition, adaptation, change and modification, while the abiotic component is provided by the media context in which the series is placed' (Pescatore and Innocenti 2013: 68).

The most innovative feature of these websites are the reviews of television series episode by episode following the original calendars of each country.[14] Regarding the American TV series, the reviews are published a few days after the date of the original transmission and consequently much earlier (with rare exceptions) than the Italian one. This habit, encouraged by some fansubbing sites that offer the subtitles of the series aired in a very short time, has the benefit of introducing the viewer to a vision of the series in its original language, as well as allowing them to be aware of the airing and the scheduling of their favorite show. Despite the fact that almost all the authors of these blogs are amateurs, their knowledge of the world of the television series has given rise over time to indepth sections and thematic monographs which can be read alongside the reviews of individual episodes on the site.

04 CONCLUSIONS

At the end of this survey, it is possible to observe positive and thorough input regarding the status of studies on the subject. From the eighties to present, in fact, the studies have not only increased in number, but they have spread out over different fields and divided themselves between the analysis of the national scene and the analysis of international scene. In the eighties, the studies had a pioneering nature, especially given the novelty of the subject, and were addressed by scholars from different disciplines. The nineties were the years of systematization and affirmation of the first research centers on television series. The last fifteen years, in addition to being the years in which structured searches are produced (facing the economic point of view, the point of view of the text and consumption), are the years in which different paradigms depending on the skills of the individual research centers have been proposed.

Given the speed of technological change involving television and new media, new research perspectives have opened up and must necessarily focus on social TV and the interaction between vision and sharing on social networks, piracy and the new forms of distribution, the increasing reduction of the windows of distribution time and finally the customization of the act of viewing as a result of mobile and on-demand devices.

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14   However from autumn 2014 Serialmente changed its editorial line abandoning weekly reviews in favor of critical insights on the TV series.

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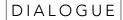
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Yo soy Betty, la fea (1999-2001)

HISTORIA Y FICCIÓN A PARTIR DE *AMAR EN TIEMPOS REVUELTOS*

ENTREVISTA A RODOLF SIRERA

P *La aparición de* Amar en tiempos revueltos *junto con* Cuéntame *supuso el boom de la serialidad histórica en España, en el caso de la primera además siendo un diario. Ahora parece que la historia es una temática con garantías...*

RS Bueno, yo supongo que todo es en cierta medida algo circular. ¿Por qué por ejemplo en el cine surge en un momento dado el terror... o las películas de súperhombres? En el caso de la televisión cabe remontarse al momento en que se ha querido recuperar la ficción. Cuando sólo estaban los canales estatales se hacía mucha ficción puesto que no había competencia, ni ritmos apretados de trabajo, ni problemas de audiencias, sin embargo cuando surgen las televisiones privadas, al principio, hay una desconfianza respecto a la ficción española en general y se comienzan a programar muchas series extranjeras...no será hasta mediados de la década de los 90 cuando se empieza a recuperar la ficción propia. Al principio de esta recuperación la ficción española utiliza los géneros habituales... Pero muy pronto fuerza los límites de cada formato y comienza la obsesión por ofrecer productos que sean para públicos lo más amplios posibles, al contrario de lo que sucede en el mundo anglosajón, por ejemplo sobre todo en la tv americana.

Aquí, y sobre todo a partir de *Medico de familia*, empieza la obsesión por productos que sirvan para el niño, para el abuelo, para el marido, y hay una resistencia total a cualquier serie que se salga de esos parámetros... Pero sobre todo hay mucha resistencia a los productos que tengan relación con la historia, había una obsesión, durante ese periodo, de que la ficción histórica no interesaba, en parte porque hay momentos delicados de nuestra historia que no son cómodos....

La realidad es que a finales de los noventa en Barcelona, algunos de los guionistas que trabajábamos juntos en la productora Diagonal, planteamos a ésta y a TV3 hacer una ficción histórica, y así conseguimos hacer una serie de tipo histórico, *Temps de silenci*, pero en un sentido amplio. *Temps de silenci,* es una serie semanal que está delimitada por un tiempo, lo que pasa desde las últimas elecciones de la Segunda República Española hasta las primeras de la Democracia y planteamos una cuestión que al principio era una pregunta un poco incómoda, que no todos los afines a una ideología por serlo son malos (ni al contrario buenos)...y que hay sectores de la burguesía catalana que también comulgaron con el franquismo...y que eso no es fácil de contar... pero al final TV3 nos

deja hacer el proyecto con muchas reticencias porque había miedo. Nos sometieron un poco a determinadas exigencias de género, nos pidieron limitar el desarrollo de la guerra civil, por ejemplo, a un solo capítulo, pero bueno nos fuimos ajustando y al final estrenamos y alcanzamos un éxito rotundo de audiencia, llegando a tener picos de hasta un 40%, que hoy en día son absolutamente imposibles. *Temps de silenci* tiene unas características especiales, el tiempo que abarca es muy amplio y a veces ente un capítulo y el siguiente hay una elipsis de 7 años. No pretendíamos contar la historia de los personajes sino contar "LA HISTORIA" a través de los personajes, eso nos permite trabajar de una manera muy creativa, hicimos 24 capítulos y luego 24 más, pero llegamos hasta el año 2000 y ya no podíamos seguir.

A raíz del éxito de *Temps de silenci*, TVE le plantea a Diagonal hacer una serie histórica diaria. Una serie diaria implica unas características de escritura especiales para los guionistas, pero quieren hacerla de una manera un poco experimental. En principio nos plantean una serie de sobremesa y cerrada, lo cual es algo insólito en la televisión pública, una serie cerrada de unos 100 capítulos. Nos piden coger un arco temporal desde los previos de la guerra civil hasta el final de la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Entonces trasladamos en cierta medida el conflicto inicial de *Temps de Silenci* a este periodo más concreto. No nos ponen ninguna traba de contenido.

P *¿Ni siquiera referente a la Guerra Civil?*

RS No, ninguna traba, también es cierto que en ese momento gobernaba el Partido Socialista Obrero Español y que lo que sí hubo fue algún artículo en periódicos, diciendo que queríamos remover fantasmas del pasado y esas cosas... pero nosotros lo que queríamos era contar historias de personajes y ha habido una Guerra Civil, eso no podemos negarlo.... Nosotros, en esa temporada que teníamos cerrada en un principio, queríamos llegar hasta 1945... pero cuando estábamos trabajando en ella y casi lo teníamos todo atado para que quedara cerrada yo hice un truco de guión porque no era lógico que nos pidieran una serie cerrada de 100 capítulos que empezara en Septiembre y acabara en Marzo.

P *No, lo lógico es cubrir hasta Junio.*

RS Exacto, así que hicimos un truco que nos permitiera retomar la serie en un momento dado. Y al final nos pidieron que continuáramos hasta 180 capítulos, eso sí jurándonos que se acabaría, que la serie se había acabado. Sin embargo cuando ya creíamos que realmente habíamos terminado nos avisan para decirnos que quieren una segunda temporada. Claro, eso nos planteó un dilema, nosotros ya le habíamos

dado un final a nuestros protagonistas y no los podíamos retomar. Teníamos que diseñar nuevos protagonistas... este hecho sin embargo ha sido claramente positivo después para la serie, puesto que los personajes no se agotaban del todo.

P *¿Fue entonces como se decidió que los protagonistas de la serie sólo se mantuvieran durante una temporada como máximo?*

RS Sí, al tener que inventar nuevos personajes protagonistas para la segunda temporada nos dimos cuenta que en realidad eso hacía que la serie no se agotara. Organizamos el trabajo de la siguiente manera, cada año establecíamos una historia troncal sobre un tema que nos interesaba contar, en algunos momentos era el ejército, otros los movimientos clandestinos contra el franquismo, en otros el mundo del teatro durante aquellas épocas. Los personajes principales estaban ligados a esa historia troncal, luego había otros personajes que continuaban siempre, y algunos que iban y venían....

P *Claro, es que esa es una estrategia estupenda para que los personajes no se agoten.*

RS Por supuesto que sí. Yo escribí la serie *El súper* y en el capítulo 580 me fui porque ya no sabía qué hacer... estaba absolutamente agotado. Y sin embargo *Amar en tiempos revueltos* tuvo más de 1700 y siempre hemos tenido historias que contar, porque cuando los personajes han cumplido el ciclo han desaparecido y han dejado paso a otros nuevos que renovaban las historias y refrescaban la serie.

Este hecho nos ha dado mucha vida. Al final de la segunda temporada ya no hubo nunca descanso y todo fue continuo, esto hizo que las características de producción, escritura y rodaje, fueran muy industriales... pero conseguimos que funcionara. Cuando voy a cursos de guión y explico como funcionaba la serie la gente alucina... y me pregunta "cuando escribías" y yo les digo, "no, yo no escribía...¿cómo voy a escribir yo 1700 capítulos?" entonces explicas que éramos 12 o 14 guionistas, y cómo se trabaja el tema de las escaletas, los diálogos, etc.

P *¿Por qué la televisión española tiene ese uso particular de los formatos?*

RS Quitando el caso de *Farmacia de Guardia* que sí que fue estrictamente una *sitcom* de 25 minutos, el resto de las ficciones españolas siempre han sobrepasado los límites estándar de los formatos, en el caso de las series diarias se han llegado de los normales 45 minutos hasta los 80. Nosotros cuando arrancamos *Amar en tiempos revueltos* nos aseguraron que sería de 25 minutos, pero cuando llevábamos escritos 50

capítulos me enteré de que eran de 35 minutos (pero que no nos lo habían dicho para que no nos enfadáramos), luego subió a 40… Todo esto trae consecuencias bastante complicadas, porque se necesitan secuencias más largas que a su vez piden más tiempo de grabación, el tiempo material que se tiene para hacer las cosas no es más y tampoco se puede estar grabando siempre, porque si no no hay tiempo para construir nuevos decorados, descanso de actores y personal etc… Entonces si cada día tienes que fabricar, no los 40 minutos que se emiten, sino 50 o 60 porque necesitas ir por delante de la emisión, necesitas grabar 6 capítulos a la semana… Esto genera como consecuencias inmediatas que no te puedes permitir exteriores, no puedes preparar lugares… La verdad es que ha sido una serie que ha tenido problemas en cuanto a limitaciones, a la hora de número de actores, etc… no puedes montar secuencias de más de 4 o 5 actores con réplica, uno que se equivoque puede retrasar todo el ritmo de producción… A partir del final de la segunda temporada, cuando el engranaje con todas estas complicaciones empezó a funcionar a la perfección, enganchamos totalmente al público.

P *A partir de la tercera temporada la serie subió mucho en audiencia y se mantuvo hasta el final…*

RS A partir de entonces se mantuvo en una media de 2 millones y medio de audiencia de espectadores. La cosa hubiera podido seguir más tiempo, la última temporada sufrimos mucho porque TVE entró en crisis y Diagonal tenía otros proyectos para Antena 3, también grabó la serie *La República* para TVE, de la cual solamente se emitió la primera temporada, (de la segunda no se sabe nada, aunque está grabada…) Los principales problemas que hubo fueron económicos y al final ese fue el motivo de que la serie cambiara de cadena y fuera a Antena 3, momento en que yo me desenganche de la serie. Solamente ayudé a hacer el tránsito…ya no es un producto que me interese y además llevaba ya siete años más uno de preparación y estaba cansado del proyecto…

P *La serie ha traspasado fronteras.*

RS Sí, ha sido una serie muy seguida en Latinoamérica y también ha sido utilizada en algunos Institutos Cervantes como soporte a las clases de español. También hemos sabido que ha sido un objeto de estudio en algunas universidades europeas.

P *¿Como ficción narrativa de la historia?*

RS Sí, ese ha sido el principal interés. Nosotros hemos intentado siempre ser fieles al momento histórico, lo cual trae sus complicaciones. Algunas pueden parecer ridículas pero no son tanto…yo soy mayor y he ido a la universidad pero también tuve que hacer el Servicio Militar… entonces ves incongruencias como un militar saludando sin gorra, o con un casco de la policía militar española cuando tienes en escena un militar alemán…cosas que no cumplen con el rigor histórico necesario. En una serie semanal o en una película eso es más fácil de controlar, en un diario como el nuestro esas cosas se escapaban con mucha más facilidad. Otro problema es que una serie diaria tiene cierto estatismo, no se pueden hacer muchos movimientos y los actores suelen tener que soltar parrafadas. También da problemas con el lenguaje, puesto que algunas palabras comunes ahora como "vale" eran muy infrecuentes en los 50 y al revés…

De todas maneras creemos que el marco general y los grandes temas están bien tratados.

P *Yo creo que están bien tratados… A raíz de* Amar en tiempos revueltos *salieron otras series históricas, como* La Señora, República *o* Isabel… *series empujadas por aquel éxito que tuvo.*

RS Sí, sí, totalmente cierto, de hecho yo mismo estoy escribiendo ahora, junto con otros dos guionistas, *La Catedral del Mar…* Nos hemos ido hasta la Edad Media, se ha perdido el miedo, ahora también es cierto que aquí funcionamos con efecto imitación, ahora nadie quiere una serie contemporánea… Pero bueno yo creo que en lo que si se ha avanzado es en romper esa necesidad anterior de que las series fueran siempre de ámbito/público familiar…

P *Ha cambiado el público que se sienta a ver la televisión…*

RS También es verdad que se funciona por ciclos, yo llevo años queriendo hacer una serie de terror y nadie está interesado… lo que cuesta muchísimo en la televisión española es innovar…la televisión española es muy reacia a cambiar y a arriesgar. Y hay ideas estupendas pero luego están en manos de los directivos creativos de las cadenas que no quieren arriesgar en general, pese a que tienen un público que conoce ya muy bien la ficción americana, muy distinta, y la consume. Quizás internet sea una posibilidad… es una posibilidad. El problema es la financiación…. pero supongo que es cuestión de tiempo que empiece a funcionar y abra muchos caminos.

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