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A FUNNIER *MONK*: A MULTIMODAL APPROACH TO TRANSNATIONAL TV SERIES ADAPTATIONS

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Transnational television; format adaptations; multimodal analysis; localization; *Monk*; *Galip Derviş*.

ABSTRACT

In their book *Reading Television* (1978: 64-5), John Fiske and John Hartley define television as a medium that provides the members of a particular community with a "confirming, reinforcing version of themselves." Although the introduction of the unfamiliar and innovative via televisual productions is a business imperative as well as a cultural necessity today, television continues to function as a mirror of its receiving society, and provide its viewers with culturally appropriate content through its various semiotic modes of communication situated within the visual, verbal, and sound tracks. Televisual productions, in this sense, can be viewed as one of the most salient multimodal texts through which our everyday politics are continuously materialized, fictionalized, and rendered into an entertaining popular language that shapes our everyday perceptions and expectations. Transnational format adaptations, in particular, stand out as ample content-rich texts in which the processes of localization and appropriation, realized through individual semiotic choices made by producers, manifest themselves. It is the goal of this paper to trace back such semiotic choices made during the *re*-production phase of transnational format adaptations, and reveal sociocultural and political interventions in meaning making at the time, through a multimodal analysis of an American comedy crime series, *Monk*, and its Turkish adaptation, *Galip Derviş*.

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INTRODUCTION

The true success of a TV series adaptation is not rooted in how closely it follows its source, but rather how it is *re*-interpreted. This is because a remake of a work usually necessitates some *re*-formation and editing to develop a closer "cultural proximity" to the host culture, which Straubhaar (1991) defines as a characteristic that reflects the traditional, regional and cultural values of a people. This localization process, however, is not only and necessarily materialized through one mode, i.e., *verbal language*. It is also done through other important modes of communication situated within the *visual track,* which includes the camera work, lighting, and frame composition; and the *sound track,* that is, the musical score, sound effects and sound design. In other words, the re-created and culturally appropriated message, along with its ideological, political and sociocultural baggage, is incarnated at different levels and through different modes of a multifaceted semiotic system that transcends the realm of monomodality and gets into that of multimodality (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996; Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001; Machin, 2013). These multiple modes, functioning as an organic whole within each televisual narrative, are used by producers artfully and strategically in order to constitute a culturally oriented narrative structure that promises more viewer ratings, and thus more profit.

This epistemological move from a less multimodal society to a complex multimodal society can be seen in alignment with the paradigmatic shifts happening in the fields of Linguistics and Semiotics in the last century; that is, from a predominantly linguistic-oriented and structuralist view of language that foregrounded the alleged universality of system, or the *langue* as named by Saussure (1983), to a more multimodal and post-structuralist view that highlighted the *social* and its workings through individuals' various semiotic choices in creating meanings (Kress, 2001). The relationship between a form (sign) and an individual's act of choosing that form (sign) to convey a specific message has come to be seen as less arbitrary, more motivated, as the individual's such choice is prompted by various sociocultural and political factors, as well as the aptness of a particular choice in signifying the intended meaning (Kress, 2001; Kress, 2003). In other words, it has become clear that the individual user has the autonomy to manipulate through various paradigmatic and syntagmatic choices in the system, and has a decisive effect on the final meaning (while reserving the viewer's own capacity and background, as another competent user of the system, in decoding the message). Adopting this view, Kress (2001) argued that, by tracking back an individual's choices in the production of a text, we could reveal the sociocultural and political structures that the creator(s) of the meaning faced at the time of the production. Based on this theoretical foundation, this paper conducts a comparative cross-cultural multimodal analysis of an American comedy crime series, *Monk* (2002-2009), and its Turkish adaptation, *Galip Derviş* (2013-2014). In doing so, it explores how meaning is re-formed and manipulated in transnational TV series adaptations through various semiotic modes located in the *visual, verbal,* and *sound tracks* of an audio-visual text. Thanks to its transnational frame, it also traces culturally specific connections between such paradigmatic/syntagmatic choices made during a re-production and certain sociocultural and political dynamics of the day, and opens up a new transnational perspective for discussion in the ever-evolving field of multimodality.

The Emmy Award-winning television series *Monk* was created by Andy Breckman, an American television and film writer, and produced by Mandeville Films and Touchstone Television in association with Universal Television. The series, with a total number of 125 episodes in eight seasons, originally ran on *USA Network* from 2002 through 2009, and at different times on various other TV channels across the country and the world. In addition to its subtitled and dubbed versions, the series was also remade with a different cast in other countries, including Turkey. The Turkish version, entitled *Galip Derviş*, was produced by Barakuda Film, and aired on *Kanal D* between the years of 2013 and 2014, consisting of three seasons with a total number of 56 episodes. Thanks to its high production values and airing time, the Turkish series also achieved great success, especially in its first two seasons. When compared, the two versions conspicuously diverge from each other visually, verbally, and acoustically at particular points where there is a crucial cultural difference in terms of topics such as family life, religion, and workplace. It is the goal of this paper to explore these multimodal semiotic divergences between the series, and their intervention in meaning making, in light of two selected scenes from the first and fourth episodes of *Monk,* and their corresponding scenes in the first and third episodes of *Galip Derviş,* respectively.

TRANSNATIONAL TELEVISION: TV SERIES ADAPTATION IN THE AGE OF GLOCALIZATION

The media today are less confined to the physical space of nation-state or city boundaries than ever before (Sparks,

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2007). With the advent of new communication technologies and transnational corporations in the second half of the last century, particularly following the neoliberal reforms in the last quarter of it, media globalization has become more and more influential on national and world politics, and on their sociocultural implications in local discourses, threatening the long standing epistemological monopoly of the nation state. In the face of this evolving global marketplace, the introduction of the unfamiliar and innovative via the media, especially in the entertainment sector, has been a business imperative as well as a cultural necessity.

Within this context, the years 1980s and 1990s saw an unprecedented growth in television channels around the world with the advent of cable and satellite television systems, which established the ground for trade in television programs and formats across cultures (Steemers, 2014). One of the axiomatic indicators of this industrial trend was the increase in the transnational circulation of finished products, such as soap operas (e.g. *Dallas, The Young and the Restless*), which Albert Moran and Silvio Waisbord called "canned programmes" that required no localization except for subtitling or dubbing (as cited in Mikos, 2015). Through these unmodified texts, except for possible censoring cuts, local cultures started to become exposed to a great flow of culturally foreign ideas and narratives more than ever.

This massive transformation in the television industry and its social implications acted as a catalyst for an already inaugurated debate over the effects of the new media on the idea of globalization and homogenization of world cultures. Conventionalist theorists such as Guback (1969), Miller et al. (2001), and Ritzer (2004) accounted for this global media frenzy as a unidirectional manifestation of the imperialist ideologies of the Western world, particularly the United States, over the rest of the world in the name of *modernity*. Progressive theorists such as Robertson (1995) and Appadurai (1996), on the other hand, saw it as the beginning of a novel and more complex level of interaction between world cultures. Colin Sparks (2007) explains this separation between the conventional and non-conventional approaches by drawing a difference between what he calls the "weak theories" of globalization that opt for seeing the new world order through conventional, dichotomous, and unidirectional lenses; and the "strong theories" of globalization that proclaim the rise of radically new and complex parameters that complicate and disorder the relationship between the already-equivocal concepts of global and local. In this sense, the advocates of the theory of media imperialism, who can be associated with Sparks' category of the "weak theories," argue that what is happening is an Americanization, or in Ritzer's (2004) terms, "McDonaldization" of the whole world rather than globalization. For those aligned with the "strong theories" of globalization, on the other hand, there is neither a single global culture nor an explicable body of global or Western cultures. The line between global and local is already blurred.

The fate of the *local* within this context has been a much debated topic as the world has started to be viewed as evolving into a "global village," in Marshall McLuhan's (1964) terms, threatening indigenous cultures.

However, Marshall McLuhan never meant the "global village" to be a mantra for those who believed in the chimera of fusion of cultures and a succeeding ataraxia. "Global village"[1] was, on the contrary, a harbinger of a more culturally diverse and heterogeneous future (Stearn, 1967). As McLuhan states (Stearn, 1967: 272), "there is more diversity, less conformity under a single roof in any family than there is with the thousands of families in the same city. The more you create village conditions, the more discontinuity and division and diversity. The global village absolutely insures maximal disagreement on all points." Thus, within this cacophony of ideas and practices that the global village generates, the local choices and constraints continue to play a crucial role in the *re*-formation and maintenance of local (television) cultures today. One of its manifestations is the emergence and growing numbers of regional markets and multiple production centers in the media industry around the world (Sparks, 2007). For Fiske and Hartley (2003), and Straubhaar (1991), it is because societies throughout history have always been inclined to make an active choice in viewing and hearing locally produced and/or culturally familiar texts, if available, which in return have given them a sense of cultural membership, security and involvement. Similarly, Steemers (2014) lists three reasons for the persistence of the local despite the boom of TV channels and the exponentially growing circulation of transnationally imported programs through them: "[1] complex national markets with their cultural, legal, and regulatory barriers; [2] the preference for local production if it [is] available; and [3] the role of national buyers as gatekeepers who [regulate] the flow of imports." Also, Moran and Aveyard (2014) reiterate the strong connection between televisual texts, and time/places, as they argue that formats do not always translate

1 Also, "Global village" and the cultural diversity it enhanced did not yield egalitarian conditions for societies. For more on the issues of enriched diversity and continuing problem of unequal representation, (see Johnson, 2007).

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readily to other locations. That is, the local is where globalization idiosyncratically happens.

Transnational remakes, in this regard, are the nexus where the global meets the local (Moran, 2004), and the local meets the global. Robertson (1995: 30) explains this two-way normalization process occurring in the midst of a tension between the global versus local[2], or globalization versus particularism, with the notion of *glocalization,* in which he sees localization as part of the globalization process because the latter, in fact, reconstructs and perpetuates the local, *home*, contrary to the general assumption that it destroys our sense of home. On a similar note, Buonanno (2008: 109) suggests that adapting a foreign text is realized through a process of *hybridization,*[3] meaning "a conception of culture as a symbolic and material complex that is 'in the making,' in constant tension between permeability and resistance to the external influences that have to be faced with the passage of time." Among these hybridized texts, TV series adaptations, as one of the most popular episodic televisual *re*-productions at the heart of glocalization, stand out as content-rich cultural artefacts in terms of tailoring of information to societies. They constitute a perfect example of how meaning that originates in another culture is meticulously *re*-constructed and *re*-fictionalized for its new target audience. By virtue of the multimodal nature of TV series, such tailoring and re-tuning of meaning occur at multiple levels and through multiple modes of communication in the visual track, the verbal language, and the musical score.

MULTIMODALITY IN TRANSNATIONAL TELEVISION

According to David Machin (2013), the multimodal research approach starts with two groundbreaking works, both by Kress and Van Leeuwen; namely, *Reading Images* (1996), and *Multimodal Discourse* (2001). These two books, as well as many other succeeding works including Kress (2003; 2010), Jewitt (2009), O'Halloran & Smith (2011), Bateman & Schmidt (2012), and Machin (2013), emphasize the fact that humanity is moving away from monomodality to multimodality, as we continue to discover and/or invent new ways of deploying and using various forms of tangible and intangible, real and virtual, analog and digital semiotic resources to produce and communicate everyday discourses. In this regard, the invention of the *moving image*, which began with Eadweard Muybridge's photographic experiments with horses in the 1870s with the intent of finding an answer to the long-standing question of whether all four hooves of a horse are off the earth (Smith, 2013), and its subsequent integration with the *sound* at the turn of the twentieth century in the short films of the Edison Company can be seen as two of the milestones in the development of today's multimodal world. More recent technological advancements in the digital world (e.g., 3D, 4D, and 5D) have expedited this process even further. Within this trajectory, Kress (2012: 36), deriving from the theories of Halliday and Hasan (1976), van Leeuwen (2005), Bezemer and Kress (2008), and Kress and Bezemer (2009), underscores the fact that every text consists of various dimensions of meaning, which have been made into a coherent entity "through the use of semiotic resources that establish cohesion both internally, among the elements of the text, and externally, with elements of the environment in which texts occur." And television, as the quintessential medium of multimodality today, cannot be exempted from the multimodal scrutiny.

Defining "mode" should be one of the first steps in understanding "multimodality." Bateman (2011) defines it by, first, highlighting the fact that perception of a mode can change across communities/groups within and across societies. That is, the way people interpret a sign within a semiotic system –be it a linguistic sign or any other material or virtual substrate– depends on their *a priori* knowledge of that sign and its discourse. For instance, the way a bibliophile sees his/her collection of books may differ significantly from an e-reader's view of such collections. Second, the semiotic mode, according to Bateman, should be paradigmatically and syntagmatically manipulable and controllable by a group of users so that an intended meaning/sign could be created and fixated using it as a tool. Finally, it is crucial to understand that the materiality and affordances of a selected mode may also play a key role in the construction of meaning (Bateman, 2013; Kress, 2003).

The fact that modes are rarely presented in isolation from each other complicates the situation further. Even in the case of the codex in its historical sense, the material used in its creation, the way it was preserved and presented, the layout, the color of the pages, as well as its typography always intervened in the meaning making process throughout the eras of various literacies (Campbell, 2013). Also, in the case of spoken

2 For more on this illusory dichotomy established between the notions of "local" and "global," see Wilson, R. and Dissanayake, W., 1996. *Global/local: cultural production and the transnational imaginary.* Durham: Duke University Press.

3 Hybridization is a concept that is often associated with Argentine-born theorist Néstor García Canclini. For further information, see Canclini, N. G., 1990. *Hybrid cultures.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

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language, the verbal has always been accompanied by gestures, mimics, eye-contact and/or the features of the voice. With the advent of new technologies and the new media, though, the complexity of multimodality has been moved into the digital realm, and has become more of an issue because of the advanced technological tools the digital world offers. Texts today come in such a cohesive organic whole that their complex structures blur the networks of modes in function, which results in either a seamless interrelation of meanings, or, otherwise, multiplication of meaning (Bateman, 2011). This prevents the understanding of how much each mode actually intervenes in the meaning making, and even what modes exist within each artefact in the first place (Bateman, 2011). Televisual (as well as filmic) narratives in particular are the epitomes of this "complexity" and "multimodality" in the sense that they continuously send messages to the viewer at multiple levels and through multiple co-existing modes. Thus, the viewer's perception of a televisual message depends not on a single mode of communication but on the sum of meanings that are sent through the image, lighting, camera angles, music, background effects (e.g. laughter track), and dialogues, as well as the *a priori* knowledge s/he uses to interpret the multimodal flow of messages. What is more to this is that, when scrutinized, these complex multimodal structures also show traces and markers of sociocultural and political dynamics that may have steered the creators of these messages into making certain choices. This fact forces researchers to concentrate on the processes of production by which such texts are made.

There is a recently evolving body of literature that focuses on the multimodal nature of filmic and televisual messages (Bateman, 2008; Bateman and Schmidt, 2012; Bateman, 2013; Chuang, 2006; Jewitt, 2009; Kress, 2003; Machin, 2013; Mubenga, 2009; O'Halloran et al., 2011; O'Halloran et al., 2013; and, Bezemar and Mavers, 2011). Bateman (2008, 2013) developed an empirical model, named *Genre and Multimodality (GeM)*, that aims to enable the analysis of the textual metafunction of audio-visual texts. According to Bateman (2013), this can be done in two ways: by focusing on various elements within a segment (*mise-en-scène*); or across segments by looking at how scenes are combined (*montage*). In other words, the product is reverse-engineered (Bordwell, 2005). Kay O'Halloran is another key figure in this newly emerging field. Especially, the software program she and her team developed and called *Multimodal Analysis Video/Image/Text/Website* is an open manifestation of her passion for creating new interactive digital tools that will make multimodal research a more manageable and analyzable research area. In one of their exemplary analyses, O'Halloran et al. (2013) study the linguistic as well as visual and acoustic semiotic choices that two individuals on Fox news make during a live interview, and connect their findings to various macro-level patterns in the society. In another work, O'Halloran et al. (2011) split the studies in multimodal research into two complementary categories: (1) *issues,* which explores more general and theoretical issues regarding multimodality; and (2) *domains,* which focuses on specific discourses in order to find out how multimodality operates within them. One another leading figure in the field of multimodality is Gunther Kress, who, in his works, argues that a sole linguistic theory can no longer provide researchers with a full understanding of communication, as language and literacy have now become only a partial bearer of meaning (Kress, 2003). He suggests that all aspects of form in a multimodal text are meaningful and should be carefully read in order to unlock the meaning (Kress, 2003). Bezemar and Mavers (2011) also contribute to the literature of multimodality significantly through their work on how to transcribe (or transvisualize) multimodal texts for a fuller representation of complex operations within them. Finally, studies such as Chuang (2006) and Mubenga (2009) expand multimodal research into a transnational frame by examining subtitle translations in films in relation to other existing visual and acoustic [semiotic] modes, as they argue that all the semiotic modes in a film contribute meaning(s) to the film text simultaneously. As a step forward in the same direction, this study conducts a comparative cross-cultural analysis of a television format that has been produced and re-produced in two national contexts, and explores the complex web of semiotic modes in play in the construction of a cohesive meaning. To this end, it traces back the culturally-specific individual semiotic choices made particularly during the *re*-interpretation of the adapted series, and explores the sociocultural and political meanings hidden in the cracks of multimodal borders.

A COMPARISON OF *MONK* AND *GALIP DERVIŞ*

Television in Turkey began its broadcasting life in 1968 with the foundation of the first state-run channel, named *TRT* (*Turkish Radio and Television*) (Aksel, 2011). However, it was not until 1972 when the viewers had their first experience of an imported TV series (Aksel, 2011; Kesirli Unur, 2015). The sudden growth and increasing popularity of these dubbed foreign works among the viewers, as well as the decline in

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the cinema industry in the presence of a more accessible medium, *television*, prompted a lot of local film producers and directors of the time to turn to the television industry (Aksel, 2011; Yanardağoğlu, 2014; Kesirli Unur, 2015). This turn resulted in a boom of local series and TV movies, which were mostly adapted from either the classics of Turkish literature or popular foreign television productions of the time. The arrival of the first and several subsequent private channels in the 1990s boosted the local productions even further, as the production capacity and the culturally appropriate imported foreign works failed to sufficiently feed the increased airtime of broadcasting in the country (Aksel, 2011; Yanardağoğlu, 2014; Kesirli Unur, 2015). In the course of all these events, the idea of adapting from already-successful TV formats in other countries has come to be seen by producers and broadcasters as a short-cut to success, an example of which we have recently seen in the case of *Galip Derviş,* which was adapted from the American series *Monk*.

Monk is an American comedy crime series that features a brilliant detective named Adrian Monk as its protagonist. After having served in the homicide division of the police force for a number of years, Monk is temporarily suspended from his job due to a mental breakdown caused by the loss of his wife, Trudy, in a bombing incident. During the three subsequent years he detaches himself from society, some of his lifelong obsessions and phobias are aggravated and take over his life. Only after he starts getting some professional help from a nurse, named Sharona Fleming, is he able to go back to active duty as a private detective despite his obsessive compulsive disorder, and is frequently called in by his previous boss, Captain Stottlemeyer, to consult on inexplicable cases. During this continued but slow recovery period, viewers meet Monk and his extraordinary skills and compulsions that help him solve even the most mysterious cases. The Turkish version, *Galip Dervi*ş, exhibits a certain degree of "fidelity" to the initial American version in terms of the characters, narrative structure, and locations; whilst certain divergences/modifications occur at particular moments due to culturally different interpretations of certain contentious issues such as religion, domesticity, sexuality, womanhood, taboos, and social stratification. Various multimodal interventions are employed to tailor and re-tune the meaning in certain parts of the series where there is a need for cultural proximity. One of these multimodal proximity features in *Galip Dervi*ş is carried out along the lines of power relations between the characters.

According to Cotta (1976: 176), inequality of power is an essential component of any entity that aims to function as an organization because inequality precludes "disorder," to a certain extent, among members by regulating the decision-making mechanism. However, the distance of this inequality, or the *power distance,* socially accepted by the members of that community can vary culturally, which Hofstede (2001) explains through the concepts of "low" and "high" power distance cultures.[4] According to his theory, in lower power distance cultures, such as the United States, the implications of inequality are at minimum; that is, both subordinates and superiors are still viewed more or less as independent individuals with equal rights despite the established hierarchical roles for convenience. On the other hand, in higher power distance cultures, such as Turkey, there appears to be an existential hierarchy between the members of an organization or community, and this perception turns individuals with superior roles into "superior persons" that should be respected at all times. It is usually the privileged members of this second group that make the decisions and direct their subordinates by giving instant orders. As a result, any violation of this hierarchical structure in higher power distance cultures is more likely to result in organizational crisis, and even the collapse of the whole organizational functionality.

Comedy and comical situations in cultures and the arts are often used as a means to mediate and negotiate such cultural boundaries as power relations, and their violations. This strategy is also employed in TV series and TV series adaptations that revolve around these contentious issues. In the rest of the paper, I conduct a multimodal analysis of the implications of power relations in the two series by focusing on two particular scenes from the first and fourth episodes of *Monk,* and their corresponding scenes in the first and third episodes of *Galip Derviş,* respectively.[5] The reason for selecting these particular scenes is that they include various moments in which Derviş (the equivalent of Monk) and Hülya (the equivalent of Sharona) violate the local hierarchical norms, at least from a Turkish cultural standpoint, when talking to their boss, Başkomiser Merdan (Captain Stottlemeyer); and it is at those moments of violation that the musical score, the visual track and the verbal track all diverge meaningfully and significantly from the American version to re-regulate the lost hierarchical structure.

4 My point in including "low" and "high" power distance cultures here is *not* to conceptualize these concepts as good or bad, respectively, based on an Orientalist frame.

5 All the transcriptions and the translations from Turkish to English for the analysis of the two scenes have been done by the author.

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ANALYSIS OF THE SCENES

The analysis of the collected multimodal data reveals that, when a culturally foreign work is adapted into a new culture, its content is meticulously adjusted and localized so as to achieve a cultural proximity to the host society. The desired and culturally appropriate message can be achieved, sometimes, by having different modes of communication conform to each other while, at other times, by having them to contradict each other in order to create a paradoxical meaning that diverts the viewer's perception to a different meaning. However, no matter how complex the interaction between different modes of communication gets during the production phase, the viewer usually processes and perceives the multimodal message as a complete whole, without dispersing it into individually perceived components. In this regard, I aim to *reverse-engineer* the two scenes below in order to reveal a number of elaborate localization strategies that are used to re-interpret power relations between the characters in a way that conforms to the ideologies of the receiving Turkish culture.

> *SCENE 8: Could you grab this, Chief?*
> (*Monk,* "Mr. Monk and the Candidate (Part 1)" (1.01) *– 00:16:35 – 00:17:44*)
> (*Galip Derviş*, "Başkana Suikast" (1.01) – *00:19:26 – 00:20:57*)

The first sequence of the eighth scene in the pilot episode(s) opens with Monk (Derviş) standing at a crime scene and investigating the surrounding area by using his idiosyncratic body movements under others' confused glances. After a while, Monk (Derviş) discovers a clue, *a twisted drawstring*, and turns to Captain Stottlemeyer (Chief Merdan) to reveal the details of his discovery. He explains that it is often used in the Special Forces to steady shots, which the Chief and others immediately approve of. In fact, Monk (Derviş), as the protagonist of the series, is well known for finding and bringing such hidden clues to light throughout the whole series; and that always puts him in a more favorable and powerful position in the eyes of the viewer, against and despite the constant presence of a hierarchically superior character, the chief. The fact that a series based on such a hierarchically anomalous order is adapted into a higher power distance culture like Turkey certainly shows that its plot is not perceived as a violation of power relations in general. However, the difference between the low and high power distance cultures does come to surface in the *re*-interpretation of particular moments where there is a direct interaction from a subordinate to a superior. As is the case in the next sequence, Monk (Derviş) decides to run a quick experiment with the clue he has found, and asks Captain Stottlemeyer (Chief Merdan) to grab a stick that lies on the floor and to hold it like a rifle, which violates, at least from a Turkish cultural standpoint, the power relation between the two. Although both Monk and Derviş use a polite form of language when making such a request (almost a command) from their chief, there appears to be an extra effort in the Turkish version to emphasize the anomaly in such a hierarchically upward request as a result of the culturally different reading of this segment. First, the tailoring of the scene to Turkish viewers is done more overtly in the visual and verbal tracks. One of the most striking divergences in the verbal track of this conversation is the number of times Monk and Derviş use the word "Captain," and its Turkish equivalent "Chief."

> *Monk:* Captain, could you grab this?
> It'll just take a minute.
> ...
> *Monk:* How tall are you?
> ...
> *Monk:* No, really.

> *Galip Derviş:* Just a second, Chief.
> Could you grab this?
> ...
> *Galip Derviş:* How tall are you, Chief?
> ...
> *Galip Derviş:* Really, how tall are you, Chief?

As is seen in the transcriptions, Galip Derviş's frequent use of the word "Chief" at the end of each statement reminds the audience that he is talking to his boss whereas his questions seem to challenge and tarnish the chief's superior position. This linguistic divergence in the number of times the characters use honorific forms of address can be understood more clearly if Galip Derviş's speech is analyzed in light of the superior – subordinate discourse in Turkish language. Turkish is a language that contains a lot of formulaic devices such as honorific forms of address. Depending on the discourse, these honorific forms of address are sometimes used so excursively that they do not contribute directly to the meaning at the sentence level, but at the discourse level.

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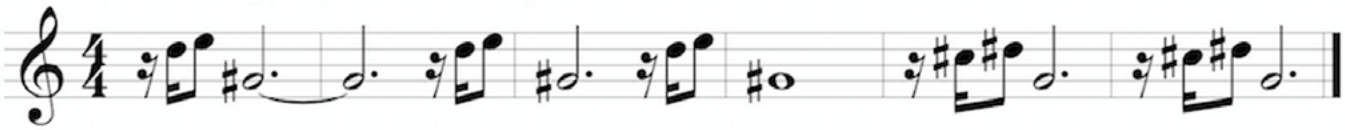
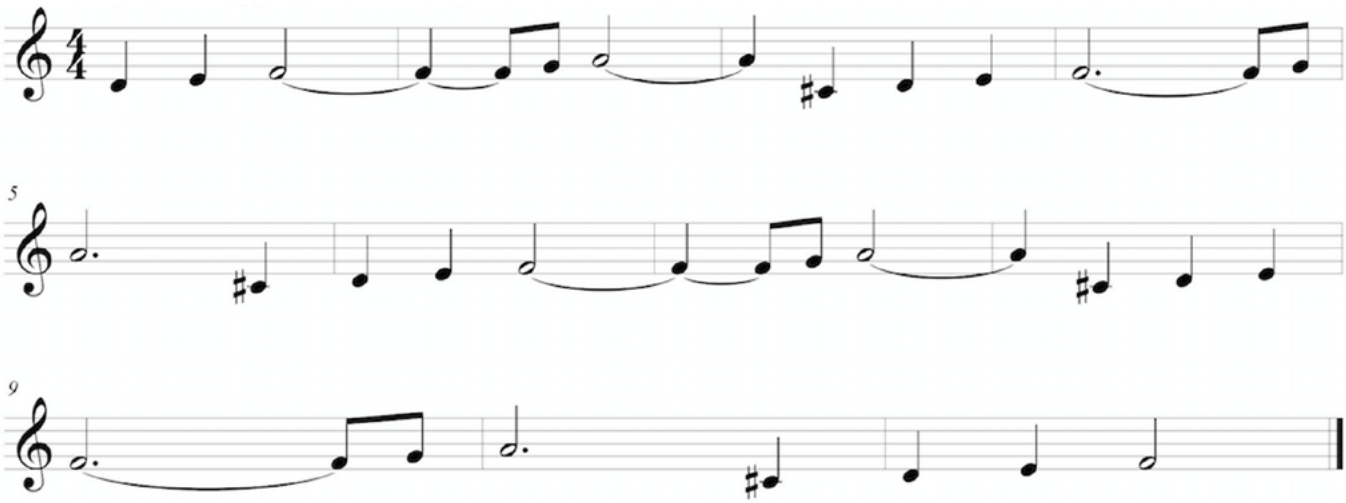
What I mean by this is that their frequent use in consecutive utterances causes them to lose their primary meaning and function, which is to capture the attention of the addressee before starting a conversation. Instead, they turn into a signal word that continuously alerts listeners, and even the speaker himself/herself, about the hierarchical relationship between the interlocutors. This linguistic adjustment in the Turkish version of *Monk* constitutes a perfect example of the localization process at the linguistic level.

Localization of this particular scene in terms of power relations becomes even more overt at the level of visual track when Monk (Derviş) asks Captain Stottlemeyer (Chief Merdan) to grab the stick from the ground. While Captain Stottlemeyer does what Monk says and picks the stick from the ground by himself, Chief Merdan, in the Turkish version, indirectly dismisses Derviş's culturally "inappropriate" request by asking the lieutenant standing on the side to grab the stick for him. More importantly, he does so with a quick hand move rather than verbally, which further highlights his authoritative stance over others. Furthermore, the Turkish lieutenant, besides grabbing the stick for his boss, also stands on the side throughout the whole scene, and takes notes while Chief Merdan talks. All these visual additions and adjustments highlight the hierarchical superiority of the chief in the Turkish context, as opposed to Captain Stottlemeyer's relatively "egalitarian" stance.

The last but not the least of localization examples occur at the level of scoring. During the time Monk (Derviş) investigates the surrounding area at the beginning of the scene, the viewer, in both versions, hears a similar musical cue that transmits the emotive state of suspense (see below). Both cues aim to amplify the visually intended message by conforming to the mysterious and suspenseful movements of the protagonist. When Monk (Derviş) discovers the clue, and turns to Captain Stottlemeyer (Chief Merdan) to explain his discovery, both cues arrive at their climax and then cease.



MONK, "MR. MONK AND THE CANDIDATE (PART 1)" (1.01) *(00:16:35 – 00:17:18) – THE OPENING CUE IN THE EIGHTH SCENE*



GALIP DERVIŞ, "BAŞKANA SUIKAST" (1.01) *(00:19:26 – 00:20:10) – THE OPENING CUE IN THE EIGHTH SCENE*

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With the subsequent musical silence in the narrative structure, Monk (Derviş) reveals the details of his discovery. However, the musical cue in the two versions diverge significantly when Monk (Derviş) asks Captain Stottlemeyer (Chief Merdan) to grab the stick. In the American version, the whole conversation between Monk and Captain Stottlemeyer happens without a cue in the background whereas in the Turkish version, the viewer starts to hear a comedic musical cue at the very moment when Galip Derviş asks Chief Merdan to grab the stick. The continued musical proximity mediation in the sequence is especially needed in the Turkish version because, after Chief Merdan holds the stick like a rifle, Galip Derviş uses him like an assistant (or figurant), and asks him questions about his height to make some insightful connections between the height of the drawstring and that of Chief Merdan. Furthermore, Chief Merdan is also ridiculed when Galip Derviş understands that the Captain lies about his height in his first answer. Although the Turkish version follows the American version closely in this sequence, the amplified depictions of these moments as relatively more comedic situations with the help of comedic music in the Turkish version, which may stem from the producers' individual culture-oriented understandings and interpretations of the original sequence, as members of the host culture, reveal one of the subliminal ways the local culture mediates any violations of power relations, and perpetuates the related ideologies within such narratives. In alignment with other linguistic and visual adjustments mentioned above, the comedic score also mitigates the protagonist's violation of power relations, and induces Turkish viewers to perceive the sequence as more of a comic situation to be laughed at than a real violation of power relations to be taken seriously (see notation below). It is crucial to note here that this does not necessarily mean Monk, in the American version, seriously aims to challenge and tarnish Captain Stottlemeyer's authority, and that there is no humor at all. On the contrary, the American version also provides a sense of humor when Captain Stottlemeyer lies about his height. However, what is striking from a multimodal perspective is how meticulously the producers apply changes to all verbal, visual and musical tracks simultaneously, which re-orients the humor that exceeds the limits of existing power relations in Turkish culture.

SCENE 3: We need to talk, Chief!
(*Monk,* "Mr. Monk Meets Dale the Whale" (1.04)– *00:03:45 – 00:04:38*)
(*Galip Derviş*, "Fil Hamdi" (1.03)– *00:06:31 – 00:07:33*)

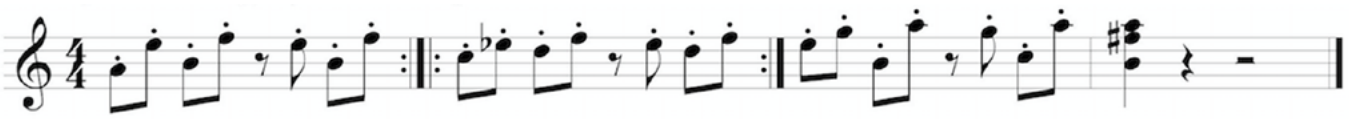
In the second scene, the producers of the Turkish adaptation implement similar localization techniques to tailor and tune the message to its new target audience group. The main concern behind this localization also revolves around the hierarchical relationships between the characters

Looking at the linguistic data, we immediately realize that the Turkish adaptation starts with an additional opening conversation in which a police officer meets Galip Derviş and Hülya at the door, and welcomes them. Despite its simplistic content, this additional dialogue occurring at the door dignifies the pair's arrival at the crime scene. Next, three of them walk towards Chief Merdan and the lieutenant who have been waiting for them in the middle of the yard. In the American version, this whole welcoming sequence is reduced to a line spoken by Captain Stottlemeyer:

Captain Stottlemeyer: Hey Monk!
Glad you are here! Miss Fleming.

Male Police Officer (Ali): Welcome.
Galip Derviş: Thank you, Ali.
Hülya: Hi.
Male Police Officer: This way, please.
Hülya: OK, this way.

What is striking in these transcriptions is the selection of the character that is to welcome and honor the protagonist and his assistant. In the Turkish version, Chief Merdan is totally excluded from the conversation in contrast to Captain Stottlemeyer's active participation in the American version. One of the reasons behind this divergence might be the fact that power relations in Turkish workplace discourse do not



GALIP DERVIŞ, "BAŞKANA SUIKAST" (1.01) *(00:20:23 – 00:20:43) – THE COMEDIC CUE USED IN THE SCENE*

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approve of a chief meeting his subordinate at the door. Yet, another reason might also lie in the succeeding statement in the two conversations:

> *Sharona:* Glad you're here? God, you must really be desperate. Usually the mayor's office has to shove us down your throats.
>
> ---
>
> *Hülya:* Izzet Abi? How come? To what do we owe this? Is it? Is it again the Mayor's request?

As is seen above, the conversation continues with Sharona's and Hülya's humiliating statements regarding the fact that Captain Stottlemeyer and Chief Merdan, respectively, needed the pair's help in another case. This can sure be considered as a violation of power relations in both contexts; however, the effects of this violation is mitigated in the Turkish version by changing Hülya's humiliating comment from a "riposte" to an "opening" of a new conversation with Chief Merdan. In other words, Hülya does not talk back to Chief Merdan. Furthermore, Hülya starts the conversation with an intimate form of address using Chief Merdan's first name (Izzet) and an honorific word used for elder brothers (Abi) in Turkish. This immediately establishes some intimacy between the two, and lightens the mood for her further statements.

> *Captain Stottlemeyer:* Fact is, the mayor's office did call, but this time I did not argue. We have an unusual situation here.
>
> ---
>
> *Chief Merdan:* This is a special case, Hülya. It is no good.

Next, the Captain's and the Chief's responses to Sharona's and Hülya's questions also diverge from each other in that while the first admits that he has received a call from Mayor and has not argued with him this time, the latter gives ambiguous personal explanations. The exclusion of the detail about the call in the Turkish version protects the superior positions of both Mayor and the Chief. First, taking Captain Stottlemeyer's words as they are in the American version would challenge the Mayor's superior position to the Chief in the Turkish setting because Captain Stottlemeyer's words clearly imply that he did argue with the Mayor previously. Second, using Captain Stottlemeyer's words would also harm the Chief's superior position to Galip Derviş and others at the crime scene because they would imply that he is overruled by external powers.

Then, we see another addition to the verbal conversation when the lieutenant intervenes with the ongoing dialogue in the Turkish version and says:

> *Lieutenant Ahmet:* Welcome, Derviş Abi.
> *Galip Derviş:* Thank you, Ahmet. Eee... So, I am listening. What is the case?

This interjection has multiple functions in the overall conversation. First, it dignifies the involvement of Galip Derviş in the investigation. Second, it again signifies that there is an intimate relationship between the characters regardless of the hierarchical differences. This intimacy is also amplified by his word of choice ("Abi") when addressing Galip Derviş. Finally, this interjection also ends Hülya's attempt to challenge the Chief and changes the subject. In the meantime, the American version instead includes some further explanations on the case by Captain Stottlemeyer, which are deferred until the next scene in the Turkish version.

The most striking differences between the two versions of the scene occur after Sharona and Hülya take out a pile of documents for Captain Stottlemeyer and Chief Merdan to sign.

> *Sharona:* Adrian. Wait, wait!
> *Monk:* What?
> *Sharona:* Uh, Captain, before we get started, could you just initial this agreement? It's our standard consultation fee.
> ...
> *Captain Stottlemeyer:* It's what?
> *Sharona:* Our standard consultation fee.
>
> ---
>
> *Hülya:* Eee, wait a second please... Before we start, Izzet Abi, I need to talk to you about something.
> *Chief Merdan:* What is it, Hülya?
> *Hülya:* Eee, well... We haven't been paid even once for the last month. This leaves me in a very difficult situation, as well.
> ...
> *Hülya:* You know, I have a lot of expenses: school expenses, my son, grocery, housekeeping, and so on. Thank God, I am not paying any rent.
> *Chief Merdan: (Interrupting her speech)* OK, Hülya. I got it. What do you want?

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Hülya: (Passing the documents she has been holding) I want you to sign this.

In the American version, Sharona interrupts the conversation by saying, "wait, wait," which makes it sound harsh and unexpected. Furthermore, she leads in the topic by directly revealing that the folder has their standard consultation fee, and that she wants the Captain to sign it. On the other hand, in the Turkish version, Hülya interrupts the conversation by first asking Chief Merdan if they could have a word before they start the investigation. The fact that Hülya initially asks for the chief's permission before talking to him about the matter, as opposed to Sharona's direct manner, can be considered as Hülya's first attempt to soften her approaching request from a figure of higher authority. Furthermore, after she gets the chief's permission, Hülya does not get right down to the business as Sharona does, either. Instead, she starts by talking about a series of excuses as seen in the conversation, which again aims to mitigate Hülya's imminent violation of power relations. This continues until Chief Merdan authoritatively interrupts and asks her to just say it. Only then does Hülya get to the point and mention the consultation fee.

Captain Stottlemeyer: Could we take care of that later, Sharona?
Monk: (Turning his face to Sharona) Not now.
Sharona: (Looking at Monk) Adrian. *(Turning her face to Captain Stottlemeyer)* I prefer to take care of business first.
Lieutenant Disher: Bet that's not the first time you've said that.
Sharona: Bite me.

Galip Derviş: Hülya, is this the right time?
Chief Merdan: Visit me in my office during the week. I'll take care of it.
Hülya: Nope! It can't wait until then Izzet Abi because, well, Galip doesn't want to start working on the case before you sign this, right Galip?
Galip Derviş: No, no... I didn't say anything like that, Chief!

In the rest of the conversation, Captain Stottlemeyer and Chief Merdan asks if they could take care of that later. Monk (Derviş) also objects to Sharona's (Hülya's) impetuosity by saying, "not now," and "Hülya, is this the right time?" respectively. However, the divergent part is that while Sharona, herself, insists on taking care of business first, Hülya chooses to relinquish her responsibility by making Galip Derviş the "scapegoat" in response to Chief Merdan's authoritative manner. Galip Derviş reacts to Hülya's escape from responsibility and denies that he said what Hülya reported. Also he finishes his statement with the honorific form of address, *Chief*. Finally, both Captain Stottlemeyer and Chief Merdan, who do not want to dwell on it, agree to sign the contract.

As in the first pair of scenes, the localization processes in this scene are not restricted to the verbal track, either. All the linguistic adjustments are supported by various appropriations in the visual track. For instance, in the opening sequence of the Turkish scene, we see that the male police officer meets Galip Derviş and Hülya at the door, and escorts them to the middle of the yard where Chief Merdan and the lieutenant wait. In this sense, the visual track, in line with the verbal track, visualizes the dignification of Derviş's arrival and involvement in the case. More importantly, though, it fulfills a much more crucial duty in terms of power relations. Because the male police officer escorts the two upon their arrival, Chief Merdan does not feel the need to walk toward the two, whereas in the American version, it is Captain Stottlemeyer who walks toward Monk and Sharona and welcomes them at the door. Another important divergence in the visual track of the Turkish version occurs when Hülya starts to talk about the payment. The lieutenant and another male officer who have been standing next to the other three until then immediately leave the scene upon hearing Hülya's statement about the payment. Their sudden slinking, as opposed to the continued presence of the lieutenant in the American version, clearly conveys the message that the Turkish officers do not want to witness (and indirectly be "complicit" in) the conversation any more because they expect that Hülya will cross the hierarchical line.

Analyzing the verbal and the visual tracks paves the way for other localization adjustments initiated in the sound track as all three tracks, aligned with each other, constitute a single narrative structure. To start with, it is crucial to start my analysis of the sound track in the second scene by stating that throughout the whole scene in the American version, viewers do not hear any musical cues whereas the Turkish version includes two different comedic cues at various parts of the conversation. When scrutinized, it becomes apparent that these cues are not scattered around the verbal and visual texts randomly but placed in a particular pattern in alignment with the overarching narrative structure of the scene.

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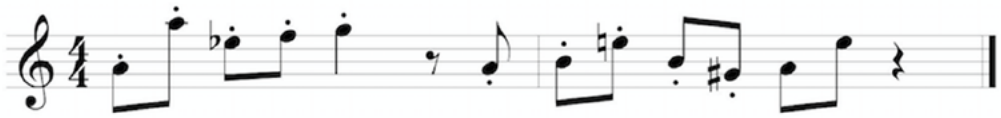
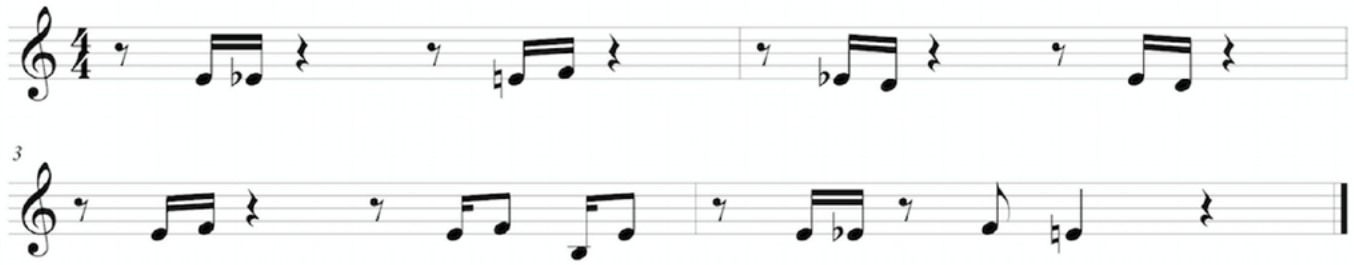


GALIP DERVIŞ, "FIL HAMDI" (1.03) *(00:06:54 – 00:07:03) – THE COMEDIC CUE (I)*

The punctuated musical cue above is the first comedic cue used in the scene when Hülya starts talking about the fact that they have not been paid for the last month. Looking at the exact moment the viewer hears this particular cue, one can conclude that the cue aims to turn Hülya's "discourtesy" into a comedy, or it is an indicator of the Turkish producers' cultural interpretation of Hülya's "discourtesy" as a comedy. Although it could be argued that the situation, by its nature, is already a comic situation, comparing the two versions of the same scene reveals that scoring emotively amplifies the humorous aspect of the message. The careful and precise juxtaposition of the succeeding cues along with the rest of the conversation also makes this tendency crystal clear. As shown in the transcription, after Hülya enumerates all her excuses in a "humorous" way with the help of the comedic cue in the background, Chief Merdan suddenly interrupts her by saying, "OK, Hülya. I got it. What do you want?" What is more striking than his authoritative voice and words is the abrupt cessation of music in the background. The sudden silence of the score brings his authoritarian reaction to the forefront. This example shows that not only the juxtaposition of a cue but also its absence at a particular moment of a scene can supplement the meaning conveyed. Next, in response to Chief Merdan's reaction, Hülya feels obliged to come to the point and says: "I want you to sign this." The moment she utters this statement, we again hear the first two notes of the first comedic cue. This clearly indicates that the comedic scoring is aligned with Hülya's turns in the conversation. In that vein, music again stops playing in the background in the succeeding two lines in which Galip Derviş and Chief Merdan, respectively, imply that it is not the right time to talk about the payment. However, Hülya does not give up and insists that it is her own as well as Galip Derviş's priority to take care of it first. It is no surprise anymore that her turn in the conversation is again accompanied with another similar comedic cue (see below) which lasts until she persuades Chief Merdan to sign the contract:



GALIP DERVIŞ, "FIL HAMDI" (1.03) *(00:07:12 – 00:07:31) – THE COMEDIC CUE (II)*

To sum up, the two scenes described thus far illustrate how the multimodal nature of audio-visual texts functions in transnational TV series adaptations, resulting in the modification of culturally discordant dialogues and actions that may, otherwise, subvert the existing values of a culture such as hierarchical relationships between superiors and subordinates. To be more precise, the examples show that the American way of having a conversation with a superior is interpreted differently and rejected saliently by the Turkish producers, and it is tailored to Turkish norms by various means and through multiple modes.

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CONCLUSION

Television constitutes a perfect stage for multimodal analysis at the trans/national level because of its increasing global prevalence and the growth of televisual productions across cultures. On the one hand, its multimodal nature certainly enhances the expressive power of audio-visual communicative devices by accommodating multiple signifiers to render a message well structured and coherent. Enhancement of this power not only eases the meaning-making process for producers, but also helps audiences to perceive messages in a more entertaining and colorful way. On the other hand, the complexity of multimodal texts also allows room for the inclusion and perpetuation of certain ideologies. This double-edged situation requires researchers, as well as any other *readers*, to embrace an even-growing critical approach to all multimodal texts including televisual productions.

To this end, this paper presented a multimodal analysis of two sample scenes from the two versions of the same TV series that have been produced and re-produced in two national contexts. By doing so, it revealed some of the culturally oriented tailoring interventions that are frequently implemented in the remake of TV series with the aim of reflecting the ideologies and values of a new spectator group. It is also crucial to note that such tailoring can be done not only by reframing and appropriating a foreign message according to the host culture's dominant norms, but also by depicting and "othering" any discordant meanings within a particular framework that is already familiar to domestic audiences. In this way, local TV channels, as well as producers, undertake, on the one hand, the mission of achieving cultural proximity through localization, which consequently preserves the harmony and assumed unity within their respective communities against any discordant effects of foreign ideologies and values. On a global scale, on the other hand, they also join the co-construction of an ever-evolving global world culture by following the transnational trajectory in the world of televisual productions and developments in the cross-cultural milieu. Its transnational approach to multimodality constitutes one of the crucial aspects of this study.

Another crucial aspect in this study is the inclusion of the musical score in relation to visual and verbal modes. Music has an important place in multimodal analysis because human beings are inclined to prioritize the verbal dialogue and the visual message when reading a multimodal text while overlooking the scoring inattentively. However, music does supplement the story emotively, and steers viewer interpretation. In fact, music is a major part of the story. Based on this rationale, this paper emphasized particularly the localization interventions in the musical score for the purpose of exploring music's "constant" interplay with the other modes of communication in the meaning-making process. It is "constant" because, as the findings have shown, not only the presence of a musical cue in the background but also its absence (silence) at a particular moment convey elaborate messages within the multimodal flow of information.

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FROM *DOWNTON ABBEY* TO *MAD MEN*: TV SERIES AS THE PRIVILEGED FORMAT FOR TRANSITION ERAS

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KEYWORDS
Transition eras; Downton Abbey; Mad Men; period drama; costume drama.

ABSTRACT
On each side of the Atlantic, the Downton Abbey and Mad Men shows have contributed to the transformation of the period drama genre on television: instead of being set in a single precise era, they take place over periods of historical transition, genuine intervals that are full of contrasts and confrontations and even propel the narrative forward.

This new approach to time periods results as much from the TV series format as from its mass medium nature: on the one hand, these shows use the apparent invariability required by the serial form to reveal by contrast the transition at work and provide the narrative with the necessary conflict; on the other hand, through their depictions of transitional eras, they offer a commentary on our contemporary period, a characteristic device of television series.

Therefore, both shows, notwithstanding their differences in themes, locations and craftmanship, play a part in making the transition period drama become a serial genre in its own right.

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In the collective imagination, the "Period Drama" genre in cinema is mostly associated with the adaptations of the Brontës' or Jane Austen's romances. But whether in a costume romance –*Pride and Prejudice* (2005)–, thriller –*Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (2012)–, war movie –*War Horse* (2012)–, or horror film –*The Woman in Black* (2012)–, the period during which the narrative takes place is always given a purely decorative expression and an immutable quality. The manor from *Sense and Sensibility* (1995) is just like a Walt Disney prince's castle: it only sets the story in a past era so as to make it timeless in return.

Naturally, the same generally applies to "Period Drama TV series", although nowadays, shows such as *Downton Abbey* (2010-) or *Mad Men* (2007-2015) depict the past in a very different manner. They focus on periods that could be defined as "transition eras", that is times of uncertainty intervening between highly characterized or even iconic historical epochs, and they do not use such periods as simple settings anymore but as a narrative tool in their own right, as a part of the story. *Mad Men* neither paints the portrait of the Hitchcockian gentleman from the 1950s nor that of the hippie he became in the late 1960s. Likewise, *Downton Abbey* or *Parade's End* (2012) do not portray either the proud aristocracy from the late 19th century or the post-war bourgeoisie that succeeded it: these shows are rather set in periods of transformation. Yet, at first glance, the serial format was not the most advantageous frame to produce such a representation.

We will first define what in TV series makes the depiction of an evolution possible, and thereby more specifically these transition eras, by drawing first on an analysis of the narrative structure of the TV series in general –and *Downton Abbey* and *Mad Men* in particular– and secondly on the rules proposed by the screenwriting specialists. This will bring us to look at the evolution of the characters and at the way they are used to reveal the transition.

We will then see how the temporality of a series defines it, and how these series are not only able to stay true to their nature despite the passage of time, but also take advantage of these liminal eras to give impetus to their narration.

Finally, we will consider the creative ensemble of the TV series, not as a serial construct, but as a televisual piece of work: building on the research done in media studies on the question of the representation of history in television, and on those of nostalgia in media, we will analyze what brings shows like *Downton Abbey* and *Mad Men* to depict these particular historical transition eras.

REPRESENTATION OF EVOLUTION AND CHANGE

a) Format matters

Interim periods being transitional by nature, their representation requires a format that is capable of portraying an evolution over time. But at first glance it is not immediately obvious that the series would be the ideal medium for such a task. The handling of time and length, which is crucial in this format, is varied in TV shows. In fact, not all serial forms enable the depiction of such transition periods as mentioned above. Though a show can be episodic, semi-serialized or serialized, transition era series themselves can only be serialized.

Indeed, the episodic show, which is the privileged format of sitcoms and many crime series, is a sequence of standalones: each of its episodes comes more or less full circle, thus setting the show in immutable times. Stéphane Benassi argues that this format "offers to the viewers heroes that are familiar to them, but whose every adventures are independent from the ones that precede or follow." (Benassi, 2000: 29, translated by myself) Naturally, such a format, defined by its fixity, makes it impossible to depict a transition. Umberto Eco expresses this idea in *Innovation and repetition*:

> They derive pleasure from the non-story (if indeed a story is a development of events which should bring us from the point of departure to a point of arrival where we would never have dreamed of arriving); the distraction consists in the refutation of a development of events, in a withdrawal from the tension of past-present-future to the focus on an *instant*, which is loved precisely because it is recurrent. (Eco, 1997 : 17)

If there is no past-present-future anymore, by definition there cannot be transition eras.

As for the semi-serialized show, it is made up of both episodic narrative arcs –closure happens at the end of the episode, as it is true, for example, of the various medical cases that House M.D. diagnoses in the eponymous series (2004-2012)– and arcs that last for a whole season, or even the whole series –such as the friendships and love relationships of House M.D. and his colleagues. Here again, the emphasis is on the world's immutability, leaving barely any room –and generally only in the intimate realm– for change.

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Therefore, series set in transition eras can only fully unfold within the serialized format. In serialized shows, arcs go on indefinitely and episodes simply serve as chapters –or punctuation devices– of a whole truly unified story, thus "the diegetic unity of the story only exists within the totality of the fully assembled episodes" (Benassi, 2000). Nothing surprising then that both *Downton Abbey* and *Mad Men* are serialized shows.

b) Character evolution

Provided that it is serialized, the series thus appears appropriate to depict a transitional period, since it has the right tools: its span gives it the space and duration necessary to represent the evolution –which can take several years– from one historical time to another. But even if it has enough *time*, the series does not necessarily have the *means* for such representations. Actually the concept of evolution, especially the characters' evolution, is usually considered antithetical to the series. In cinema though, the character shows indeed an evolution, to the point that Lajos Egri, in 1946, asserted that "any character, in any type of literature, which does not undergo a basic change is a badly drawn character."" (Egri, 1960: 61) This idea will be taken up by most screenwriting academics. This change can be very superficial, as Bordwell describes it:

> This dynamic takes on a particular shape in mass-art storytelling, whereby the character faces up to a mistaken judgment. Hollywood screenwriting manuals strongly suggest that there be a "character arc," whereby a basically good person comes to recognize that they have erred and try to improve. (Bordwell, 2012: 118)

But it can also be essential:

> The sort of change that many consider the essence of a high-quality narrative is more radical, involving a change in fundamental traits. Epistemic change can fuel some changes in personality, but to alter a trait is to become a different person." (Bordwell, 2012: 118)

So, in the case of films, an evolution is possible; however that is usually done at the very end, during the climax. But when, in *The Sopranos* episode "D-Girl" (2.07), Christopher asks, angrily, "Where's my arc?", meaning "character arc" he also comments the fact that the series' characters are not likely to evolve, precisely because it is not a "different person" that the viewer wants to discover in every episode but, instead, an "old friend" as explained by Umberto Eco in *The Myth of Superman,* where he holds characterization elements to be *"vices, gestures, nervous tics permit us to find an old friend in the character portrayed, and they are the principal condition which allows us to 'enter' into the event."* (Eco, 1984: 118). Pamela Douglas, in *Writing the TV Drama Series*, advises scriptwriters and showrunners to follow such a rule, suggesting that they work on in-depth characterization rather than let their characters evolve:

> Characters who are not transformed by the plot need something instead: dimension. Think of it like this: instead of developing horizontally toward a goal, the character develops vertically, exploring internal conflicts that create tension. (Douglas, 2005: 8)

This is what makes the complexity and density of characters in series according to Maria E. Reicher:

> Sequels and episodes of a series are to be treated like chapters of a novel: that the descriptions given of a character in chapter two are different from those given in chapter one, does, of course, not imply that the character from chapter one cannot be identical with the character in chapter two. Rather, it is the same character that is described 'from different angles', as it were. Therefore, it is possible to 'enrich' a character, to make it less indeterminate, in the course of a novel as well as in the course of a series. (Reicher, 2010: 131)

This rule perfectly applies to the series under study here, particularly with regard to the main characters: though less successfully than his mother, Robert Crawley, Earl of Grantham, devotes himself body and soul to resisting any of the changes that his relatives and entourage in *Downton Abbey* suggest to him, and later demand from him. In the series' seven-season run, *Mad Men*'s Don Draper hardly changed his neck tie (Figure 1, Figure 2).

Nonetheless, secondary characters can easily disregard this rule or, in longer-running shows, even change radically. Peggy Olson from *Mad Men* exemplifies this type of evolution most efficiently: a clumsy and reserved secretary at the beginning (Figure 3), she fashions herself, over the course of the

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FIGURE 1. DON DRAPER, *MAD MEN*, "SMOKE GETS IN YOUR EYES" (1.01)

FIGURE 2. DON DRAPER, *MAD MEN*, "WATERLOO" (7.07)

FIGURE 3. PEGGY OLSON, *MAD MEN*, "SMOKE GETS IN YOUR EYES" (1.01)

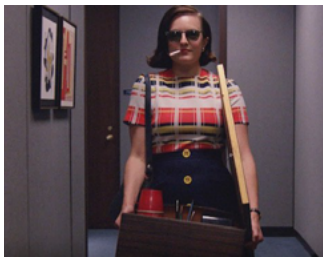

FIGURE 4. PEGGY OLSON, *MAD MEN*, "PERSON TO PERSON" (7.14)

series, into an independent and self-assured business woman (Figure 4). The stability of Don Draper's characterization therein serves as a guarantee for the possibility of other characters to evolve -or, like Peggy, to become completely new people.

However, the series we study here do not seek to challenge this lack of evolution of the protagonists. On the contrary, *Downton Abbey* is very close to the genre of soap opera, which is as characterized by its serialized format as it is by:

> An emphasis on family life, personal relationships, sexual dramas, emotional and moral conflicts; some coverage of topical issues; [and by being] set in familiar domestic interiors with only occasional excursions into new locations" (Bowles, 2000: 119)

But, in this particular genre, Ien Ang claims that:

> The viewer is manoeuvred into a position of permanent expectation which [...] "creates a feeling that things are constantly happening (becoming more complicated) in the narrative but that, at the same time, nothing ever really happens" [Seiter, 1982]." (Ang, 1985 : 74-75)

Thus, not only do the characters not evolve, but the exploding and non-linear narration even prevents a true evolution of the story itself.

> It may seem paradoxical that a part of these series' main characters lack evolution: the idea is to depict a transition era but not a transition or transformation of the protagonist, or even of the narration. Indeed, an evolution can only be shown by comparison with a fixed point: the future or the past.

c) Fixity as an anchor point

These series rely on dramatic irony to provide a contrast between the period during which their narratives take place and the future. This technique consists of giving the audience a head start on the story, often –but not exclusively– to comic purposes. But in the shows we study here, the narratives follow the course of history, so that their audiences naturally have a head start on the characters: the viewers know the future, at least insofar as they are aware of the historical events following the depicted eras. In *Downton Abbey* for instance, when Mr. Carson, with a charming mix of touchiness and clumsiness, uses a telephone for the first time ("Episode Seven", 1.07), the scene is amusing to us because we, as an audience from the 21st century, know that telephones will grow commonplace and invade everyone's daily life. Thus, dramatic irony here becomes a way to show the transformation of a world devoid of telephones into one that could not live without them. In *Mad Men*, similarly, Bertram Cooper reacts with a "Bravo!" to Neil Armstrong's famous moon-landing words "That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind" ("Waterloo", 7.07). The series' viewers are aware of how prevalent this quote will become in popular culture, and that it will also grow into an adman's dream. The character appears to be significantly ahead of his contemporaries, which helps to define him as a visionary.

However, dramatic irony inevitably brings a metatextual quality to the programs: when referring to extra-diegetic elements, namely the viewers' knowledge of the world around them, shows do not pose as self-contained and self-sufficient worlds anymore but reveal themselves as the works of fiction that they truly are. Because of this metafilmic aspect of dramatic irony, the latter cannot be the sole device used to bring out the transitional nature of the chosen time frames, not

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without risking to repeatedly "pull" the audience out of the series and create exhausting and sometimes superficial back and forths between the extra- and intra-filmic levels. This is why the shows' inflexible, utterly conservative characters actually serve as fixed points of reference in the past. It is against the backdrop of the Dowager Countess of Grantham's conservatism that the progressive ideas of Isobel Crawley, her friend and rival, appear to be so striking. Likewise, it is because Don Draper's and his peers' machismo is so ardently reactionary that Peggy's breakthroughs in the advertising milieu stand out so visibly. The characters' immutability, which is first of all dictated by the serial format, consequently becomes a narrative tool whose purpose is to highlight the changes in society. In parallel, it justifies and organizes the construction of the characters concerned: they are characterized as reactionary and conservative in their daily habits and in matters of propriety as much as in their political and social views.

But their lack of evolution and the choice to place them amid great historical changes makes the characters from TV shows depicting transition eras appear more likeable to us because of their helplessness. They are all trapped in a world that changes in spite of them, which they do not comprehend and over which they gradually lose all control. Maggie Smith for example interprets two Countesses of nearly identical characterization, in two different works: the Countess of Trentham in Robert Altman's movie *Gosford Park*, and subsequently, the Countess of Grantham in the series *Downton Abbey* that the film inspired (both works having been created and written by Julian Fellowes). They have in common a talent for remarkably witty and acerbic comments. The Dowager Countess of Grantham has become famous on social networks for well-chosen retorts such as: "Don't be defeatist, dear. It's very middle class" ("Episode Eight", 2.08), while the Countess of Trentham would exclaim, upon learning in the aftermath of a murder that the victim's mistress had vacated the premises: "Aw, it's a pity, really. I thought it was a good idea to have someone in the house who is actually sorry he's dead." In *Downton Abbey*, the Dowager Countess of Grantham's lines lead us to see her as this last stubborn rock which the tide of change has still not taken away. Quite the opposite, *Gosford Park* does not depict a historical transition, but a fixed point in History. Incidentally, the movie takes place much later, in 1932, whereas *Downton Abbey* spans 1912 to 1925. In fact the countess from *Gosford Park* speaks up for a class division in complete opposition with the world around her, yet this guarantees her a semblance of stability. Even though she is dependent on a small allowance and has hired a novice lady's maid to save money, Lady Trentham's aristocratic loftiness remains unchanged: she is still a countess. This categorization, albeit preventing the expression of singularity, enables her to maintain her *social class* superiority (for want of *actual* superiority) in a fossilized environment. Made from such a position of superiority, her remarks seem more spiteful and have a stronger effect on the people around her.

Additionally, as we have seen, the length of the show allows a more in-depth study of the characters and makes it possible to separate them little by little from the archetypes on which they are based. The Dowager Countess of Grantham's old story of thwarted love gets unveiled and she is granted a depth which her *Gosford Park*'s counterpart cannot claim. This lack of depth, ergo humanity, accounts for slightly more archetypal or even stereotypical characters, contributing to the film's comic dimension, one that is mostly absent from the series.

Because the characters from *Downton Abbey*, whose story takes place in a transition era, appear to us both more likeable and less comical than those from *Gosford Park*, the irony is that the viewers become inclined to resist change with them, to embrace their reactionary wishes, or at least recognize the ambivalence at work, as Tom Branson does. The show's audience, while witnessing the transition, is led to adopt an anti-progressive attitude and swim against the tide of history. On the contrary, *Gosford Park*'s audience, not being a witness of the transition but only its distant judge, and knowing what the future is made of and what will or should change, is placed in history's camp and in the comfortable role of the enlightened progressive. It follows that *Gosford Park*'s audience, the film's moral fairness made indubitable, is put in a gratifying position: it is placed on the side of Christian Metz's "Grand Imagier" (1974), the "great image-maker", and shares the omniscient point of view granted by the latter. By contrast, *Downton Abbey*'s viewers are put in a compromising position: they know what morality they should endorse, yet, they are enticed by the characters themselves into challenging it. Yet *Mad Men* has often been criticized for placing its audience in a comfortable situation: some say that "*Mad Men* is an unpleasant little entry in the genre of Now We Know Better" (Goodlad et al., 2013) because:

> According to Sady Doyle in the "Atlantic", *Mad Men* "affords viewers an illusion of moral superiority"; and for Benjamin Schwarz, also writing in the "Atlantic", the show "encourages the condescension of posterity" by inviting its audience "to indulge in a

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> most unlovely—because wholly unearned—smugness. (Goodlad et al., 2013: 8).

But as we have seen, the length of the series and its nature of transition-era drama is supposed to free us from this opinion, provided we are receptive to the pain and loneliness of the paradoxical Don Draper –developed in the series via a war trauma, that of a violent and unloving family during his childhood, or even around an unusual friendship with a surrogate mother– our desire to see him change and approaching a form of serenity goes against what he represents and the historical choices that we know to be the right ones. This effect is only permitted by these long explanations and the intimacy that the series takes the time to create between the viewer and the character, notably using the very visionary Peggy who acts to this end as a relay between the audience and Don Draper.

TEMPORALITY AS A DECISIVE SETTING

a) Comparing the duration of TV shows to that of the transitions represented

It is interesting to note that *Downton Abbey*'s first two seasons span over several years (April 1912 to August 1914 for the one, July 1916 to early 1920 for the other), whereas the third and fourth seasons take place over approximately one year each (1920 to 1921 for the third season, 1922 to 1923 for the fourth) and the fifth and sixth over only a few months (February to December 1924, then April to December 1925). Yet, every season is comprised of no more than seven or eight episodes. So the series expands time by covering always shorter periods over same-length narratives, thus favoring story over history. By contrast, "*Mad Men*'s pattern so far has been to slightly outpace the real time between seasons: from its debut in July 2007 to the fourth-season finale in October 2010, the show's calendar advanced from March 1960 to October 1965" (Goodlad et al., 2013: 26), but each season itself lasts a little less than a year. Thus *Downton Abbey* must have had to decelerate its narrative rhythm, whereas *Mad Men* wanted to speed it up.

Downton Abbey, contrary to *Mad Men*, has "slowed down time" to stay within the boundaries of the transition era it wishes to depict, rather than risk stepping out of the liminal time between eras and into a known historical time, which would clash with what the audience expects to see when they switch on their TV set to watch the show. Because if a narrative takes place in intervening times, its temporality is, by definition, subject to transience: the series have a duration which may even exceed that of the transition they represent. Yet, the periods in which these shows are set determine them absolutely.

b) The Period Dramas, defined by their temporal arena

In order to be sure if a particular period is important in establishing the setting of a show, first we must find all of what defines a show, what makes it unique and distinguishes it from any other; and then see if temporality is, or may be part of these constituent elements that the series cannot override, at the risk of losing some of its specificity and, at the same time, its coherence and its audience.

But the definition of a production bible by the French SACD (society for the protection of the rights of authors and composers) is as follows:

> The bible must give all the permanent elements essential to the development of the TV series. It is the written document that describes in detail the general framework in which the main characters of the series will evolve. (SACD, 1998: 1).

These decisive "permanent elements" are specified in the TV series screenwriting manuals, including that of Richard A. Blum, who notes:

> A written series presentation details these elements: (1) concept (arena/setting), (2) characters, (3) pilot story, and (4) sample storylines. [...] The first section of a written series presentation provides a description of the basic arena or setting for the series. (Blum, 2013: 273)

If the setting is most often understood as the "geographical arena" of the scenario, "the temporal arena" is equally a constituent. The Cambridge Dictionary also defines the setting as "the time and the place in which the action of a book, film, play, etc. happens." (Setting, Cambridge Online Dictionary) However, if the production bibles of *Mad Men* and *Downton Abbey* are difficult to obtain, it is safe to assume that they identify the era the shows take place in on the very first line, as is the case in the shooting script of the *Mad Men*

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pilot in which the 2nd sequence is a Title Card: "Manhattan 1960" (Weiner, 2006: 3). The temporal and geographical arenas are the two major components of the period drama settings. Since the temporal arena is key in a period drama, the latter cannot shift towards another age without losing its essence, a clear risk for transition era shows.

This is why most of the series that focus on the transformation of a world into another are generally not set at the very time of this transition. For example, the mafiosi from *The Sopranos* (1999-2007) prompt extensive comparisons between the Mafia from the 1940s, as depicted in *The Godfather* (1972), and the one, much less remarkable, from their own time. The contrast comes more from the gap between reality and representation than that between one era's reality and another's. But what it engenders for Tony Soprano is truly a feeling of nostalgia rather than deception, as he vocalizes it to his therapist: "Nowadays, everybody's got to see a shrink [...]. Whatever happened to Gary Cooper, the strong silent type?" ("The Sopranos", 1.01). Therefore, *The Sopranos* is not, on the one hand, a period series happening during a transition era. On the other hand, it even denies the very existence of such a transition, presenting it as a naive construct of the protagonist's mind. In so doing, the series also avoids losing its nature with time.

c) How TV shows avoid self-distortion

Transition era series, however, really take the risk of attempting historical reconstructions. Even so, they never reach a precise point after which they leave the periods defining them behind, and the various eras in question are never described so specifically as to make it possible to differentiate them categorically. In fact, each epoch is connected to a high number of characteristics, which are themselves mainly represented by the cultural and artistic objects from that era or created in reference to it. Together, such characteristics then form an archetype of the era to which, separately, they only corresponded to a certain extent, even during the period itself. For example, the late 1960s can be partially characterized by its "hippie" youth –long-haired and dressed in bell-bottoms, antiwar, sexually liberated as well as interested in certain types of music and art, etc. Thus, the archetype of an era is itself made up of several archetypes, each of them being associated with a generation, a social background, a geographical location, etc. The more consistent with this general archetype the depiction of an era will be, the more it will be considered as close to the era in question. Besides, the temporal boundaries of an era are not any clearer: in some cases, like the interwar period, eras can begin and end with precise events that bring about sudden archetype reversals, but more often than not, eras merge into one another and elements from their respective archetypes become mixed up, and even more often are competing, at the same point in time. So there is a lack of precision in both the formal and temporal delineations of eras, making the gap between two periods almost imperceptible.

Consequently, the transition era series are set in times corresponding both to the archetype of an era and that of the following one. What allows us to talk here of intervening periods rather than periods in their own rights is that the characterizations brought together do not constitute a coherent whole but are almost systematically contrasting or conflicting. This constant opposition is precisely what creates conflict –an essential narrative element to any story– and accounts for the fact that temporality in transition era series does not simply fulfill a decorative function but shapes the narrative itself. Such opposition stems from the differences which arise between reactionary circles and the individuals who push for reforms or revolutions, most of them coming from middle- or working-class backgrounds and some of them being well-off progressive intellectuals. Indeed, transition processes will both be delayed and slowed down in reactionary circles that have made themselves impervious to change, whereas they will occur sooner and faster in the social classes most interested in and concerned by such changes. This is what is represented, for instance, by Sarah Bunting, the school teacher character in *Downton Abbey*, for whom it is easier to be a revolutionary activist than for Tom Branson: the latter's beliefs remain unchanged but his assimilation into the Crawley family, and his affection to its members, conduce him to take a different stand.

Thence, so as to extend transition eras over the whole length of a show, the television series in question cling to reactionary characters who, as previously shown, *reveal* the transition at work, but, additionally, *slow it down*. For that reason, these series need to focus on traditionalist characters that move in conservative circles –which, in the cases of *Mad Men* and *Downton Abbey*, are largely tantamount to dominant classes– and mostly silence progressive opinions: Sarah Bunting very soon disappears from the series *Downton Abbey*, Tom Branson is integrated into the rest of the family, etc. In *Mad Men*, which is not an ensemble TV show, Don Draper's egotism can guard him from the world's whirlwind around him. This usually explains why he is always or almost always

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"on the wrong side of history", most often denying advances that are known to be inevitable, as Dana Polan remarks:

> Even though Don Draper is the seeming protagonist of the series, it is noteworthy how often he is shown to be on the wrong side of history, supporting in his professional work causes that are either doomed to failure (Richard Nixon for president! Don even declares, "I am Dick Nixon," as a point of identification) or promised success in the immediate present only to go down in the longer annals as errors of moral judgment (the demolition of Penn Station). (Polan, 2013: 43)

Still, this extreme slowing down of transitions has its limits: that of plausibility. Transition era series may indeed last for a long time but they cannot stretch the periods of transition themselves indefinitely.

THE TRANSITION PERIOD: BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT

However, we must still question whether a television medium is able to give a fair overview of these historical periods.

> Both TV and film are incapable of rendering temporal dimensions with much precision. They have no grammatical analogues for the past and future tenses of written language and, thus, amplify the present sense of immediacy out of proportion. The illusion created in television watching is often suggested by the cliché 'being there'. (Edgerton, 2001 : 3)

So television does not do History, it does present. Or "the improbable rise and huge popularity of history on TV is also the result of its affinity and ability to embody current concerns and priorities within the stories it telecasts about the past." (Edgerton, 2001: 3). The correctness of this assertion can by demonstrated by taking a look at the concerns that led to the creation of the series we analyze here.

a) *Downton Abbey*'s look at the present

In 2003, a few years before *Downton Abbey*'s broadcasting began, the increasing interest in objects, media and styles expressing nostalgia had Katharina Niemeyer describing parts of the web as "a huge attic or bric-à-brac market where the individual and collective nostalgias converge and spread." (Niemeyer, 2014: 1) She goes on to define this phenomenon not only as a fashion, but also as a hint to a current crisis:

> Nostalgic expressions or the creation of nostalgic worlds could indicate a twofold phenomenon: a reaction to fast technologies, despite using them, in desiring to slow down, and/or an escape from this crisis into a state of wanderlust and nostalgia [...] that could be 'cured', or encouraged, by media use and consumption. Nostalgia could consequently present a symptom of progress, but also of crisis. (Niemeyer, 2014: 2)

This love and need for retro probably explains what interest there was in creating period series but, judging from the similarity in subject matter between television programs such as *Downton Abbey* and *Parade's End*, series creators seem to be especially interested in one particular transition era: the intervening period between the Great War and the very beginning of World War II. The fascination for this period, whether a reaction to the crude privacy- and restraint-deprived world of the social media, a simple interest for the aesthetically pleasing or a nostalgia for a time yet untainted by the Second World War, goes far beyond the British borders in any case. Incidentally, the series *The Knick* (2014-), although less transitional, gives another expression of this same fascination while taking place in the United States.

Nonetheless, England, consciously or unconsciously, remains at the forefront of this trend. A large number of the objects routinely associated with it are actually linked to British culture: tea sets, "Keep Calm and Carry On" posters, etc. These objects too relate to the Anglo-Saxon interwar legacy rather than contemporary culture. What is more, British transition eras series have contributed to the promoting of an image of the English –already widespread around the world and even more so in the United States– as a population of sophisticated, reactionary and deeply class-divided islanders. But these shows are not solely responsible for such a reputation. Indeed, in the past few years, the rising British actors, Eddie Redmayne and Benedict Cumberbatch leading the way, have come from very privileged backgrounds and spoken with an aristocratic accent which reinforces the cliché even more –Christopher Eccleston lamented this state of things in a recent interview with the magazine *Radio Times* (Andrew Duncan, 2015); and tabloids' ever-renewed interest in the Royal Family plays a part too.

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And yet, past the period itself, what both *Downton Abbey* or *Parade's End* look into is the early twentieth-century transition from the world to which the English are assimilated to the very different one they actually live in nowadays but are not culturally associated with: a world in which American culture, most of all, has gained ground on the local culture. Here again, Julian Fellowes's idea of making the show start the day after the sinking of the RMS Titanic makes a lot of sense: this historic event, in addition to symbolizing the necessary decline of a nobility that thought itself untouchable, highlights the will there was then to connect the United States to the United Kingdom. And it is precisely this supposedly safe connection that made the English aristocracy literally and metaphorically sink. In fact, *Downton Abbey* or *Parade's End* do not only stand at the *historical* juncture between a purely British, aristocratic and autonomous world and a globalized and capitalist one, they also symbolically stand at the *geographical* juncture between the two, serving as an interface between the English and American people. This process "flattens" history into geography. In this respect, it is no coincidence that Julian Fellowes's series includes a character –Cora Crawley's mother– who is American, thus giving a recurring nod to its American audience or to its viewers who are westernized in "the American way". This opposition is even taken one step further, crystallizing through the use of two great actresses from the same generation: Maggie Smith becomes representative of an aristocratic and royalist England, Shirley MacLaine of the republican American Great Bourgeoisie. While Maggie Smith made herself known in film through Shakespearean adaptations until she became an icon of British cinema, Don Siegel infamously said about Shirley MacLaine that: "It's hard to feel any great warmth to her. She's too unfeminine and has too much balls" (McGilligan, 1999: 182). This is the kind of vulgarity that she brings to her American character who, unlike the Dowager Countess, does not shy away from money or sex talks. Both of them are paragons of the countries that they represent. The American and the English, owing to their common history and, most importantly, language, see themselves as standing on either side of the transition that the series show, like the two sides of a same coin: the English with the past, the American with the future. This way the series creates a sense of cultural community on one side and on the other of the proverbial "pond" (the Atlantic Ocean), in the same way that commemorative programs, according to Ann Gray and Erin Bell, "seek both to represent a historical national identity, but in so doing, create a sense of community within a culturally disparate nation." (Bell & Gray, 2007: 100) Thus the show does not only pit "the old era" against "the new era" but "the Old Continent" against "the New Continent" as well.

It would be fair to ponder whether the representation of such a significantly class-stratified England, which only focuses on a minimal, or even negligible part of the population, would not indeed add to a certain British "auto-exotism", for it is precisely here that one finds a perfect illustration of the stereotyped view that the rest of the world holds on England. Admittedly, this auto-exotism glamorizes the British legacy by idealizing it, yet it offers a nostalgic representation of the British culture that is entirely backward-looking.

"Writing television history often means illuminating aspects of a country's socio-political life in parallel, given that these histories are intertwined and inextricable." (Wheatley, 2007 : 4) Thus, as part of the flow of television history, *Downton Abbey* says less about its subject, bygone, than about the present generation, who watches the show and creates it.

b) What *Mad Men* tells us about cinema

"Americans have generally been a presentist people, seldom invoking the past beyond occasional nods to forebears. Recent soothsayers have announced 'the end of history'" (Goodlad et al., 2013: 2). Accordingly, the *Mad Men* series' success cannot solely rely on the historical accuracy with which it depicts this transition from the so-called "Age of Innocence" of the 1950s, to the "Age of Anxiety" of the 1960s.

Matthew Weiner, who created *Mad Men,* had notably distinguished himself as a recurring scriptwriter on David Chase's series *The Sopranos*. Both series have a lot in common, starting with, as we previously discussed, the depicting of a bygone era –in the case of *The Sopranos*– or of an ending one –in the case of *Mad Men*. More remarkably even, the archetypes of the eras in question have mostly been created by greatly influential films that had a major impact on the public. *The Sopranos* continually refers to Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather,* and Tony Soprano, the protagonist, is in fact often interpreted as a revised and updated version of the famous mafioso Don Corleone (Messenger, 2012). As regards *Mad Men*, the show's title sequence already gives a nod to Hitchcock: a man in a suit falls in the style of *Vertigo*'s imagery (1958), then becomes a black silhouette in a manner reminiscent of *Alfred Hitchcock presents*' opening credits (1955-1965). As for the plot, it starts in 1959, the release year of the famous Hitchcock's film *North by Northwest*.

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Don Draper and his first wife Betty are quintessential of the iconic Hitchcockian figures, and Tony Soprano, at first sight, seems to have the stature of a true Godfather. But such images shatter as soon as modernity establishes itself anew. After a few seasons, Don Draper appears to be, in reality, no more than the wax effigy of a careless and arrogant generation, and Tony Soprano proves to be, from the very first, a paunchy and ignorant pater familias. Their only escape from their own mediocrity is the awareness that they could be something more, something better, and should have been, had the times they live in been on par with their social standing aspirations –an evidence of this way of thinking, Don Draper's favorite drink is none other than the "Old-Fashioned".

What makes Jeremy Varon say that Mad Men "is more plausibly the staging of a fantasy than the rendering of history" (Varon, 2013: 258), is that it is the images, the icons, that undergo a transition in this series: a process perfectly consistent with the (self-)appraisal of America as a land with no *memory*, in which past events are experienced again through iconic forms, generally cinematic ones. Thus, *Mad Men* validates Andreas Huyssen's theory in *Present Pasts* (2003) according to which our fascination with memory and the past is a reaction to the "spreading of amnesia" in Western society (Huyssen, 2003): the latter is less interested in the past itself than in iconifying the past. Equally, these fallen, or at least, sad and nostalgic versions of iconic figures, are a proof that when it comes to the depiction of a transition era, Matthew Weiner's main interest lies in esthetic and audiovisual changes. Besides, "*Mad Men* consistently reminds its viewers that Don Draper is a cinephile. Movies, we learn, fill Don's offscreen time: when he's not in his office or another woman's bed, he is catching a matinee." (Rushing, 2013 : 192) A hereditary connection between the works of Antonioni and *Mad Men* is analyzed in detail by Robert A. Rushing –which is interesting because it is also a legacy that the proponents of the New Hollywood had claimed for themselves in the 1970s, just like they were inspired by other European cinema.

> Indeed, a wide number of the most successful directors of the period –among them Martin Scorsese, Robert Altman, Arthur Penn, Dennis Hopper, Sidney Lumet, Clint Eastwood, Sidney Pollack, William Friedkin, and Peter Bogdanovich– have named as influences the works of De Sica, Rossellini, Bertolucci, Antonioni, Visconti, Bergman, Godard, Resnais, Rivette, Rohmer, Truffaut, Renoir, Buñuel, Ray, Kurosawa and Ozu. (Berliner, 2010: 6)

As for David Chase, showrunner of *The Sopranos*, he is open about the fact that he wanted to work in film (Brett, 2014) and that television was only his second choice. The statement he, and Matthew Weiner after him, seem to make is that the cinematic era they wanted to take a part in as creators is over. Similarly to their characters Draper and Soprano, they are, in their own world, the reactionary individuals who have failed to accept the transition. David Chase makes a direct reference to the death of the New Hollywood by disintegrating the image of the *mafiosi* that Scorsese and Coppola had helped to invent; and Matthew Weiner, setting his series in the 1960s, makes his own reference to the directors who have influenced and formed the New Hollywood: Antonioni and Hitchcock. But the result is the same: as in the credits of Mad Men, these icons are almost literally chucked out the window. Two great figures of the very end of the New Hollywood era, George Lucas and Steven Spielberg, also announced the end of American cinema to the Hollywood Reporter in 2013: George Lucas regretting that "the pathway to get into theaters is really getting smaller and smaller" (Bond, 2013). David Chase and Matthew Weiner obviously know something about this. But at the same time, they both have somehow made the successful transition, since television series are now seen as the future of –or at least the less glorious but quality alternative to– the classical Hollywood cinema.

George Lucas and Steven Spielberg themselves regard TV series as this: when Lucas said "I think eventually the *Lincolns* will go away and they 're going to be on television", Spielberg replied: "As mine almost was. This close –ask HBO– this close." (Bond, 2013) So it is an aesthetic junction in cinema history that is depicted in *Mad Men,* and that leads us to question the death of Hollywood and the growing importance of television series.

In the case of *Downton Abbey*, the TV reflects its viewer, and in that of *Mad Men*, its creator. This process, which leads us to question the present in a past universe, is perfectly described by Newcomb:

> Television formula requires that we use our contemporary [...] concerns as subject matter [...] and place [them], for very specific reasons, in an earlier time [when] values and issues are more clearly defined (Newcomb, 1974: 258).

The historical perspective thus allows to shed light on a present trend by projecting it further from the viewers, at a distance where they are able to judge it more objectively: in

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the past. The transition periods that are represented are actually not strictly speaking "in between two eras", but between the past and the present time, one allowing us to see the other in a necessarily more nuanced manner; since by means of putting two periods into conflict, there are every time two visions of the world, of a country or of Art that contrast and complement themselves.

To conclude this overview, we have seen that at the condition of being serialized, the TV series does not in itself prevent the representation of these transition periods, despite the absence of evolution of its main characters made necessary by the format.

What makes these series unique is that this lack of character evolution is then reused at the narrative level to create an anchor point that allows us to better judge the depicted historical transition –as does the dramatic irony common in these series, in another way. The serial format proposes therein an interesting tool to treat transitional eras– a tool that cinema cannot offer –and this probably justifies, for example, that *Gosford Park* (as a film) and *Downton Abbey* (as a series) are not strictly set at the same time, despite their similar themes. This subsequently determines the choice of characters made by the series, which, to be fixed without losing credibility, are selected to be reactionary and, in general, upper-class (never middle-class). However, we saw that, interestingly, because the fixity of characters is used to highlight the narrative of transition, the series also puts the viewers on the side of this fixity, and thereby makes them reactionary, or least in an ambiguous position in relation to this past world. It avoids placing them in the position of "Now we know better", and at the same time makes them more active and less arrogant, or comfortable, than the audiences of some other period dramas.

But if series as such do not prevent the description of those transitional eras, their length can undermine the representation, in that these transitions are by nature ephemeral, and sometimes more ephemeral than the series themselves. If their diegesis were to exceed the time of the transition, the series would eventually be denatured and lose what constitutes their main feature; these are after all "period dramas". These periods are difficult to determine however, both in their duration and in their nature, and these series artificially lengthen their duration. Again, the depicted reactionary circles are those in which change is slower, since they resist it. However, if these series must still overcome these coherence and credibility issues, they are also gaining tremendous narrative effectiveness, as these transition eras are a vector for conflicts which further the narrative, and even are the primary constituent.

The TV series is an interesting format to use in order to talk about transitional eras, but beyond their serial nature, we must also reflect on their televisual nature; for audiovisual works, televisual in particular, are grammatically unable to give an idea of the past or even of the future. The televisual language is a language of the present. It is therefore not quite bygone transitions that these series depict, but present "junctions". In the case of *Downton Abbey*, it may be– among other things – contemporary ambivalence for a country glorified for its past ("There was a time when Britannia really did rule the waves, and it's a memory which has never wholly faded", Bell & Gray, 2007: 201) yet nowadays quite Americanized, bringing the United Kingdom in general and *Downton Abbey* in particular to a form of self-exoticism. In the case of *Mad Men*, on the other hand, the junction that is significant above all is an esthetic or even iconographic one, which refers to contemporary questions about the future of cinema, the demise of Hollywood, and the growing importance of the television series in the audiovisual landscape. The past transitions represented are actually a reading of present junctions.

With this overview we have defined ways in which the television series and the representation of transition periods self-complement each other, justify the interest of creating these series and partly explain their quality, despite initial paradoxes between this format and their subject.

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ADAPTATION OF STAND-UP PERSONA TO THE NARRATIVES OF SITCOM AND DRAMEDY

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KEYWORDS

Stand-up persona; narrative complexity; sitcom; ambiguous character; dramedy; hybrid genre.

ABSTRACT

This article explores the results of the adaptation of Louis C.K.'s stand-up persona to the narrative and genre conditions of the sitcom and the television dramedy. The research belongs to the field of television studies and applies narrative analysis (with a focus on characters) to the TV shows Lucky Louie (2006) and Louie (2010–). The first section of the essay offers an analysis of Louis C.K.'s stand-up performances in order to identify the subject matter of his comedy and the traits of his comic persona. This analysis makes it possible to define the influence of his television projects on the transformation of the original comic character. Unlike the sitcom, dramedy favors genre and narrative experiments and features an ambiguous yet relatable protagonist. This character provides a wider range of opportunities to reinforce the original message about everyday life conveyed in Louis C.K.'s stand-up comedy.

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Lucky Louie (2006) and *Louie* (2010–) are the television projects created by Louis C.K., one of the most popular contemporary stand-up comedians in the United States (and around the world) today. These two TV shows have met with very different fates: *Lucky Louie* was cancelled by HBO after its first season and did not receive a positive reaction from critics, while *Louie* soon became a "critically acclaimed comedy series" (http://www.fxnetworks.com/shows/louie/about), receiving many prestigious awards (Emmy, Golden Globe, etc.), and has so far run for five seasons. In both TV shows, Louis C.K. plays the title character who to a certain extent bears a resemblance to the persona that the comedian presents in his stand-up acts.

This study compares characters in two different comedy forms: stand-up and television comedy. In this respect, it is important to bear in mind that "for the stand-up, self is text to a much greater degree than for a dramatic comedian" (Marc, 1989: 18). The comic persona functions as a "medium" of communication with the live audience, and "provides a context for the material" (Double. 2013: 53). Louis C.K. uses his stand-up character to expose issues that hinder communication, such as ignorance, self-obsession, intolerance and lack of empathy. Hence, the comedian's stand-up can be treated as social commentary. When Louis C.K. makes his transition from the live stage to the screen, his TV characters move away from the stand-up persona as a result of the influence of the television format. In terms of narrative characteristics, *Lucky Louie* matches the definition of the "traditional sitcom".[1] Its narrative combines "a dependence on repetition and an avoidance of narrative closure" (Neale & Krutnik, 1990: 6). In every episode, characters face a problem that threatens to transform the initial order of things, but the end of the story always restores that order. In accordance with the narrative, sitcom characters are also required to maintain a consistent, stable personality and are not expected to experience any meaningful changes.

Following the classification of narratives established in television studies, I refer to *Lucky Louie* as an example of a "series" because "each episode is [...] self-contained" (Bednarek, 2010: 12). In the case of *Louie*, the events unfold in a more complex and heterogeneous way. Though most of the episodes allow us to consider *Louie* as a "series" as well, there are plotlines that often break away from the initial order. The events of these plotlines develop over several episodes in a narrative mode of a "serial", where "the story and discourse do not come to a conclusion during an episode, and the threads are picked up again after a given hiatus" (Kozloff, 1992: 70). *Louie*'s experimentation with the form is noted by Jason Mittell,[2] who describes it as an example of "narrative complexity", "a new model of storytelling [that] has emerged as an alternative to the conventional episodic and serial forms" (Mittell, 2015: 17) over the past two decades. Narratively complex shows are not required to fit into formal genre conventions. This often places them "across a range of genres" (Mittell, 2015: 18).

Perhaps the best way to begin describing *Louie* is to distinguish it from the traditional sitcom, because the show differs from the norm in terms of setting, aesthetics and narrative. Mittell calls *Louie* a "much more unconventionally authentic sitcom" (2015: 109) as opposed to a sitcom that follows the formal conventions. Trisha Dunleavy sees the difference between traditional and more recent forms of sitcoms in the approach to visuality: "a single-camera film approach allows sitcoms to deviate from the natural aesthetic of studio production and, with that, from the theatrical performance styles that have characterized multi-camera sitcoms" (2009: 189). So according to her classification *Louie* could be identified as a "single-camera sitcom" because it is indeed shot by a single camera on location. However, I prefer to apply the term "dramedy" to this series to highlight its hybrid nature. The term first appeared in the 1980s to identify an example of "genre fusion": "add one genre to another, allowing the associated assumptions to interplay" (Mittell, 2004: 155). In the case of dramedy, "the weaving together of comic and dramatic elements" creates "a highly complex text" (Lancioni, 2006: 131).[3] This article analyzes the character that functions within the complex text of *Louie*. The narrative complexity and the mix of drama and comedy result in a protagonist with an ambiguous personality: over the course of five seasons he exhibits contradictory social behaviors.

I agree with the popular opinion "that television programming in the postmodern era is marked by such genre hybridity that the notion of pure generic forms is outdated" (Mittell, 2004: xii). Neither *Lucky Louie* nor *Louie* can be considered representative of a pure "sitcom". However, the use of "genre"

1 "There are three aspects to this definition. The first examines sitcom's setting, which is focused on recurring places and characters; the second outlines sitcom's aesthetics, and notes the artificiality of the sitcom text; the third looks at narrative, with reference to the repetitive nature of sitcom stories" (Mills 2009: 28).

2 "It is rare for a program to violate [...] serialized characters and world building, such that it becomes noteworthy when *Louie* plays with the form by having the same actress play Louie's date in one episode and his mother in another episode's flashback..." (Mittell, 2015: 22).

3 Another term applied to this hybrid genre is "comedy drama" (Mills, 2009: 31; Neale, 2015: 4).

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understood as a dynamic "cultural category" (Mittell, 2004: xi) can still be beneficial for the research of a television product as it helps us to understand relevant cultural trends and shifts in society's modes of reception. A product of "genre mixing" makes "conventions and assumptions [...] more visible and therefore accessible" for the researcher (Mittell 2004: 157)., The analysis of complex genre hybrids like dramedy appears to be a productive direction for studies of television genres to take.

Another element that adds complexity to *Louie* is the quasi-autobiographical connection between the main character and Louis C.K. as his creator and the actor who plays him. Mills points out that "the notion of someone playing themselves is quite common in comedy, and comedy remains the only mode within which this is a possibility" (Mills, 2010: 193). But while in the scenes that elicit laughter the protagonist of *Louie* seems close to his comic persona, in dramatic scenes the character appears in a new light: vulnerable and conflicted, demanding a new type of reaction from the audience.

As can be seen, the analysis of the comic in this article is influenced by certain key notions of Relief Theory, according to which humor is required "in order to deal with the restrictions placed upon everyday behavior" (Mills, 2009: 92), and Henri Bergson's concept of humor as an indicator of automatism ("what is essentially laughable is what is done automatically", Bergson, 1911: 146). Since "a direct contact with people [... is] a defining aspect of stand-up comedy" (Marc, 1989: 32), the first section of the article explores the comedian's communication with the audience, in addition to his verbal jokes and physical gags. In so doing, the section considers the social aspect of joking first theoretically described by Mary Douglas. Television "texts" are analyzed in their complexity as they are "made up of many comic moments, alongside a whole host of other narrative and aesthetic factors" (Mills, 2009: 92).

This article explores the results of the adaptation of the specific stand-up persona to the contexts of different types of television comedy. Because of the narrative and genre differences between the shows *Lucky Louie* and *Louie*, their main characters appear dissimilar. Both shows seem connected to Louis C.K.'s stand-up material as they touch upon similar themes and, in the case of *Louie*, include scenes of his stand-up performances in the episodes' structure. In the first section of the essay I analyze Louis C.K.'s stand-up specials professionally recorded for TV and paid distribution from the official website (https://www.louisck.net/) to identify the subject matter of his comedy and the traits of his comic persona. This then allows me to define the influence of two television projects by the same author on the transformation of his original comic character. I apply narrative analysis (with a focus on characters) to his two TV projects in the second and third sections. My aim is to demonstrate that the format of dramedy, due to its hybrid nature, provides a wide range of opportunities to reinforce the critical message about the modern person and his/her everyday life.

THE STAND-UP PERSONA OF LOUIS C.K.

Many stand-up performers create characters that differ radically from themselves in such aspects as speech, clothing style or social origin. Louis C.K. belongs to the group of comedians who appear to the audience to be similar to their "real" identities, "eschewing the luxury of a clear cut distinction between art and life" (Marc in Double, 2013: 69). Louis C.K.'s onstage dress always looks emphatically casual: jeans and a navy blue or black T-shirt. In this way he intends to blur the line between himself off-stage and his stand-up character and to reduce elements of the show that may distract the spectators from his words.

Louis C.K. constantly emphasizes various details of his private life in his act, which also contributes to the impression of authenticity. Oliver Double sees "C. K.'s strength as a performer" in "his honesty": "the brilliance of what he does is that he is mercilessly honest in the way he comically analyses his own life" (2013: 88-89). Louis C.K. describes his sexual and biological activities, his physical shape, health problems, anxieties about fatherhood (he has two daughters), romantic relationships and traumatic childhood experiences. It might seem that the comedian hides nothing from the audience, as in many stories he presents himself in a very negative light by revealing blameworthy thoughts and actions.[4]

Besides topics that have to do directly with his personal experience, Louis C.K. uses a little "observational comedy" about everyday life, as well as expressing his thoughts on national traumas or social and cultural issues. Such issues include: the colonization of the indigenous peoples and the history of slavery in the United States, discrimination based on race, gender and sexual orientation, violence against children, environmental issues, unemployment, the self-obsession of

4 For example, in the stand-up special "Shameless" (2007) he tells of his habit of scanning people in the line at the bank and commenting on them in a mean way in his mind.

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the privileged class, and the inability of modern people to empathize with each other. In this respect Louis C.K. could be called a satirist or a "sick comedian": the kind that "insists on exploring the sick aspects of society in an [...] articulate way" (Marc, 1989: 70).

To make his reflections on private and social issues funny, Louis C.K. often uses physical gags that can be considered to belong to "satiric forms of parody" (Hutcheon 1985: 44). According to Linda Hutcheon, satire uses the "textual differentiation" and "critical distancing" offered by parody to "make a negative statement" about its object (1985: 43-44). Oliver Double introduces a separate term for this type of physical gag: the "instant character" (2013: 199). In Louis C.K.'s acts, the instant character is most frequently himself as a participant in the events that he's describing. In these cases, the line between the narrator and the instant character is not obvious to the audience. The comedian's family members and randomly met strangers become "victims" of his impersonations as well. He creates their comic portraits as he describes a certain situation and uses mimicry to attempt to reproduce the social behaviors that he finds annoying. Such behaviors include uncontrolled aggression, overindulging children, indifference to other people's interests, manifestation of extreme masculinity, the unreflecting use of certain words, etc. As he often chooses himself as the embodiment of the behavior being criticized, self-irony can be considered the key "ingredient" of his comic style. In one of his interviews, Louis C.K. comments on his satirical approach: "I wanted to do material about how selfish Americans can be and how self-centered and unfair they can be. And the only way I could really make that work is to say it about myself first" (Marsh, 2010).

"The most extraordinary use of instant character is when comedians act out painful, traumatic or terrifying experiences" (Double, 2013: 204). When C.K. demonstrates an excessively emotional reaction to a minor inconvenience he "deviates from established emotional patterns" (Zijderveld, 1968: 302) and enters the realm of the grotesque. "The grotesque object [...] simultaneously arouses reactions of fear and amusement in the observer" (Steig in Palmer, 1994: 157). For instance, in the stand-up special "Chewed Up" (2008) Louis C.K. remarks that because he lives in the country, he sees a lot of wild deer around. They annoy him so much that he confesses: "I don't have a gun, but if I did, I would shoot a baby deer in the mouth and feel nothing". He goes on to add that he would even be willing to get infected with a deadly virus solely to pass it to a deer and cause its death. This "plan" seems both extremely irrational and cruel. In this and similar scenes the comedian demonstrates how anger and other fixed ideas turn reasonable instincts into unhealthy obsessions. What often follows these grotesque scenes is the comedian's regret for acting so aggressively or his laughter about the violent intentions revealed to the audience. Thus, the apparent seriousness of his previous antisocial statements comes to nothing. Even without such "corrections", such hyperbolic comic representations of emotions seem to be a satire on a modern person's incapability of being tolerant and sympathetic to others. The exaggeration totally exposes the irrationality of aggression as a reaction to everyday irritants.

Comments on the unreflecting use of certain words constitute another important element of C.K.'s stand-up performances. In many cases these reflections are devoted to taboo terms or offensive expressions: for example, the comedian notes that nobody seems bothered by the phrase "white trash" which often designates the social group of uneducated poor "white" Americans (Louis C.K., 2005). He also draws attention how the use of the euphemism "N-word" by the official media frees them from the moral responsibility for pronouncing the taboo word and at the same time puts this responsibility on the consumer (viewer, reader) of this "cypher", who automatically decodes it mentally and is thus forced to break the taboo (Louis C.K., 2008). Some words are clearly marked by society as offensive but many, like "Jew" are not usually recognized as insulting. Yet this word can not be completely released from negative connotations unless it appears, for example, in the President's speech (Louis C.K., 2010). By illustrating the problematic status of particular words, Louis C.K. reveals the conventional nature of what is considered acceptable and unacceptable by society and the fragility of established boundaries.

During stand-up performances "the comedian must always keep a grip on things and stay in control" of the audience, which "can and do influence events" (Ritchie, 2012: 164). Louis C.K. tends to suppress the attempts of individual spectators to interfere in his act or interrupt him even unintentionally (by answering a mobile phone call, for example). At the same time the comedian attentively observes the audience's reactions to the jokes and always responds to exclamations of astonishment and shock. "Stand-up is a dialogue: it requires the active participation of its audience, and therefore the comedian has a responsibility to orchestrate and manage those responses" (Quirk, 2015: 11). In this communication process, Louis C.K. usually tries to test the limits of spectators' tolerance.

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He often performs "the oldest, most basic role of the comedian, [which is the] role of negative exemplar" (Mintz, 1985: 75): using taboo words to describe family members and other characters in his stories, invoking the rhetoric of racists and homophobes, and offering unnecessarily cruel decisions for problems. Nevertheless, he manages to keep the audience from directly protesting and to obtain their permission to continue in the form of laughter. According to Mary Douglas, permission for the joke is equally important as the act of it being identified as a joke in a social situation (1999 [1968]: 152). However, Jerry Palmer offers a modification to this principle, stating that someone but not necessarily everyone must allow that the joke has been pronounced (1994: 169). So a comedian's aim becomes to convince at least a part of the audience to express agreement.

"All jokes, and much humour, are dependent upon performance skills" (Palmer, 1994: 161), and so it is important to analyze the tools used by Louis C.K. to gain an audience's permission. Every time spectators get indignant at his words he either apologizes for them or takes them back. Sometimes after a shocking joke, C.K. abruptly changes the subject as if openly trying to "escape responsibility". This usually elicits laughter from the audience but at times the comedian has to wait till the "booing" is over to proceed. In some cases, he intensifies his interaction with spectators by succeeding to get their approval to break a taboo. For example, in the stand-up special "Oh My God" (2013), C.K. says that his decisions are always influenced by ideals, on the one hand, and realistic modifications to them, on the other hand. He calls this principle "of course..., but maybe...". To demonstrate to the audience how it works he says that, of course, all the conditions must be created to guarantee the safety of children allergic to nuts, but maybe their death as a result of nut consumption should be perceived as a natural consequence. The spectators laugh, i.e. recognize and permit the joke. After that Louis C.K. tries to draw another example: "Of course, slavery is horrible..." The public does not let him continue. The comedian responds by reminding how they approved his previous joke about the death of children with allergies. So he believes that the audience should share with him the responsibility for the second joke. They find the argument fair and applaud. C.K. proceeds with the interrupted joke. The shared experience of violating taboos within which the comedian and the audience become equals produces what Douglas calls "a sense of freedom from form" (1999 [1968]: 151): the "norm" reveals its constructed nature and the relativity of its observance. The will to obey the rules overpowers the wish to laugh when a certain type of rhetoric is officially marked as unacceptable. However, less widespread but equally antisocial statements might get round the mechanism of "inner censorship".

Thus, in his stand-up Louis C.K. alternates grotesque gestures and antisocial rhetoric with criticism of irrational, unethical actions. The examples of reprehensible behavior are presented as the results of both violations of social norms and their observance without thinking. If a person does not try to understand values and ideals they become commonplace and clichés. Another important problem that the comedian emphasizes is the lack of empathy towards the "other", the excessive unsociability and self-involvement of certain people, social classes and nations. The more isolated a person is the fewer opportunities he/she has to adapt to social life.

LUCKY LOUIE: FROM STAND-UP PERSONA TO SITCOM CHARACTER

The first TV series created by Louis C.K. matches many of the criteria of the traditional sitcom. *Lucky Louie* (2006) was filmed in a television studio, shot by several static cameras; the scenes of the show were performed in front of a live audience and their reactions were added in the series as the background sound ("the laugh track").

Another characteristic of the sitcom – narrative permanency – is present in *Lucky Louie* as well. For instance, the modest life conditions of the main characters (Louie, Kim and their daughter), their occupations (mechanic and nurse), the dominant role of the wife in the spouses' relationship and their limited circle of contacts never change throughout all the twelve aired episodes. The events of every episode follow the same scheme: the characters are confronted with an unpleasant situation, often caused by their own actions; they employ productive and counterproductive measures to resolve it and then by the end of the episode the encountered problem becomes partly or completely eliminated. Though sometimes the rising action of an episode seems capable of altering the plot of the whole series, its potential is never realized.

The narrative of *Lucky Louie* often focuses on the immaturity and irresponsibility of its protagonist, Louie. In the final scene of every short story he comes to realize the negative consequences of his behavior. But as a sitcom character he "entirely forget[s] the 'lessons' in which episodes engage [him]" (Dunleavy, 2009: 174). For example, in episode "Drinking" (1.09) Louie neglects his parental responsibilities

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to watch a football match with friends; he regrets this subsequently, but in the next episode ("Confession" 1.10) he feels too tired to look after his daughter one afternoon and foists her onto his neighbor. Such "obligatory incorrigibility" (Langford in Dunleavy, 2009: 175) is characteristic not only of Louie himself but also of his relationship with his wife, Kim. They seem always to be under the threat of falling apart but at the same time are "insured" against a total breakdown by the sitcom format, as it "embodies narrative's tendency [to] go backwards" (Bortzmeyer, 2014: 5).

However, while the narrative circularity and the fixed setting of *Lucky Louie* might signal its status as a traditional sitcom, the aesthetics of the show represents a deviation from the genre. One of the key characteristics of the sitcom is its open artificiality: "Contrary to most other televisual genres, sitcom does not want to either cause belief or show to believe in its own story. Rather, it reveals its nature of fiction" (Savorelli, 2010: 32). Conversely, *Lucky Louie* often represents what could possibly be the everyday reality of a blue-collar worker. Unlike most of the *domesticoms* ("domestic sitcoms") that aired on network channels, HBO's *Lucky Louie* was not limited by restrictions on offensive language, nudity or the demonstration of drug consumption. Almost all the characters regularly use obscene words and expressions in their speech; sex scenes between Louie and his wife Kim are shot with a naturalistic approach; and characters are often seen smoking marijuana.

As Brett Mills suggests, "sitcom is a genre defined by its association with the comic" (2009: 5) and "it must never stray too far from humour for too long" (2009: 7). In the case of *Lucky Louie*, stories constantly emphasize sad aspects of the characters' lives: for example, in the pilot episode Louie and Kim find themselves with empty pockets after paying the monthly bills. Besides their financial troubles, the characters are subjected to violence and they break the law. In several episodes ("Discipline" 1.07, "Get Out" 1.08) they are shown imposing strict disciplinary measures on their children. Limited resources and the crises in Louie and Kim's relationship remain the never-changing elements in the narrative and are embodied by the show's most frequent setting: the kitchen with a table and three chairs (the characters do not have a living room). It is mentioned a few times that Louie and Kim rent the flat so it seems to be a place they are forced to inhabit due to their economic circumstances, rather than a "physically spacious yet spiritually warm home" (Marc, 1989: 26). Thus, the content of the episodes appears to be in conflict with the conventions of the genre. The upsetting reality and the antisocial behavior of the characters are likely to be read by the cable channel's audience as a "shocking violation of normative taboos" (Marc, 1989: 24), which is a frequent ingredient of stand-up comedy.

Before comparing Louis C.K.'s stand-up persona to his sitcom character, I would first like to draw attention to the genetic and formal similarities of the two genres of comedic performance. The formation of the sitcom on American television in the 1940s-1950s and the development of stand-up comedy in the US were both influenced by the culture of vaudeville (Dunleavy, 2009: 188). This may explain why an active live audience has been a necessary component of both stand-up and the traditional sitcom. However, while a sitcom can work successfully with recorded laughter instead of a live audience, a stand-up act cannot really exist without a group of listeners present (Double, 2013: 98). This distinction clearly demonstrates the key difference between the audience function in each case. In a sitcom, performers and spectators are contained in "parallel worlds": the former are not supposed to pay attention to the audience's reactions and the latter cannot interfere in the scenes. Furthermore, "the creators and performers of sitcoms are structurally separated from immediate human reactions to their work" (Marc, 1989: 28). They evaluate the effectiveness of their material based on ratings and media reaction, while the voice of a live audience serves merely as an additional sound effect. Its aim may be to impose "'canned' definitions of situations" (Zijderveld, 1968: 295) on viewers, to make them recognize something as a joke. Conversely, in stand-up the comedian creates a performance in collaboration with his/her spectators. Though a performer defines and controls the extent of audience involvement, their responses to the material directly influence the unfolding of the comic monologue and the actions of the comedian.

The transition to the context of sitcom eliminates Louis C.K.'s ability to communicate with his audience during the performance. He thus finds himself confined inside his comedic material. Many of his stand-up jokes are transformed either into plot situations or into lines spoken by the character he's playing. In his stand-up act, Louis C.K. shares his witty observations with the audience; in the sitcom, he tells them to other characters. It is also worth noting that the comedian's sitcom character is far less inclined to demonstrate antisocial behavior than his stand-up persona. Tolerance and disapproval of violence are among his good qualities. Despite the fact that in many episodes Louie acts in a reprehensible way (e.g. making his daughter sit in a closet ("Discipline" 1.07); using an offensive word to address his wife ("Flowers for Kim"

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1.06), etc.), he always realizes his mistakes in the end and is shown to be repentant.

Unlike Louie himself, his friends in the sitcom often express the kinds of perspectives that Louis C.K. makes fun of in his stand-up. Mike advises Louie to use violence in disciplining his daughter, and drives his car when drunk; Rich is openly homophobic and misogynistic, neglects personal hygiene. Yet none of these two characters ever try to analyze their words and deeds. The same character in a sitcom cannot exhibit opposing qualities: tolerance and homophobia, respect for his wife and hatred toward women, etc. Therefore, a sitcom can only provide foils to a character to add to the variety instead of interchanging the kind of contrasting discourses possible in stand-up. Though the other male characters contrast with Louie, he is united with them by their shared social class of "blue collar" workers, interests (food, sex, watching sport on TV) and language, particularly the casual use of offensive expressions. As a result, their interactions appear as a substitution for the monologues of Louis C.K.'s stand-up character.

Another peculiarity of *Lucky Louie* is that in most situations it is the title character's wife who is more likely to win audience approval. Thus, the role of the protagonist that the viewers can relate to is divided into two: a strong and active protagonist (Kim) and a weak protagonist who prefers talking to acting (Louie). The "voice" of Louis C.K.'s character is not the most authoritative in the series, as his passivity strips his words of their performative nature and seems to be a tactic to avoid taking serious action.

Lucky Louie can be considered an experimental example of a sitcom in view of its tendency towards realism and its representation of social issues. Nevertheless, "the genre's remarkable rigidity" (Mills, 2009: 43) prevented the show's creators from introducing major changes to the scheme of a sitcom character. *Lucky Louie*'s protagonist provides a much narrower frame for Louis C.K. to present himself before the spectators. Moreover, many topics from his stand-up material, such as the economic state of the country, the analysis of taboo words, the self-indulgence of the privileged class, issues associated with childhood and relations with parents, etc., do not find a place in the dialogue of the sitcom's characters. Thus, though the sitcom format introduced Louis C.K.'s comedic material to a wider audience, it distanced him from them at the same time. This happened because his transition to the sitcom format eliminated direct contact between Louis C.K. and the spectators, demanded a contraction of themes and resulted in the performer losing his completeness as a persona.

LOUIE: A TELEVISION CHARACTER WITH A TOUCH OF STAND-UP

As was previously mentioned, the narrative of *Louie* is complex and heterogeneous. In the first and the second seasons it follows the format of a "series": the events of one episode do not develop in the following episodes. There are a number of constant features, like characters and themes (fatherhood, the romantic relationship, the profession of a stand-up comedian, etc.), but most episodes consist of two or three separate stories, so that the narrative is fragmented not merely into episodes but into smaller parts thereof. Starting from season No. 2, more episodes are devoted to a single independent story. The third season features eight single-story episodes plus two longer stories ("Daddy's Girlfriend" and "Late Show"), which unfold over two (3.04-3.05) and three episodes (3.10-3.12), respectively. Thus, a "serial" narrative is introduced through the episodic unfolding of the events. The fourth season expands this pattern, as there are only three single-story episodes, while the other eleven form part of three mini-series: "Elevator"(4.04 – 4.09), "Pamela" (4.10, 4.13, 4.14), and "In the Woods" (4.11, 4.12). However, the narrative fragmentation remains, because these stories are self-contained and unconnected to each other. The narrative of *Louie* is an example of how "narrative complexity redefines episodic forms under the influence of serial narration — not necessarily a complete merger of episodic and serial forms but a shifting balance" (Mittell, 2015: 18).

"Narrative special effects" (Mittell, 2006: 35) in the form of unexplained narrative transitions and intentional missing plot links are another peculiarity of *Louie*. For example, though the character of Louie's brother is present in a few episodes of the first season, he is completely absent from seasons 2 and 3, and then reappears in the fourth and the fifth seasons. While in the episodes that take place in the present Louie is shown having a brother and three sisters, these characters are always missing in all flashbacks of his childhood. Louie's mother is present in both "time dimensions"; however, her attitude to her son is radically different in each, as in the past she is always represented as a compassionate and caring parent, whereas in the present she acts in an egoistic and hard-hearted way toward her children. Though such elements do not considerably transform the narrative of the dramedy, they demonstrate wide ranges of possibilities within which the events occur. In addition, they establish the priority of a separate short story over the coherency of character representations, i.e. one plot requires a "good mother" and an-

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other one needs to include a "bad parent". In this way, *Louie* challenges the episodic format not only by "implanting" the opposite type of narrative ("serial") but also by making some of the recurring characters "unstable".

As noted above, I prefer to define *Louie* as a dramedy because it is a hybrid series that combines comedy and drama.[5] "[Genre] fusion can occur at a variety of levels" (Mittell, 2004: 155); in *Louie* these are mostly levels of separate scenes and episodes. "Serious" dialogues are often followed by funny moments, which relieve the viewer of the sentimental/tragic impression. Dramatic plots in *Louie* usually take turns with comedic ones, but it is especially interesting to watch the switch from drama to comedy within one scene. It can be considered a "parody" in the sense of "a form of inter-art discourse" (Hutcheon, 1985: 3), a reflection on the form exercised through imitation. For instance, in "Bummer/Blueberries" (2.02) on his way to a date with a stranger Louie witnesses a horrible death: a stranger rushes to the street and his head is knocked off as a result of a collision with a moving car. Louie's shocked state surprises his date when he gets to her. In response to her questions he shares his thoughts on modern people's egocentrism. The woman enthusiastically agrees with his opinion, saying that she feels the same way. She passionately kisses Louie. The camera moves around them in a suggestion of vertigo to film their kiss. This visual detail, along with the music of the scene, evokes the clichés of romantic comedies and melodramas. Then Louie tells the woman about the tragedy that he has seen before they met. She becomes indignant at the fact that after such an experience he was still able to come on a date, and she storms off. The music immediately changes to the piece normally used in the comedic scenes of Louie's failures. Louie automatically turns from the lover and "profound thinker" into the loser unable to win women's sympathy despite all his "tricks". Such transformations of dramatic scenes into comedic ones upset audience expectations of being fed another re-creation of a mass culture formula and force the actor to adapt flexibly to changing contexts.

In the case of the multi-episode stories mentioned earlier, drama prevails over comedy. The events are united by a common problem which is solved over the course of several episodes. These inserted mini-series are always constructed according to formulas borrowed from popular cinema: in three stories ("Liz", "Elevator" and "Pamela") it is melodrama; the plot of "Late Show" matches the description of the "narrative of test" (Bortzmeyer, 2014: 7)[6]. "In the Woods" is evocative of a "coming-of-age" movie, another cinema genre. Sometimes the formula is reproduced with intentional deviations; nevertheless, these self-contained multi-episode stories seem to have more in common formats of film than of a modern drama series in terms of narrative and temporality. Whereas the storytelling in drama series is never fully resolved (Bortzmeyer, 2014: 4-5), these plots always have a clearly defined ending. They are divided into several episodes only because of the formal rules for how the series is broadcast.

Louie broadly employs "cinematic values" like "feature-style cinematography" and "deep space" (Caldwell, 1995: 12). This results in an obvious contrast between the visual aspects of *Louie* and *Lucky Louie*. The latter supports the point of view that "sitcom may have resisted televisuality" (Caldwell, 1995: 18), the "stylistic exhibitionism" that has become characteristic of American television since the 1980s (Caldwell, 1995: 4-5). The cinematic televisuality gives *Louie* "the realist look of drama", which "positions the viewer as an observer of everyday behavior" (Mills, 2009: 127-128) and allows the creators to insert elements taken from different movie genres. However, despite the stylistic and narrative borrowings from film drama, *Louie* can be still regarded as a collection of separate stories (of differing duration), in which the recurring character regularly finds himself in situations that have a comic/tragicomic conclusion. Thus, *Louie* is located between two poles: popular cinema and situation comedy.

The structure of a self-contained Louie episode includes inserted short stand-up performances. For the most part they are not connected with the plotlines of the episode, although in some cases there is a thematic unity. For example, in the episode "God" (1.11) the common theme is religion. In the stand-up fragments, the performing comedian can often be identified both as Louis C.K. and as his character Louie, because they share the same occupation and stage persona. However, it is clear that the performer is Louie when these scenes are presented as the character's everyday activity or when they influence subsequent events in the episode. When the performer's actions in stand-up scenes are influenced by a stressful situation that preceded the stand-up performance, it is not the jokes that grab the viewers' attention. The question here is whether Louie can overcome the problem and find a connection with the audience. In such cases viewers adopt the perspective of the comedian as the camera is di-

5 On IMDB it is also associated with both genres (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1492966/?ref_=ttep_ep_tt).

6 Example: "Rocky" (1976).

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rected toward the spectators of the live comedy show more than the performer.

In comparison with the character in *Lucky Louie,* the protagonist of *Louie* has more biographical similarities with Louis C.K.: in addition to being stand-up comedians, both are divorced and have two daughters. Moreover, the plots of several episodes reference events from Louis C.K.'s life that would be known to much of the audience. For example, in the episode "Ikea/Piano Lessons" (3.07), Louie's reconciliation with his old friend, stand-up comedian Mark Maron, may remind viewers of Louis C.K.'s interview with Mark Maron on his podcast "WTF with Marc Maron" in 2010, which represented the resumption of their friendship. In this way, the fictional character alludes to issues in the life of the person who portrays him. Although "[a comedian] can move between acting and being – and keep the same name" (Mills, 2010: 200), the character in the series is never called "Louis"; even on the sign-boards at comedy clubs his name is always spelled "Louie C.K." in the dramedy. This dividing line may seem thin, but it does stress that the similarity between the performer and the character is only partial and that there are important differences. For instance, at no point in the five seasons of the show does Louie enjoy major success in his career as a comedian. In the series he is often referred to as "a comics' comic", suggesting that his audience is largely limited to other comedians. The character often meets colleagues (famous comics playing themselves in the series) whom he considers more well-known and successful than he is, when in fact Louis C.K. (as opposed to Louie) is definitely on their level.

Following the pattern of the serial narrative with its constant deferment of a final resolution, the identity of its protagonist also transforms over the course of the series and constantly reveals new personal qualities that contradict one another. On the one hand, Louie's behavior can often be described as automatic. He uses clichéd expressions when he expresses feelings of love or offers life advice. By behaving and speaking without reflecting, the character engages in psychological violence toward others, trying to impose his own ideas of what is right on them. On the other hand, Louie is also shown overcoming the automatism of his reactions to others through self-irony and displays of empathy. He clearly identifies empathy as a key to socialization and tries to teach his kids to sympathize with other people's feelings.

In addition to his communication difficulties, Louie fails to achieve many of his goals, such as buying a new house, getting himself in shape, being appreciated by his children, or winning the attention of attractive women. His failures are generally due either to his lack of self-confidence and idleness or simply to bad luck. Many of Louie's friends consider him a loser. At the same time, the character's confidence in his professional life compensates for his weakness in the other aspects of life. His job thus enables him to transform his everyday troubles and stresses into objects of amusement. Louie's attitude to his job is based on firm principles that keep him from compromising on questions concerning material, authorship and his performative style. Yet in his personal life he usually tries to consider the interests of others. Openness to the new and to the "other" enriches the character and makes him less socially awkward.

Compared with straight stand-up performances, *Louie* gives the audience the chance to observe a stand-up comedian on and off the stage, thereby providing a better understanding of his material. The aim to test spectators' tolerance is a distinctive feature of Louis C.K.'s stand-up and is present in the dramedy as well. First of all, it is evident in the content of the stand-up insertions, which are identical to the previously analyzed stand-up specials in terms of themes and performative techniques. Another strategy to elicit a reaction from viewers is the representation of Louie's negative behavior: he offends a member of the comedy club audience who interrupts him ("Heckler/Cop Movie" 1.06), disrespects his mother ("Double Date/Mom" 1.07), and imposes his opinions on others. Unlike the stand-up performances, the dramedy also often aims to elicit compassion for the protagonist. Technically this is done through close-ups and by positioning the viewer in the place of Louie's interlocutor in scenes with dialogue. While in the stage performances the comedian controls the situation all the time, in the dramedy Louis C.K.'s character frequently becomes the victim of other people's actions and is shown being able to feel confident only in a limited number of locations: his house, comedy clubs and cafés.

Unlike the sitcom *Lucky Louie*, all the events in the dramedy unfold around the title character. His attitude toward his own life is fraught with worries about death, health, loneliness, and professional failure, and treated as a priority over his interactions with others. In this case, there is no need to assign the author's "voice" to several characters because the protagonist combines positive and negative qualities and is able to develop. He oversteps the limits of his own way of thinking and of the spatial limits of his everyday life. He appears to be "broader" than both the stand-up and the sitcom character, as he is not obliged to be constantly funny due to the hybrid co-existence of drama and comedy in the complex narrative of *Louie*.

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CONCLUSION

This study has analyzed how comedian Louis C.K.'s stand-up persona, which embodies his critical reflection on social and cultural issues, has been adapted to different television contexts. *Lucky Louie* and *Louie* are connected not only by virtue of having the same creator and star, but also by the fact that both shows deviate from the genre requirements of traditional stand-up. *Lucky Louie* uses a realistic approach and provides no "comfort" either "literally" or "figuratively" (Marc, 1989: 26). However, it still follows the conventions of narrative and setting of a traditional sitcom. As a result, the character lacks the capacity for self-reflection and functions as a barrier between the comedian Louis C.K. and the audience.

Conversely, *Louie* appears to be a more effective television format for Louis C.K. to express his ideas about the everyday experience of a modern person thanks to the hybrid nature of the series. A viewer of this dramedy observes the alternation between short and longer stories, daily situations and life-changing events, dramatic and comedic scenes. These experiments with narrative, with the density of events and genre elements in the dramedy correspond to the complexity and ambiguity of an everyday experience where the sublime and the banal, the sad and the funny, are always intertwined.

"A comedy is [...] marked [...] by its concern with the representation of 'everyday life'" (Neale & Krutnik, 1990: 11), and thus even though the protagonist of *Louie* is usually shown to be immature, physically weak, and struggling to resist hedonistic temptations, by demonstrating empathy and self-irony he can still teach viewers a lot about socialization. The character of *Louie* can be considered a relevant commentary about life in today's society, embodied in a fictional personality.

This research demonstrates that dramedy offers a wide range of opportunities to incorporate external elements (such as those of stand-up comedy) into a television text and mix them with characteristics taken from various other formats of drama and comedy. Dramedy's openness to different genre and storytelling experiments can produce an ambiguous yet relatable protagonist who is able to reflect the everyday experience of a modern person.

Dramedy (or "comedy drama") remains relatively unexplored in television studies (Neale, 2015: 4). Its relationship with sitcom should be reconsidered, as although both genres "employ recurring characters in regular settings" (Mills, 2009: 31), their narratives may differ considerably in terms of complexity and comprehensibility. Moreover, the functioning of dramedy as a hybrid genre should be studied more, as it can help us define the current state of the genre system on television and understand the cultural processes behind the prevalence of dramedies among modern comedy series.

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SERIAL CONTRADICTIONS. THE ITALIAN DEBATE ON TV SERIES

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TV drama; complex tv; cinematic tv; tv series; tv audiences; television studies.

ABSTRACT
In the last decade the academic debate on television seriality has become lively and often quite animated, in the US as well as in Italy. The traditional hierarchic relation between cinema and television is clearly represented by the form of the most recent tv drama, whose boundaries are more and more difficult to locate.

The main questions at stake seem to be the so-called "cinematic television" (Mills, 2013; Jaramillo, 2013), the umbrella definition of "quality tv" (McCabe and Akass, 2007) and its relation with the broadest concept of "complex tv" (Mittell, 2009, 2015).

The essay will take into consideration these oxymorons, which are deeply rooted in the Italian tv series debate, with the aim of considering both their risks and their opportunities.

A great variety of texts are grouped under the "tv series" label, but they are very different as far as content, production values and audience reactions are concerned. The academic discourse, however, only recently has tried to identify the differences between longstanding mainstream shows (such as, for instance, Grey's Anatomy or CSI) and some more recent, and supposedly "cinematic" series like True Detective or Fargo. Together with the analysis of the oxymoric nature of recent television seriality, the essay will explore the need to historicising what is proving to be one of the most dense and fruitful domains of recent television studies.

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Until the beginning of the new century, tv drama was far from being a noteworthy topic in the Italian media studies. Film studies and narratology have long ignored television serial forms, and television studies have been traditionally interested in analyzing other genres, such as the news, which were considered more serious (Buonanno, 2012; Abruzzese, 1995) In slightly more than a decade, the mediascape has radically changed. Today, tv drama is a central interest not only for scholars, but also for those audiences which were traditionally distant from television. Not knowing what *House of Cards (2013-)* or *True Detective (2014-)* or *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) are about would mean being cut off from the majority of social conversations and from a lively academic multidisciplinary debate.

Why and how, then, has tv drama become a cutting-edge topic in Italy? The present interest in serial tv narratives seems to enlighten some interesting contradictions, which traditionally characterize both Italian media studies and, more specifically, the social discourse about television. In parallel with the favour of the Italian media scholarship towards the new "quality" tv series, it seems that television's traditional bad reputation has not completely disappeared.

In the last decade, television has undergone a revolution in technology, language and audiences, which is clearly symbolized by the new tv drama. Jason Mittell's definition of "complex tv" clearly describes its new features and can be applied to the outlooks of tv drama in the 2000, such as *Breaking Bad, True Detective, House of Cards, Game of Thrones (2011-), Mad Men (2007-2015),* or *Downton Abbey (2010-2015)*: "

> To call something complex is to highlight its sophistication and nuance, suggesting that it presents a vision of the world that avoids being reductive or artificially simplistic, but that grows richer through sustained engagement and consideration. It suggests that the consumer of complexity needs to engage fully and attentively, and such engagement will yield an experience distinct from more casual or partial attention. (...) Thus while complexity need not be seen as an evaluative criterion, it can certainly serve as one that helps shine a light on how serial television can reach aesthetic achievements (Mittell, 2013: 46-47).

According to some Italian observers, however, this label could not be extended to successful mainstream tv series such as *Grey's Anatomy (2005-),* or *CSI (2000-)*, for instance: their narrative structure, the director's and authorship's signature, the standing of actors cannot be compared with *True Detective* features, for example, which is often considered as the benchmark of "quality" seriality (Fumarola, 2014; Demaria, 2014).

One of the contradictions in the Italian debate on tv series, then, seems to be the unclear definition of "quality tv drama": are mainstream series such as *Grey's Anatomy* comparable with *Fargo (2014-)*? And, if that is the case, is quality tv necessarily related to the idea of "cinematic values"? (Mills, 2013). The uncertainty in drawing a specific list of "quality" titles is the first marker of how the field of tv drama has today become richer in suggestions but at the same time quite elusive, at the centre of the social-media discourse but difficult to be analyzed in a clearer theoretical framework.

In the following pages I will try to focus on some contradictions which emerge from the Italian recent studies on tv series, and which more or less overtly show a tendency to downgrade the "tv" element from the debate. Such contradictions emerge also in other international contexts (Mittell, 2015), but in the Italian media studies they appear particularly polarized around the opposition between cinema and tv studies.

"COMPLEX TV DRAMA IS NOT TELEVISION"

In the last five years the international debate about the so-called'cinematic tv' (Mittell, 2009, 2013; Mill, 2013; Jaramillo, 2013) has involved also the Italian academia. One of the most relevant topics in this discussion is whether television dramas can be considered as a homogeneous group of texts or not. Even at a non-specialist glance one can clearly see the huge gap between the serials from the early 1990s (or even the 1970s telefilms) and the shows that from the beginning of 21st century, can be termed "tv series" (Buonanno, 2012).

Audiences, too, are different in attitude, tastes and behavior. The excitement expressed by *Grey's Anatomy*'s lovers, although quite high, does not in any way match the *hype* surrounding the airing of the second season of *True Detective*, which in turn is quite different from the quiet pleasures expressed by the audience of a new episode of *CSI*. Can all these shows be labeled as "complex tv"? They differ in terms of narrative structure, number of episodes and seasons, acting performances, relevance of directing, dialogue density, audience's quantification and demographics, relevance on social

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media - just to mention only some of the many possible areas of comparison.

In his sharp analysis of *Lost* (2004-2010) and of *Breaking Bad* and *The Wire (2002-2008)*, Mittell (2009, 2013) proposes to finally overcome the traditional opposition between television studies and film studies, where the former are accustomed not to express any personal evaluation and the latter, on the contrary, are allowed to base their analyses on taste and aesthetic pleasure. In this perspective, Mittell's definition of "complex tv" underlines the need to overcome as well the narrow label of "quality tv" under which some tv dramas are traditionally grouped (McCabe and Akass, 2007):

> I do not believe that complex tv is a synonym of quality television, as the latter is a troubling term that shines more light on the assumptions of the speaker than the programs it labels, while the former is an analytic tern that doesn't necessarily imply value judgement. Complexity and value are not mutually guaranteed (Mittell, 2013: 46).

In the Italian debate, it would be quite useful to adopt the concept of complex tv and to apply it more strictly to tv series. "Complex tv drama" could be applied to identify the new forms of seriality which spread their textual structure on a long time span, and extend their narratives over the limits of film, whose peculiar dimension is *the season* instead of the single episode (Bandirali and Terrone, 2013).

Traditional television seriality is based on the repetition of conventionally short and clearly-defined narrative units (installment and/or episode), which are regularly scheduled on a weekly basis, while in complex tv dramas repetition mechanisms refer to an extended narrative unit, the season, composed by at least 12-13 episodes. Far from the weekly schedule of traditional tv programming, the narrative model of the season exploits the new and flexible modes of consumption offered by the idiosyncratic time frame of the web: from the "serial instantaneity" provided by Netflix or Hulu, to the practice of *binge watching* (Poniewozik, 2012; Roberts, 2015), which consists in a viewing marathon of many episodes at a time, or maybe of the whole season in a weekend or in a few days.

The narrative potential of complex tv drama is expressed in the season, which broadens its boundaries in both vertical and horizontal lines (Thompson, 2003) and enormously extends the universes of meaning compressed into the limited time-frame of the movie, and adds the strength of the image to the large-scale narrative of the novel (Bandirali and Terrone, 2012).

"Complex tv drama" means that a series is a television show, *and also* a movie, *and also* a novel, but it bypasses the narrative closure of the movie, the time extension of the novel, and the traditional television division in repeatable units (episodes). Some recent Italian studies on tv seriality have already considered and discussed this concept, with the aim of overcoming the traditional oppositions in media studies in order to open up to the more flexible concept of "medial environment" (Boccia Artieri, 2004; Abruzzese, 2015) and of "narrative ecosystem" (Pescatore and Innocenti, 2013).

"COMPLEX TV (DRAMA) IS NOT WATCHED ON TV"

Since the mid-1990s, the traditional notion of mainstream television audience has been questioned by new practices brought about by the web and social networks, by the possibility of sharing content, commenting on them and freely stating one's opinion, together with the radical change in the socio-demographic profiles. Social networks have created a generation of "experts", bringing to light new concepts to be considered: besides the idea of "sharing", deeply affecting media agendas and priorities, also the practices of online fandom have proved to be a grass-root phenomenon that radically influences the contents and relevance of television and media products (Jenkins, 2006; Scaglioni, 2006). Sharing information, anecdotes, and opinions on one's own favourite series is gratifying, and being "the first" in reviewing an episode, in discovering a new series or in downloading a new season is even more pleasurable, giving birth to the so-called spoiling activity (Jenkins, 2006b).

As far as complex tv is concerned, its fruition practices are both complementary and contradictory. On the one hand, as said before, the narrative division in seasons is strictly linked to the practice of binge watching, which usually promotes an individual (if not narcissistic) viewing experience. On the other hand, the multi-screen viewing on different devices (computer, television, tablet, smartphone) takes place in a non linear time dimension, where the individual viewing experience is shared in the collective commentaries and discussions which take place in the virtual time and space of social media. The outcome is a viewing and sharing experience which is quite different not only from the features of mainstream fandom (Scaglioni, 2006), but also from its earlier digital ex-

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pressions, as those engendered by *Lost*, which can be considered the ancestor of complex tv drama (Pearson, 2009), which expressed themselves mostly in blogs and forums.

"COMPLEX TV DRAMA IS QUALITY TELEVISION"

The quality issue has been one of the main focuses in television studies, also in the Italian debate. It is maybe the topic which has been most thoroughly explored by interdisciplinary analyses in the early 1990s, being the focus of a high number of studies which triggered quite a heated debate (Sartori, 1993; Lasagni and Richeri, 1996; Colombo, 1993).

The definition of quality television developed in Italian media studies, however, was unclear, mostly due to the persistence of a strong cultural bias against television and of the opposition between high-brow and low-brow. The early Italian scholars of television seriality stressed the fierce criticism of academia towards this genre, which was considered too popular and low-brow in comparison with the news, the only qualitative television content which was worth studying and analyzing (Abruzzese, 1984; Buonanno, 1994; Casetti, 1988).

In the same years, though, the first wave of "quality" US serials came to question the assumptions of such a negative attitude: *Twin Peaks (1990-1991)*, *E.R.* (1994-2009), *X-Files (1993-2002)*, reached Italian broadcast television schedules, scoring huge audience success. From the mid-1990s, also some Italian serial productions began to get very good audience results, for example *Il Maresciallo Rocca* (1996-2005) or *Il commissario Montalbano* (1999-2013), which partly changed the negative attitude of academia about serial television.

In the same years the topic of television quality became an issue in the US academia as well (Thompson, 1996). This debate is still quite alive and controversial, centered on the concepts of complexity and of evaluation as useful criteria to be applied also in television studies, in order to overcome the traditional hierarchical opposition between cinema and television.

The differences between the American and the Italian (and European) cultural attitude on this topic is clearly expressed by Mittell:

> 'Quality television' is a more commonly use phrase in Europe, referencing upscale fictional programs in the press and academic discourse, while it is used far less frequently in the United States, even though much of what is labeled 'quality' is American television. Most American media scholars regard the emphasis on quality with skepticism and even have outright hostility toward regarding television as an aesthetic object" (Mittell, 2015: 210).

Today, quality tv is still an issue in contemporary Italian debate on tv series, which is still polarized in the opposition between television and cinema: the more a tv series is similar to cinema, the more it is considered ad an example of "quality television", but often without a cleaer definition of what "quality" means. In order to overcome this useless and maybe anti-historical categorization, also in the Italian seriality studies it would be useful to take into consideration the discussion of "cinematic television" coming from US television studies (Mills, 2013; Jaramillo, 2013). As Mills points out

> it's clear that the term 'cinematic' is associated with hierarchical ideas of quality, and is perceived to be a compliment when appropriated for television... This means that television style only seems to become of interest when it is seen to draw on the conventions of another medium which, in more broad terms, has far more cultural legitimacy... Its use [of the term 'cinematic'] in television studies is never innocent (Mills 2013: 64-5).

Even though the debate on quality television is still alive in the US either, American scholars have traditionally paid attention to "production values" broadly (Cardwell, 2007: 26), and to the economic and technological context where tv drama developed, influencing its aesthetic dimension. The industrial nature of television and of media in general is taken into account also by the debate on complex tv drama, thus broadening the horizon of the discussion and somehow blurring and downsizing the comparison with cinematic values.

While in Italy the studies on media production (and on television seriality production in particular) are quite a few (Scaglioni and Barra, 2014; Barra et al. 2016; Menduni and Catolfi, 2009; Cardini, 2004), in the United States the studies on complex television and also on the aesthetics of television often take into account (Mittell, 2009, 2015; Pearson, 2009; Mills, 2013) both the role of economic investments in the development of television seriality, without penalising it with respect to cinema (Hesmondhalgh, 2008), and the role of digitalization, which has deeply changed not only audience practices, but also shooting and editing techniques, thus enabling

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television to reach a "cinematic" technical quality (Nelson, 2007: 43). Technical improvements have played a major role in convincing cinema professionals (actors, directors, screenwriters) to take part to new complex tv drama shows: in the pre-digital Hollywood era, they would have barely accepted to be involved in television productions.

In Italy, on the contrary, from the beginning of television studies the industrial nature of television has been neglected, and in part still is, and the economic value of seriality has long been ignored (Abruzzese, 1984; Cardini, 2004), while on the other hand a solid scholarship has flourished on the aesthetics of film. As a consequence, cinema and television continue to be considered as two opposite media, where the first one is somehow "better" than the second one. Such a persistent attitude is mirrored in the often animated debate about the features of complex tv drama.

NEW DEFINITIONS (AND NEW CONTRADICTIONS): THE TELE-CINEPHILE

As we have tried to underline so far, complex tv drama is the combination of several elements: the turning to the narrative unit of the season expands the storytelling potential of the film along new and creative dimensions of time and space; technological changes allow a prolific exchange process between production routines and creative professions from cinema to television and the other way around; the growth of social media enables the new generations of viewers-fans to show their skills and creativity by discussing the complexity of dense narrative structures, multi-screen fruition and binge-watching practices. Given these elements, it is possible to retrace in the Italian debate on tv series a peculiar characteristic which summarizes many of the contradictions highlighted so far, and which can be termed "tele-cinephilia" (Cardini, 2014).

This concept is an adaptation to the Italian context of the seminal "telephilia" definition by John Caughie, that is "an awkward neologism which is itself a provocation" (Caughie, 2006: 6). Caughie answers to the question: "Is television drama the last refuge of people who don't really like television?" (ibidem) by discussing the term "cinephilia" with reference mainly to the work of Elsaesser (2005) and trying to apply the same idea to the "love for television". In Caughie's argumentation, cinephilia can be defined as the idealized love for cinema itself, together with memory and nostalgia, that generates an attachment which "drives a deep emotional engagement with the critical object which is also a love object" (Caughie, 2006: 9). Would it be possible a similar attitude towards television? In Caughie's analysis, the dignity of television compared to cinema is evident, and it comes from its capability to "ask of us a kind of intellectuality, a degree of intelligent detachment from the shock and discontinuity of 'the flow" (ivi:, 15). For our analysis, it is quite interesting to observe that Caughie's "television" is not strictly referred to tv drama, but to the broader concept of "good television". Telephilia, in Caughie's words, describes the love for those peculiar aspects of television language which "ask for our perceptual intelligence... and... may offer an exteriority to be appraised rather than an interiority in which to lose ourselves" (ibidem).

In Caughie's argumentation, the non-hierarchical relationship between cinema and television is quite clear, and it mirrors the point of view of a large part of the academic international debate. As a consequence, within this conceptualization it is possible to distinguish between a "cinephile" and a "telephile" attitude.

In the Italian academic debate, on the contrary, such a neat and non-hierarchical dstinction between cinema and television is still difficult to achieve. For this reason, it can be more appropriate to speak of "tele-cinephilia" while referring to the Italian attitude towards complex tv drama, where the specificity of television values is quite often downgraded in comparison with the "cinematic" features which give relevance to some tv series in comparison with others.

As a consequence, Italian tele-cinephiles can be portrayed as cinema lovers, who consider complex tv dramas mainly as a form of expanded cinema. They do not watch traditional television, nor do they love mainstream movies: they are closely linked to high-brow culture and art as opposed to low culture and "commercial" media. Social networks are useful for tele-cinephiles to try out (and show) their cinema expertise in commenting episodes. For tele-cinephiles, *True Detective*, *Breaking Bad*, *Game of Thrones*, *Fargo* maybe cannot be strictly considered as movies, but certainly they are not television shows. They are particularly active in blogs and social networks, where they are proud to state their "addiction" to tv series. A rapid glance to the titles of some of the most popular Italian blogs can clearly show what can be defined as a "tele-cinephile attitude": www.serial.minds, www.amoreperleserietv.com ("love for tv series"), maniaciseriali.blogspot.it ("serial addicted"), .www.seriangolo.it ("the serial corner for quality tv series"), just to mention only a few .

As tele-cinephiles often implicitly state in their reviews (or social network comments), watching a tv show is not the

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same immersive experience as watching a movie: as a consequence, in their opinion, complex tv dramas are more like cinema than television. For the same reason, tele-cinephiles love binge-watching (Poniewicz, 2012). Compulsiveness is another quite common feature in tele-cinephiles, together with "nerdiness" (Nugent, 2011), that in this context means showing hyper-specialized knowledge and skills, even about secondary aspects of seriality; being the first ones to get new information about narrative and technical aspects of the shows, previews, gossip; to be recognized as experts in their social media communities.

In the above-mentioned international debate on complex tv drama and telephilia (Caughie, 2006), one recent key-point is whether binge-watching can influence the comprehension of storylines, or whether this practice can affect the pleasure of watching serialized tv (Jurgensen, 2012). Also on this topic, a further analysis of Italian practices should be useful in order to better understand these peculiar aspects of "tele-cinephilia".

SOME CONCLUSIVE SUGGESTIONS (AND WARNINGS): IN THE FIELD OF TV DRAMA STUDIES, IS ITALY AT RISK OF REMAINING "A PROVINCE OF THE EMPIRE"?

I have attempted here to pinpoint some of the major contradictions in the Italian debate on tv series, and tried to sketch the outlook of a peculiar attitude towards its fruition, which can be termed "tele-cinephilia".

In the Italian scenario of tv seriality studies, some risky and therefore interesting issues seem to emerge.

The first issue, as it has been argued before, is *the predominance of film studies categories in the analysis of television drama*. Instead of exploring the recent changes in the mediascape, in order to focus on the characteristics of the new forms of cinema and television storyteling, the Italian debate risks to underestimate the complexity of the new tv drama by applying to its analysis mainly the critical, aesthetic and theoretical categories of film studies, ideologically downsizing – if not totally ignoring – its television components. This peculiar attitude is clearly observable non only in the academic debate or in common discourse, but also in everyday practices of television scheduling. For instance, before the opening of a dedicated channel (Sky Atlantic, opened in 2014), tv "quality" drama was scheduled by Sky Cinema, a channel almost exclusively dedicated to movies. In line with this attitude, the marketing and programming strategies of the new channel Sky Atlantic, moreover, are quite similar to those traditionally used for the promotion of movies: previews for journalists, premieres at film festivals, awarding ceremonies in classic cinema style.

Another example of Italian "tele-cinephiliac" attitude is the deep change in the structure of the historic dictionary of Italian movies "il Morandini". In its 2014 edition it changed its title into *Dizionario dei film e delle serie televisive* (*Dictionary of films and television series)* including 250 reviews of tv dramas, a genre which was never before taken into account by its authors.

Also the recent hype on the annual ceremony of the Emmy Awards is an example of tele-cinephilia. Until a few years ago the Emmys were considered nothing more than "second-rate Academy Awards", just because they dealt with television shows. Nowadays, thanks to the inclusion of tv dramas in their scheduling, they have become a must-watch event even for cinema lovers, which involve increasingly larger audiences who comment on social networks and blogs.

The second issue is related to the critical attitude towards domestic seriality. It would be worth analyzing with more attention the *ongoing comparison between Italian and US television seriality.* Every time a new American tv drama is released, the usual volley of complaints is inevitably heard coming from several fronts (academics, professionals, journalists, and the mainstream discourse) according to which "producing *Breaking Bad (*or *True Detective*, or *Fargo*, etc.) would always be impossible in Italy". If this attitude is explainable when referred to fans, the same cannot be said if it comes from scholars (or professionals), who should be well aware that such comparisons are unjustified.

Moreover, ut seems that the success of many mainstream domestic productions is not worth being studied by tele-cinephiles. For instance, prime time series produced by broadcasters Mediaset and Rai can turn to be more easily the focus of ironic comments than of serious analyses capable of explaining their huge audiences. Even though these shows can be quite different in style, production values and technical aspects from complex tv drama (Cardini, 2004; Buonanno, 2002; Grasso, 2007; Innocenti and Pescatore 2009), they are nevertheless a cultural benchmark which cannot be ignored in order to understand most of the Italian scholars' attitude towards domestic seriality.

An important step in this direction is the analysis of the more recent tv series produced by Sky (Scaglioni and Barra,

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2014), which highlights the productive and narrative reasons of their success. *Gomorra – La serie* (2014-) is a clear example of this new trend, but it would be important to study also the reasons of failures (like for instance *1992 [2015]*, the series on the recent scandals in Italian politics, which was hailed by critics but not appreciated by the audience).

Moreover, some recent Italian series such as *Braccialetti rossi* (Raiuno, 2014-), *Tutti pazzi per amore* (Raiuno, 2008-2012), or *Tutto può succedere* (Raiuno, 2015-) could be considered with no doubts as complex tv series. They have reported a huge success both from audiences and critics; two of them stem from a careful and difficult process of adaptation from a foreign format (*Braccialetti Rossi* is adapted from the Spanish format *Polseres vermelles [2012-]*, aired by TV3, while *Tutto può succedere* is adapted from the US series *Parenthood [2010-2015]*, produced and aired by NBC); and all of them are produced and aired by the mainstream broadcaster Raiuno, which is used to more traditional forms of tv fiction.

To sum up, the analysis of complex tv drama in Italy should stay clear from the risk of further drifting into another useless opposition, according to which Italian top tv seriality should be only the one produced and broadcast by pay tv, a "niche" product close to cinema and not also, and with full rights, some of the new series produced and broadcast by traditional mainstream television.

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NARRATIVE ECOSYSTEMS THROUGH THE NETWORK ANALYSIS LENS. STEP ONE: THE PRODUCTION OF U.S. TV SERIES, BETWEEN CAPITAL AND LABOR STRATEGIES

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KEYWORDS
Social Network Analysis; TV Series; U.S. Television Industry; Narrative Ecosystems.

ABSTRACT
This paper aims to present a first step in the investigation of the environment hosting narrative eco-systems through the tools offered by Social Network Analysis (SNA).
The narrative ecosystem paradigm is a cross-disciplinary approach that considers vast narratives as the result of an ecosystemic design, where a general model is developed in advance as an evolution-ary system. Consistently with this systemic view, our idea is to bring the relations among the com-ponents of the ecosystems and the environment that host them (i.e. the entertainment industry) to the fore through the implementation of SNA. In order to do so, we focused on the relational patterns characterizing a sample of 164 U.S. TV series aired between 1984 and 2013. For each one of them, we collected data on executive producers, broadcasters, production studios, actors and writers.
Through the analysis of the networks we obtained by com-puting the data, we drew some conclu-sions regarding the ef-fectiveness of the ecological and evolutionary paradigm, the non-rigid and opportunistic patterns of alliances and coalitions among competitive firms, the relevance of the strategies of capital implemented by the firms and the strategies of labor implemented by the peo-ple.

1 The article was conceived and developed by the authors in close collaboration. As for the draft of the single sections, Marco Ruffino wrote *The Network Approach* and *The Analytical Model and Its Practical Results*. Paola Brembilla wrote *The Narrative Ecosystem Paradigm, Remarks and (Open) Conclusions* and the analytical interpretations of Tables 4, 5 and 6. *The Introduction* section was written jointly. As for the practical work, Marco Ruffino also computed the data and created the networks. Data were collected by Luca Giuliano.

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INTRODUCTION

Considering the increasing relevance of vast narratives in contemporary audiovisual production, and focusing in particular on U.S. scripted TV series, Veronica Innocenti and Guglielmo Pescatore have developed the ecosystem paradigm, a cross-disciplinary approach to examine serial narrative forms as the result of an ecosystemic design, where a general model is developed in advance as an evolutionary system with a high degree of coordination among all its components (2012: 57-72). This exploratory paper is part of a larger project that aim to complement this paradigm by defining the environment that generates and hosts these *narrative* ecosystems, in order to account for those practices, policies and dynamics that affect and shape the design and evolution of the storytelling and its components.

Our main idea is that narrative ecosystems are generated and hosted by a broader environment that includes both production (networks, broadcasters, studios, actors, etc.) and consumption (viewers, users, fans, etc). Commercial strategies, along with individual choices and collective practices, can affect the products in many ways, pushing the narrative universes to adapt to the modifications, dynamics and needs of the external environment, therefore fostering a co-evolution of the involved and interlinked ecosystems. That is why we are going to adopt a systemic and non-linear approach in order to look for these possible patterns of co-evolution, more than just for deterministic relations between causes and effects. Coherently with this view, we have identified Social Network Analysis (SNA) as a powerful methodological approach, useful in disclosing the inner structure of the intertwined systems. In fact, SNA is not a novelty in studying the entertainment production systems, with significant value-added results.

The aim of this preparatory paper is to verify the real extent of the SNA approach, focusing on the relational patterns characterizing a sample of TV series, produced and aired from 1984 to 2013. The links are expressed as a participation of one or more broadcasters, studios and/or professionals (i.e. actors, writer,s producers – seen as "human productive factor") in two or more series. The existence of common resources between products is assumed both as an inter-firm cooperation strategy outcome, and as a possible personal "defecting choice" by a key personality, i.e. the result of a mix between capital and labor strategies, in a complex and partially self-structured environment.

1. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Our theoretical framework draws on two intertwined concepts: the ecosystem paradigm and the network approach, both encompassing a complexity view.

1.1 The Ecosystem Paradigm

The ecosystem paradigm takes into consideration a wide range of agents and factors, different from one another in their basic nature: producers, actors, audience, narrative elements, economic background, etc. (Innocenti and Pescatore, 2012). It is a complex and heterogeneous scenario where the TV series are the outcomes of the interplay among these elements and the environment they inhabit, just like a natural ecosystem. Given this complexity, that necessarily require a cross-disciplinary approach to the subject of study, the ecology metaphor naturally works as a proper and effective theoretical framework.

Obviously, we need to account for a basic difference between natural and narrative ecosystems: though they both attain to some regulatory principles, the former is based on *genetic* ones (the behavior of the agents is strictly codified, although subject to evolutionary pressures), while the latter is *rationality*-driven. In other words, narrative ecosystems have to deal with the social-economic teleology of agents (producers, actors, audiences); each one of them needs to maximize something – being it capital, revenue, career perspective, personal satisfaction or a mix of them all. According to these needs and goals, negotiations among parts are enacted, carried out and end up affecting the final products. That is why, in order to take into account the players' behavior, we need to add the concepts of *power* and *control* to the ecological metaphor, drawing on socio-political sciences and, in particular, to a model developed by economist Albert O. Hirschman (1970), which we find particularly suited for the matter.

Working on the responses of consumers in deteriorating quality goods, Hirschman developed the *loyalty, exit and voice model*. Basically, members of an organization have two possible responses to dissatisfaction caused by a perceived decrease in benefits from belonging to that group: from a state of *loyalty* to the organization, they can either *exit* (terminate the relation) or *voice* (communicate in order to fix, improve or change the relation). We find that this pattern can be applied to the subject of our analysis, as a starting point to map some industrial and social practices, tactics and strategies. Let's take the case of actors. From a state of *loyalty* represented by the

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contract with the network or the studio, an actor can either exit through the termination of that contract, or *voice* through negotiations, which usually results into a production standoff. Once the deal is made, the situation can be restored back to *loyalty* (a new contract), or we can have an exit if the deal is not made. Both *voice* and *exit* can be used to identify and evaluate the crisis of a series, but if the narrative ecosystem is resilient enough, it should be able to recover.[2]

Similarly, we find that a *loyalty-voice-exit* model can be applied to audience as well. Serial products, as long-term narratives, require a high degree of consumers' *loyalty* in order to survive and to thrive. Nevertheless, they can also get very unstable, due to internal and external perturbations of the ecosystem. Viewers can simply decide to quit following the show: that is an *exit*. Fans, instead, could try to voice in order to express their disappointment in a network decision[3] or a precise productive and narrative strategy.[4] Like in the case of actors, depending on how things work out, fans can either go back to a *loyalty* status, or *exit*.

Once again, both *exit* and *voice* can be used to measure the health of a series in relation to its target audience. But, as Hirschman argues, there are also some important differences between the two of them: *exit* only provides the warning sign of a decline and, when it happens, it might be already too late for the series to recover. *Voice*, however, is more informative and provides reasons for the crisis. The interplay among *loyalty*, *voice* and *exit* is also extremely important: by providing greater feedback opportunities and by consequently showing an effort to adapt to the fans' needs or the actors' requests, *exit* could be reduced; conversely, a negative response or no response at all from the production side could lead to a direct *exit*. Broadcasters and producers can also carry out strategies to reduce the risks of *exit*, for instance by tightening up the contracts of actors or by leveraging on the value of brand loyalty for consumers. We therefore find that the *loyalty-voice-exit* model could work as a proxy between the two levels of production and consumption, providing the social-political frame we need in order to identify the dynamics of power and control that shape the narrative ecosystem.

1.2 The Network Approach

An ecological system (i.e., an ecological web) may be seen as a real complex network, object of several and increasingly interdisciplinary studies, aimed to understand the mechanisms that determine their topology (Réka and Barabási, 2002) and evolution. The network approach is operationally known as Social Network Analysis. Given its fitness to a wide range of areas, the SNA has been used to map and study relations among different agents in many contexts and disciplines, from chemical reactions to computer links, crossing economics, history, biology, and obviously anthropology and sociology. In psychology, a direct linkage between Ecological System Theory and SNA has been recently assumed both in a theoretical and practical perspective, as "a conceptual framework for understanding what ecological systems are and how they relate to one another" (Neal and Neal, 2013: 735). The network is a representational and computational paradigm, very robust and useful in modeling interdependent agents, shifting the epistemic focus from objects *themselves* to objects *as defined by their mutual relations*, which can be seen as structural constraints rather than informative connections. Consequently, the real object of the SNA are relational data, seen as information that cannot be reduced to the properties of the individual agents, but that can rather be seen as "properties of the relational systems of agents built up from connected pairs of interacting agents" (Scott, 2013: 3). Therefore, SNA is a useful approach to discover the

2 For instance, in 2012, six actors of *Modern Family* (2010-present) caused the cancellation of a table read and tense weeks of negotiations over a salary standoff. A new deal was reached with producer 20th Century Fox Television, mainly because the actors had a high contractual power and the studio could not afford to lose all of their leading characters. Things can change in ensemble series like *Grey's Anatomy* (2005-present), where the presence of many characters and multiple storylines allows the production to be more flexible over cast turnover. For more details on the evolution of narratives in relation to productive factors, see Pescatore, Innocenti, Brembilla (2014).

3 In many cases, hardcore fans organized campaigns to protest against the cancellation of their favorite series. Some of them were successful, for instance *Star Trek: The Original Series* (1966-1969) was the first TV show saved by fans through a letter writing-blitz coordinated by sci-fi lovers Bjo and Joe Trimble. Others did not completely worked. More recently, *Jericho* (2006-2008) fans managed to buy their favorite series one more season by sending the network 20 tons of peanuts, a reference to the finale of the first season. CBS brought the show back for another short season, just to cancel it for good at the end of the year. The *Veronica Mars* (2004-2007) case is also well-known: a group of fans of the series, calling themselves "Cloud Watchers", organized several campaign both to bring more viewers to the series in order to ensure its continuation and then to save the show itself from cancellation. None of the campaigns worked. However, a few years later, a *Veronica Mars* film (*Veronica Mars*, Rob Thomas, 2013) was financed through a crowdfunding campaign on Kickstarter.

4 Viewers' feedbacks on forums, blogs or social networks can sometimes affect TV shows scripts. Writers and executive producers often refuse to read online comments on their shows – for instance, Bill Prady often reminds his fans on Twitter not to pitch him any idea for his show *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-present). However, sometimes they just can't ignore their voices: it is the case of *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-present), when creator Julie Plec and her writers' room had to work an idea into the script in order to solve a fans' question that persistently popped up on online threads. For more information, see Jannarone (2007).

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inner relational structures of production systems, in order to identify "those forms of social organization that now play the roles that were attributed to forms in the past (i.e. that act as independent units for decision making, optimization, etc.)" (Berkowitz, 1988: 265), typically characterizing the TV economics landscape.

In the world of movies and entertainment, SNA is a widespread approach, coherently with the large and inexpensive information availability provided by Web resources (i.e., IMDb www.imdb.com and AMG www.allmusic.com, not to mention the rich world of thematic social communities). A general literature review shows two main types of application fields: (*1*) the structure and dynamics of the production systems, and (*2*) the behaviors of the online social networks engaged in reviewing movies. As for the former, we refer to the seminal work of Fass *et al.* (1996), usually known as the *Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon Game*. In this network, the nodes are the actors, and two nodes have a common edge if the corresponding actors have acted in a movie together. Based on the *Small Worlds Theory* and the *Six Degrees of Separation* concept (Milgram and Travers, 1969; Newman, et al., 2001), the Game assumes that any individual involved in the Hollywood film industry can be linked within six steps, through a role played in a film, to actor Kevin Bacon. The so-called Bacon-number of an actor or actress, is his or her number of degrees of separation from Bacon and its computation creates a co-stardom network. The movie network shows a non-random structure: the average path length of the actor network is close to that of a random graph with the same size and average degree (3.65 compared with 2.9), but its clustering coefficient (the measure of the degree to which nodes in a graph tend to cluster together) is more than 100 times higher than a random graph (Watts and Strogatz, 1998). That explain the "strange property" of many networks to support a relevant connectivity between nodes/actors, also with a very low density (number of links per node).

The same approach applied to the creative artists who made Broadway musicals from 1945 to 1989 (Uzzi and Spiro, 2005) and to pop musicians (Park et al., 2007), shows small world properties as relevant resources affecting their creativity and performance. Following Uzzi (2008), it is very important to observe the relevance of clustering coefficient (strongly depending on the network topology), compared with the simple relational degree of each actor. The author found "a nonlinear association with the production of financially and artistically successful shows. When the clustering coefficient ratio is low or high, the financial and artistic success of the industry is low, while an intermediate level of clustering is associated with successful shows". The organizational form prevail over the single actors' position and creativity is successfully enhanced by a "middle-coupled" environment.

Cattani and Ferriani (2008), referring to the context of the Hollywood motion pictures industry,[5] have come to a similar conclusion. Creativity at an individual level appears shaped by the position occupied by the single agent in the social-productive network: specifically, individuals who occupy an intermediate position between the core and the periphery of their social system are more likely to achieve creative results.

Another important organizational dimension explored by SNA is related to international co-productions (ICP) in film industry. Shichijo (2012) – using IMDb, combined with the Motion Picture Producer Association Japan database, Korean Film Council database, and all-cinema database (http://www.allcinema.net/) – has explored all the 11,767 feature films produced from 1970 to 2007 in Japan, China and South Korea, which included 7,658 professionals either as director, directors of photography and screen writers. Following the author, "the experience of joining in ICP affects the centrality of professionals in social networks within each country's social network. [...] The social capital formation rate according to the degree of film-making experience is higher for ICP experienced professionals than non-ICP experienced professionals. This suggests ICP effect not only economically beneficial but also beneficial on fostering talented professionals".

In short, all the papers we have seen support a relevant hypothesis: the structure of the social-productive system is a critical factor in defining the characteristics of the entertainment products (movies, musicals, songs), acting on the "creativity-resource", not only ascribed to the genius of the author/actor, but specified in terms of position in the network, and even more in its own topology.

On the social side, several scholars explored the effectiveness of SNA in studying the structure and behaviors of the audiences. Fatemi and Tokarchuk (2012), referring to a wide set of movies and their reviewers collected from IMDb, showed a power law topology, consistent with the general Internet structure (Réka and Barabási, 2002). Only few movies reviewed present a very high degree in the network (link from/to other movies, by the common reviewers). As the au-

5 The data consist of the entire population of core crew members who worked in at least one of the 2,137 movies distributed in the United States by the eight major studios (Universal, Paramount, Warner Bros, Columbia-Tristar, Disney, 20th Century Fox, and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer), plus Dreamworks Pictures and their correspondings.

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thors claim, "the observed result suggests that the structure of the IMDb network is a social graph with number of small tightly clustered communities held together with nodes with high degree."

Krauss *et al.* (2008) explored online forum discussions on IMDb by examining the correlation of the social network structure with external metrics such as box office revenue and Oscar Awards. They observe that discussion patterns on IMDb (a network characteristic) could predict Academy Awards nominations and box office success. A similar approach is carried out by Doshi et al. (2010), who worked on the prediction of movie prices using a sentiment analysis tool representing the general buzz of the movie from the Web and the bloggers, assumed as unconscious signals about popularity.

As for the audiences, treating media networks as a set of media outlets connected by the audiences that overlap among them, Ksiazek (2013) traced large-scale patterns of media use.

As we have seen, movie production systems and social forum activities can be attributed the same structure: both of them are based on small-world/power law topology and a significant correlation is observed between social behaviors and market performances. In terms of narrative ecology, all those evidences reinforce the evolutionary perspective, based on an emerging relation between structure (network topology, role and positions of the actors) and outcomes (movie and musical features). Finally, the richness and, at the same time, the complexity of the IMDb universe is assumed by other authors as a promising field to develop more user-oriented techniques of visualization and graphical analysis (Ahmed *et al,* 2007; Shen *et al.,* 2006), useful in representing the structural intricacies of the entertainment production systems.

2. THE ANALYTICAL MODEL AND ITS PRACTICAL RESULTS

2.1 A Basic Model

Using the ecological metaphor, a TV series may be seen as an "organism" necessarily susceptible to coherence constraints towards the environment where it lives. If we assume that TV series are correlated, in their narrative structure, to the production environment, the characterization of the whole network set becomes very useful. In this view, regarding both the nature of the theoretical assumptions and to the data features, we propose a "first step" general model (table 1), showing the basic interrelations between three logical and operational categories: the TV series, the firms and the single professionals involved in the TV production business. In SNA terms, six kinds of networks can characterize this universe:

- two "TV series networks", respectively expressed by co-appearance of professional people and by producers' co-participation;
- similarly, two "producers networks", respectively coordinated by co-produced series and by people allocated in there;
- obviously, two "professional networks", respectively bound by at least one common TV series and by a common firm.

Each pair of networks is not necessarily isomorphic, the internal differences representing both a specific strategic choice of the firms (assuming risks, capital and/or sharing "on contract" human resources) and of the people (following the employer's strategy or defecting and acting against it). Cooperation and defecting schemes may play a role in maintaining/transferring some characteristics within the TV series, which in turn can be assumed in itself as a highly structured narrative networks, depending to (and, at the same time, organizing) their environment. Verifying this hypothesis, demands an extensive network modeling activity, concerning all of the system's layers.

In practical terms, the available public data allowed to build only four networks (the complete pairs of TV series, the producers and the people via TV series), since the direct links between producers and professional are not available in a reliable way.

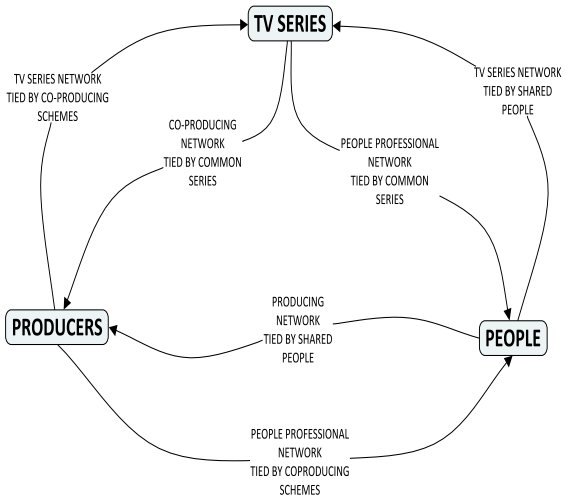

TABLE 1. A SIMPLE, PRELIMINARY MODEL

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2.2 TV Series Sample, Data Handling and Network Building

We have adopted, in a smaller-scale, the same approach used by Uzzi (2008) to analyze the Broadway musical industry, narrowing the data collection only to Internet database, without using any other complementary source (as – in the Uzzi's work – direct interviews). The data have been drawn from DBPedia Live and IMDb. The former is considered the semantic web mirror of Wikipedia and it is an open platform that allows users to extract and reuse structured content from Wikipedia, therefore querying relationships and properties associated with Wikipedia resources. We chose DBPedia as the main source because of the automation in data harvesting, but we then needed to manually integrate its data with the information provided by IMDB which, more specialized and complete, ultimately worked as an adjustment filter. The sample includes 164 TV series, produced and aired from 1984 to 2013. In this 30-years spanning period of time, the TV industry has certainly undergone changes and evolutions (for instance, the affirmation of pay cable and the quality TV economic and aesthetic model). However, it is also true that these decades present a rather steady competitive environment, composed of broadcast players (the networks) and cable players (both basic and premium) only. In fact, the major competitive upheavals brought about by the launching of the over-the-top players (OTTs) original programming, seem to occur either right in 2013 or after 2013, and are therefore excluded *a priori* from our sample. Furthermore, some of the most resilient and long-standing practices are those steering the products and labor exchanges – i.e., networks and professionals will sell, buy and sign deals according to a mixture of contingent commercial and creative factors. We therefore believe that this sample could work on a broad level in depicting some ground rules of the scenario.[6] That being said, the series selection criteria, oriented by their typological representativeness, is based on the shows' success in terms of popularity, as known by online evaluations (such as the IMDb metrics) and hit-names' relevance. For instance, we included *666 Park Avenue* (2012-2013) although it was canceled after only one season, but it is nevertheless considered high-profile because of the hit-names involved. Some British series are also included, since they present a certain relevance in the U.S. market thanks to exchange and co-production relations. For each series, we collected data on executive producers (301), broadcasters (25), studios (140), actors (1.399) and writers (54).

After structuring the vectors, we organized data into two bipartite graphs, a "TV series by companies involved in their production" network and a "co-stardom" network, where the two types of nodes correspond to actors/writers and series. Edges exist, only with a dichotomic value, if the nodes have a relationship ("actors in a TV series"). Through a simple cross-product, we obtained four 1-mode matrices, in which the rows and columns refer to the same kinds of objects and the link are undirected and weighted by the number of common occurrences in the original 2-mode matrix:

- the "TV series network by common companies", expression of the intentional cooperation strategies between firms;
- the "TV series network by professional co-appearance", expression – in an unknown ratio – of the interplay between firms and personal strategies;
- the "Co-stardom network by common TV series", the social and professional structure involved in writing, directing and playing fictions;
- and the "Co-production network by common TV series", representing the sum of the single alliances and cooperation schemes underlying the sample.

The methodological choice to use the 1-mode matrices instead of the original 2-mode is consistent with the model shown in Table 1, as well as with the models adopted by the authors cited in the previous pages. Although possible (i.e., in historical perspective, Borgatti and Everett, 1997), the direct analysis of the bipartite graph does not fit the analytical model shown in table 1. Furthermore, the direct approach is not necessarily better than a "conversion approach" (that we have used), since "dual-projection analysis methods are generally safe to use and often have conceptual advantages over direct methods (and in many cases can be used to obtain the same results as direct methods)", as the same authors clearly argued in a recent critical paper (Everett and Borgatti, 2013).

2.3 The TV Series Networks, Between Company Cooperation and Professional Participation

The TV series network based on companies shows some interesting topological properties. At first glance, we can easily detect a giant component (151 nodes), combined with 11

6 However, we do not rule out the possibility to work further on it, either by including more years to the sample or by fragmenting it into decades, so to build an evolutionary comparison among them. Potentially, this could be one of the next step of this research project.

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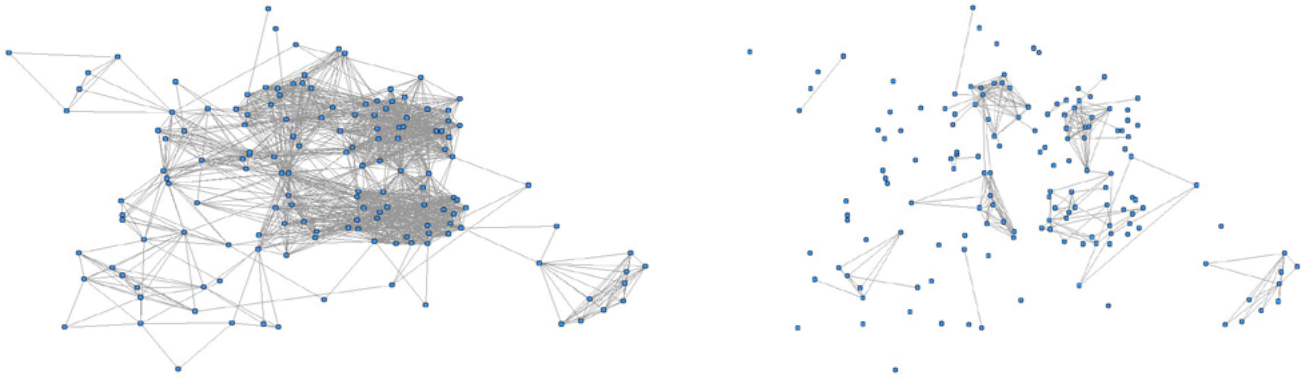

TABLE 2. TV SERIES BY COMMON COMPANIES – MAIN COMPONENT

isolated single TV series and a micro 2-nodes network. The main component (Table 2, upper picture) shows small world properties, presenting a low density (0.167), matched with a clustering coefficient one size bigger (1.024 not weighted), an average geodesic distance of 2.7 and a binomial (Poisson-like) degree distribution. The net is clearly structured in a "core/periphery" model (Girvan and Newman, 2002). The main part of the edges (84,4%), presents a mere value of 1, which means the greatest part of TV series are connected only by one common company. A simple dichotomization at the edge value >1 (namely discarding all the links weighting 1 dramatically simplify the network (Table 2, bottom picture), highlight its inner structure, organized in 12 independent subnet, two of them linking about 30 TV series each one. This is the entire set of co-production cases. A further dichotomization produces a severe loss of information.

Already at this first analytical step, the TV series appears to be linked by two distinct connective logics. The first and widely spread logic is the productive behavior of the single companies, 40% of them producing 2 or more (just to 29) series each. It is the widespread "1:more" ratio to generate the greatest part of connections between products, therefore the relative closeness representing the membership to the same strategic control. But the whole network structure, and mainly its width and the small-world properties, is due to the presence of a second type of connective logic: the co-producing schemes between two or more companies, whether in the same chain of control, or – and that is the most productive situation – representing a real risk-sharing between two or more majors. The cross-sectional nature of the sample over a significant period of time causes an accumulation of these cases, not so frequent in itself, bearing the so wide continuity of the network. In an evolutionary, ecosystemic metaphor, the few "bridges" between endogenous and homogeneous subgroups of products may act as a potential crossbreeding factor, reducing the transitional costs and enhancing the learning-by-interacting opportunities. The cohesiveness of the TV series world is the outcome of a mix of cooperation/competition strategies, structuring the products in to a set of interacting or interdependent components forming an integrated system.

As we have seen, a second TV series network can be produced taking, as a link generator, the common professionals (actors, writers, producers, etc.). In this case as well, we obtained a giant component (Table 3, left picture) in the same magnitude order of the previous one (137 nodes), followed by 24 isolates TV series and one autonomous small network, 3 nodes wide. The principal net shows different properties: density is significantly reduced (0.033, one one order lesser than the previous network) and so is the clustering coefficient (0.325 not weighted); the average geodesic distance is 4.2, much more than in the previous case. The structure is not hierarchical and the degree distribution is rather log-normal like. Following a dichotomization at the edge value >1, the network breaks up in 35 isolates nodes and 12 small networks (Table 3, right picture), only one of them more than 5 nodes wide.

The first comparison between the two networks, within the methodological limits, suggests two types of evidences:

- in both cases, the clear presence and the weight of the giant component confirms the structural role assumed by the shared resources. TV series, seen in a cumulative, diachronic view, are not a simple whole of disconnected instances, but an organized world, in which the links may allow a dynamic cognitive interactions, potentially operating on formats, aesthetics and audiences' perceptions;

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TABLE 3. TV SERIES BY COMMON PROFESSIONALS (ACTORS AND OTHER HUMAN RESOURCES)

- at the same time, the coordination schemes are quite different, the shared companies carrying out a more relevant contribution to the whole connectivity and a more defined topology than the shared professionals.

A reliable way to draw a structural comparison between the two networks consists in analyzing their logical product, via the AND operator: the new network only holds the links presents in the same time in both the sources. The initial 164 TV series fall off to 78, 30 of which present themselves as isolated nodes. Only 48 TV series set up 11 fragmented networks, the most relevant of 28 and 21 nodes wide (Table 4). Therefore, less than a half of the sample shows a double coordination mechanism: by common companies and by shared resources. Both the networks present a near-linear backbone structure, with a relevant diameter, crossing and integrating some local micro sub-networks.

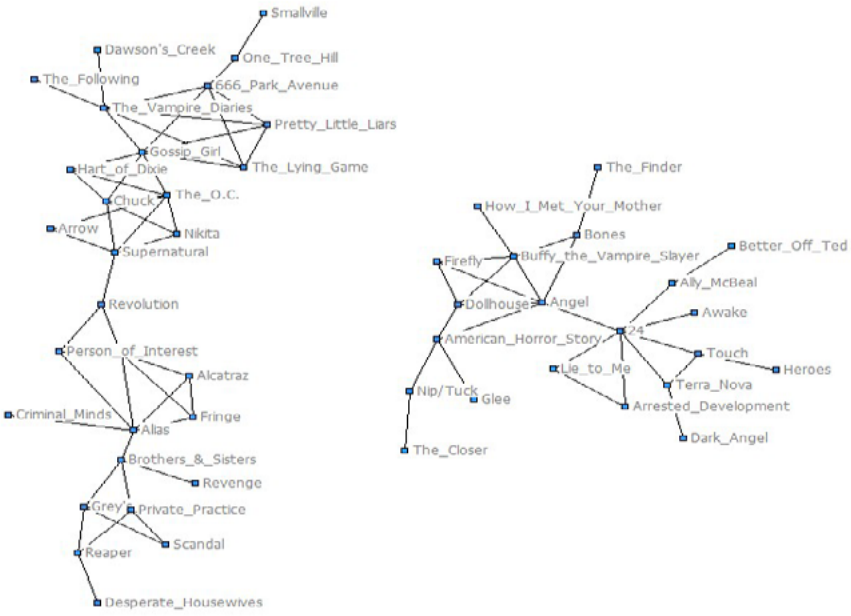

TABLE 4. THE MORE RELEVANT SUBNETS SHARED BY THE TWO TV SERIES NETWORKS

Interestingly, though we know that professionals figures such as actors and writers tend to frequently move from one production to another, by observing the TV series in Table 4 we can infer that the coordination mechanism by common professionals still revolves around the big broadcasting networks (the so-called 'Big Four', ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, plus The CW), that actually structure the backbones of the network. In other words, all of the series composing the network belong to one of the Big Four plus The CW, or to one of their own-and-operated cable stations. On the one hand, its is clear that contracts are the main reason for this structure, especially when it comes to the sub-nets. In fact, long-term productions often require deals that bind professionals to a certain show or a

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package of in-house productions for several years, even decades. On the other, and that is less obvious, we can also note that these same human assets tend to keep on moving mainly from one TV network to another, even if the broadcasters are potential competitors.

In an attempt to better understand the interplay between companies' rationality and people's behaviors (seen as proxy for "labor v. capital" strategies), it is useful to examine the TV series network made up only by the professionals working in two or more shows, across the sample time span. As shown in table 5, a giant component dominates the landscape, with three minor networks. On the whole, a very relevant amount of series (124 out of 164, equal to 75,6% of the sample) share one or more professionals each other, without any common company. The main component present a very reduced density (0.023) and, for the first time, a similar clustering coefficient (0.024). Consequently, the average geodesic distance reach the value of 5.4. The core of the net is non hierarchical and only a little vulnerable by deletion of single nodes. The network does not show any typical topology.

However, observing again the TV series appearing in the network, we could speculate about a qualitative trend. The crowded central cluster is in fact mostly made of broadcast network series (e.g. *Grey's Anatomy*, *24*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Desperate Housewives*...) that have proven to be the forerunners of certain innovative aesthetic styles and narrative formats (Innocenti and Pescatore, 2008, Mittell, 2014). These series also look like central nodes from which several links originate. Ultimately, these links lead to the edges of the network, where we mostly find cable shows that are usually evaluated and reviewed as 'edgy', 'transgressive', 'quality' (e.g. *Girls*, *The Newsroom*, *True Blood*, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *Episodes*, *Californication*...), an overall qualitative improvement from the usual broadcast network shows. We could therefore argue that once know-hows, competences and perhaps a certain recognizability attached to his or her name are acquired, professionals tend to move from the most central and critically underrated part of the industry (the big broadcast networks) to the critically acclaimed periphery. However, we deem it necessary to acknowledge that there are exceptions to this rule (for instance, the presence of quality benchmark *Mad Men* at the center of the network), meaning that the hypothesis should be further investigated.

Definitely, the inner structure of the TV series world is a complex mix of two kinds of rationality, with a different impact force, composing a "porous" system, coherent with diffusive processes. The wide part of the series is deeply embedded in this environment, with a relevant proximity in terms of shared resources and, most likely, opportunities both of self-structuring and hybridization. This "articulated compactness" may also support the audience perceptions towards a really specific narrative genre. All these characters are consistent with the ecosystem paradigm, supporting the experimental SNA approach.

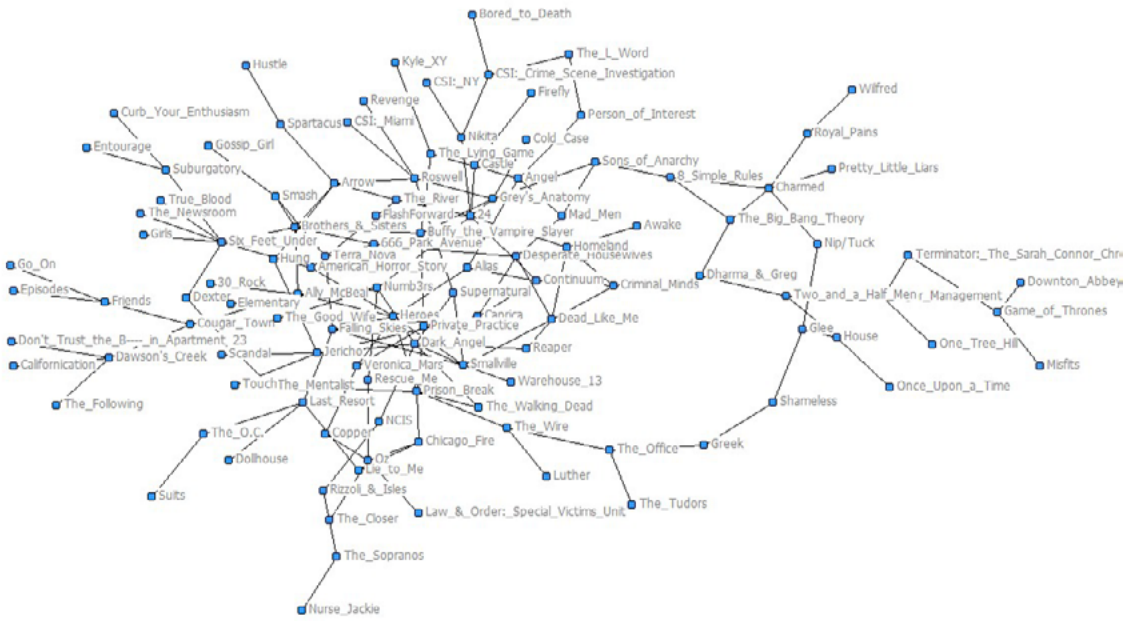

TABLE 5. THE TV SERIES NETWORK DEFINED ONLY BY PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIORS

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2.4 The Productive Forces: Companies and Professional Networks

By affiliation from 2-mode matrix "TV series/companies" we obtain three companies networks, as usual organized in a giant component (121 cases) and in two micro instances (9 cases in all). Only 10 firms remain isolated.

The first and more substantial research object presents a low overall density (0.061), matched with an impressive clustering coefficient (1.692), the highest in all the available datasets. The average geodesic distance is not very short (3.4), representing the "star-based" component. The node's degree distribution is Pareto-like, showing signs of heavy tail. The network is highly structured around a few relevant companies, with a huge coordination power, represented by the betweenness centrality proxy[7]. The use of different algorithms shows a consistent pattern of sub networks, clearly correlated with the more central nodes.

In table 6 we can observe that the most important broadcasters (in terms of market value) are the biggest nodes of the network and, more in detail, they are the ones belonging to a big media conglomerate (they are indeed the afore-mentioned "few relevant companies").[8] As of the overall structure of the network, it is interesting to note that the most detached part of the network includes the premium cable HBO ecosystem, which actually looks detached from the rest of the TV industry environment. It is not only about premium TV vs. broadcast television, otherwise Showtime would be as much detached. Nor it has to do with proprietary independence, since HBO belongs to Time Warner Inc., which looks as an important node of the massive part thanks to Warner Bros. Television. Thinking about the overall HBO business strategy, funded on the dismissal of television traditional contents and aesthetics in favor of what has been defined a cinematic quality television (Akass and McCabe, 2007), we can see how the network graphically represents the actualization of the strategic catchphrase "It's Not Television. It's HBO". Therefore, it seems that HBO does not only detach ideally from the rest of the TV environment, but also effectively through the employment of specific and exclusive resources.

7 "An actor is central if it lies between other actors on their geodesics, implying that to have a large "betweenness" centrality, the actor must be between many of the actors via their geodesics" (Wasserman Faust: 188). A geodetic is the shortest path from all nodes to all others, that pass through the node object of measure; the betweenness centrality measures the number of geodetic paths for each node. The higher the betweenness centrality, the higher the probability that the node play a coordination, relay or power role in the network.

8 For instance, HBO, HBO Original Programming and Warner Bros. Television belong to Time Warner Inc., NBC and Universal Television belong to Comcast NBCUniversal, ABC Studios belongs to The Walt Disney Company.

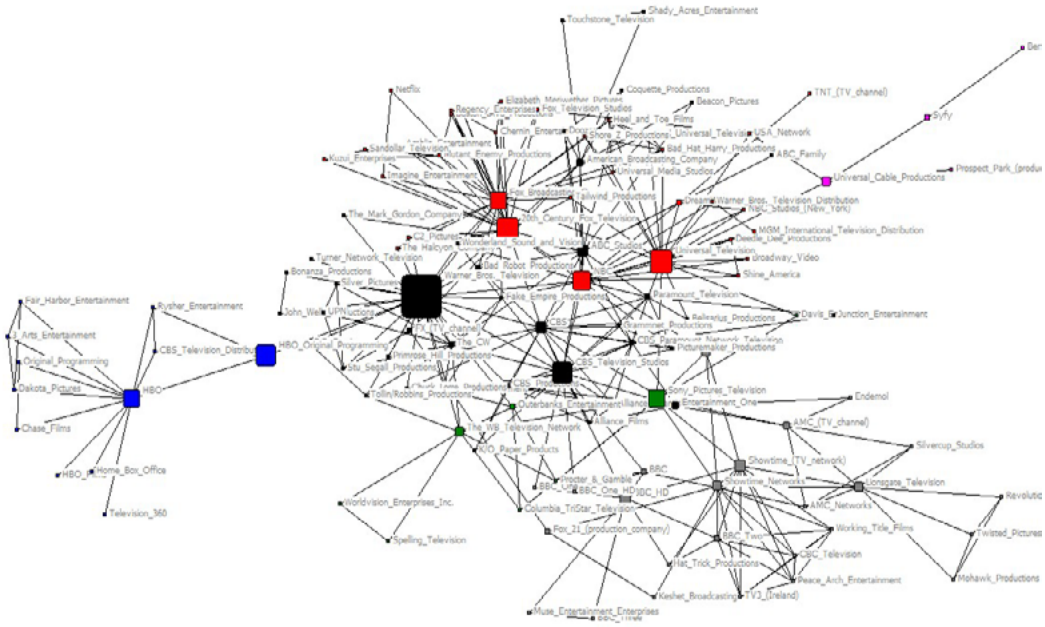

TABLE 6. COMPANIES BY COMMON TV SERIES, WITH BETWEENNESS CENTRALITY MEASURE – MAIN COMPONENT

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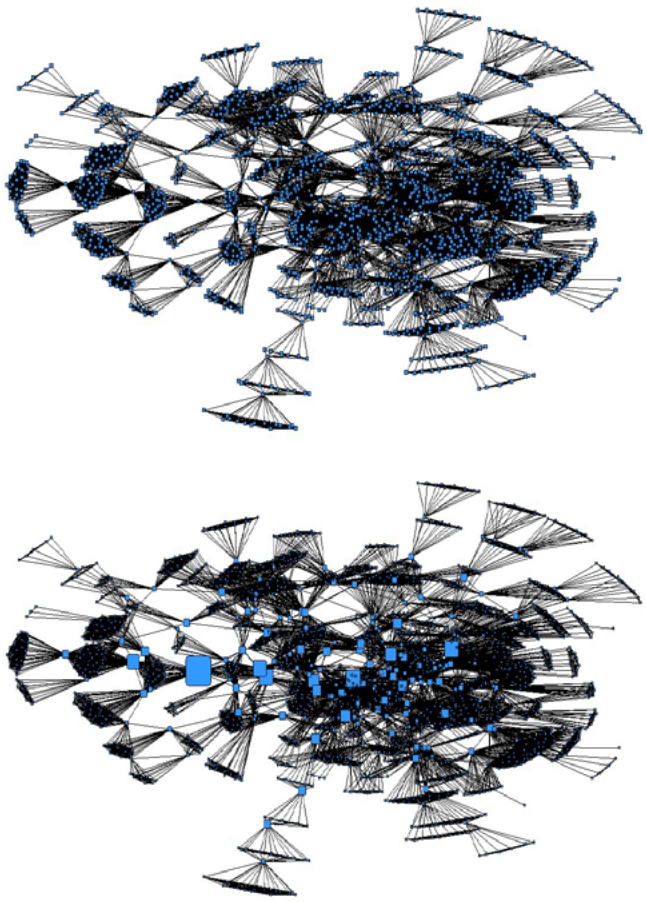

TABLE 7. PROFESSIONALS BY TV SERIES- MAIN COMPONENT

Also, the network represents clearly, although partially, the result of the strategic mix between cooperation (opportunistic) and competition, emerging from a cumulative view across the temporal span of the sample.

Quite different is the professional network, made up by affiliation of 2-mode matrix "TV series/professionals". The 1,869 peoples are organized in 21 different small networks from 2 to 36 nodes and in a giant component made up by 1,682 nodes (90% of the people in the sample). In all, only 11% of the people have more than one participation in a TV series. However, at first sight (Table 7, left picture), the TV series environment appears as a rather cohesive space. The usual characterization of the more relevant network shows a very low overall density (0.012), combined by a relevant clustering coefficient (0.942 not weighted), a long geodesic average distance (5.4) and a log-normal like degree distribution. Only 203 peoples (12% of the whole network) present a betweenness value greater than zero (Table 7, right picture, the dimension of the nodes being proportional to the measure), distributed in a strongly asymmetric way: 13 case sums up 25% of the total betweenness; 40 cases the half.

The cohesive property of the network is clearly due to a few professionals, having typically two or few more participation in series. A naive glance at the pictures already shows the inner connections logic: each "fan-shaped" sub-net represents people that are mutually involved in the same TV series; the single sub-nets are linked to each other by a single actor, with the partial exception of the core part of the network, showing a reinforced pattern. In this specific topology, higher betweenness values comes from a "legacy effect": the nodes involved are the intermediate connector of a sub-nets' chain, organized in a star-like shape: in this position, the node is crossed for a relevant number of geodetic path, without that implying a strategic role in the network. On the one hand, a strong betweenness is more the result of a chance-effect over the time span, than the outcome of an actor's rational choice; on the other hand, the individual opportunities to "migrate" from a TV series to another (for personal reasons, rather than for a company's strategy) present a potential structuring effect on the whole professional system.

The result is consistent with the outcomes of a recent work of Gallos et al. (2013) which, in reference to an IMDb subset, shows the topological importance of the links strengths over a large period of time, and the subsequent transition from a small-world to a long tail, power law structure. Finally, shifting from one series to another is a highly individual movement: no other people are involved. The professional network is very far from a possible "communities-of-practice" model (Wenger 1998) and no specific sign of "strength of weak ties" (Granovetter, 1973, 1983) are detected. After the first step dichotomization only 54 nodes survive. A clear confirmation of the scarce network deepness.

REMARKS AND (OPEN) CONCLUSIONS

This paper aimed to present a first step in the investigation of the environment hosting narrative ecosystems through the tools offered by SNA. Given what we have seen so far, we are able to draw three main points.

First, from an ecosystemic standpoint, the high degree of connection among the networks and their overall structures, support the idea that we are dealing with an ecological model. This model is characterized by practices and dynamics of radiation, reciprocal influence and interdependency. The

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environment looks weakly structured (at least from the hierarchical point of view) and, as such, it is apparently adaptive and inclined to forms of evolution.

Second, though the structure of U.S. TV industry is certainly an oligopoly from the proprietary standpoint, the networks account for non-rigid and opportunistic patterns of alliances and coalitions. Some main nodes remain central, but the structures around them change according to different strategies and relations.

Thirds, the graphical representation of the networks highlighted two main strategies. The first one, that we have named *strategy of capital*, is employed by companies and centers on the management of financial and human assets in order to produce a successful product. At this point, we account for relations of co-production that seems to be more occasional, rather than actually based on structural alliances – which mostly occur, instead, when we talk about proprietary relations. Furthermore, some series work as 'connectors' in the network. In some cases, this appears to be a result of isolated episodes of cooperation among producers, which proves consistent with the concept of opportunistic coalition. The second strategy is what we have defined *strategy of labor*, since it is mainly based on the individual choices of people. However, given the scattered form of the networks, we can assume that these strategies are not grounded on "communities of practice" and not much regularly repeated. It is likely (even if not yet proved by a proper research on specific cases of contracts and deals) that individual choices prevail over external or hetero-directed choices made by the companies. It is in fact interesting to notice that capital strategies networks are not isomorphic with work strategy networks, therefore proving that there is no structural alignment between the two strategies. This lack of isomorphism could affect the narrative universe in what Innocenti and Pescatore call the "perturbations" of the ecosystem (2012: 68). These perturbations have to do with institutional decision (e.g. a changing in the programming slot) or exceptional events such as the 2007-2008 Writer's Strike or a defection of a cast member, which inevitably end up affecting the storylines, bringing to the fore the *loyalty-exit-voice model* we used as a proxy in the theoretical framework.

These remarks lead us to some more considerations on the combination of SNA and a general ecosystemic approach. Our work resonates with the idea that the narrative ecosystem paradigm, being inherently composite, is like a puzzle: it needs a wide and diverse range of approaches, hypothesis, tests, studies, examinations that, brought together, form a broader picture. In this context, our contribution shed some lights on the relational dynamics of the industry, proving the existence of an ecological model, of opportunistic patterns and strategies that, although different by nature, share the need to maximize the subjects satisfaction. Therefore, the drawn networks offered a general description of the topologies of the environment containing the narrative ecosystems, rather than providing clear-out rules of how these nodes and links directly contribute or determine the existence of a TV series. In order to do so, we necessarily need to integrate this model with specific case studies and qualitative analysis. For instance, Pescatore, Brembilla and Innocenti (2014) argued that the most resilient ecosystems are those able to endure and to adapt to internal and external upheavals thanks to their inherently ergonomic nature. For instance, the series *Grey's Anatomy* has carried out a successful selective evolution for more than ten years now, "mainly thanks to a setting that allows to remove and introduce new characters and storylines according to internal or external needs – a decline in ratings, the defection of actors or other exceptional events." (2014: 3). In this case, given what we have seen so far, we ourselves could argue that series like that benefit from the opportunistic nature of the industry relations: this flexibility could cause upheavals in case of a main actor defection, but the ensemble nature of the show, i.e. the low incidence of the professionals with a significant betweenness centrality and the absence of a "community of practice" topology, could also result into an increased resilience in terms of cast turnover. This is why we strongly underline the exploratory nature of this paper, wishing for further investigations and collaborations.

So far, we have drawn some general conclusions on the depicted productive scenario, though single cases prove to be interesting and worth of further, in-depth analysis – such as the peculiar position of HBO emerging for table 6.

As for the next steps, on the one hand, before deepening our analysis through the introduction of new factors (i.e., the time-factor), we deem it opportune to make interpretative hypothesis based on external factors (for instance, types of broadcasters, TV series genres, etc), in order to better define the object of study and to verify its expected features. On the other, we will retain the *Loyalty-Voice-Exit Model* for the consumption side as well, keeping in mind that we need to adopt a different approach to the analysis from this other standpoint. The general idea, in this case, would be to map the mutual exchanges among production, audiences and fan communities in order to complete the definition of the external environment of the TV series' single ecosystems.

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AN ANALYSIS OF *TRANSPARENT* THROUGH DISPOSSESSION

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KEYWORDS
Dispossession; transparent; gender expansive; transgender; cisgender; coming out.

ABSTRACT
Using dispossession as an analytical lens, this essay problematizes the way in which the transgender "coming out" experience is depicted on the Amazon original serial, *Transparent* (2014-). Contextualizing Butler and Anathasiou's (2013) work on dispossession within the history of the pathologization of gender expansiveness in the United States of America, this essay argues that *Transparent*'s use of "coming out" rhetoric dispossesses the transgender protagonist, Maura (Jeffrey Tambor), of the very gender autonomy the show has the potential to portray. While *Transparent* undoubtedly increases visibility for gender expansive individuals in the media, and often renders Maura in a sympathetic manner, its pilot season ignores the history of the pathologization of gender expansiveness while often reinforcing "wrong body" rhetoric concerning transgender individuals. *Transparent* depicts Maura as a dynamic character, yet it also depicts her dispossession that results from sociocultural forces and from her own internalized transphobia (cissexism) as a "normal" part of "coming out". The authors conclude that exposing the transgender dispossession depicted in *Transparent* could disrupt the normality of cisgender privilege to open a critical dialogue about the reification of the gender binary in media.

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> *Everyone around me is trying to tell me that it gets better when you get older, but I gotta wonder how much older do I have to be?* (Malice, 2012)

Underscoring the significance of *Transparent* (2014-) in its Network Responsibility Index, GLAAD (formerly the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) reported that 2014 "signified the beginning of a trans 'media moment' (...). Public awareness of the transgender community is swiftly on the rise, and more forward thinking programs and networks would be wise to capitalize on that" (2014: 4). While most American portrayals of transgender individuals in news, film, and television vilify, mock, or dismiss them and the significant social issues they face (Jobe, 2013), *Transparent*, an Amazon original televised serial (produced by Jill Soloway) featuring a male to female (MTF) transgender woman, Maura Pfefferman (nee "Mort") (Jeffrey Tambor), as its protagonist, presents Maura as a complex and nuanced character (Lambe, 2014). Commending this portrayal, *The Rolling Stone* (Grow, 2014) declares the show is "making the world safer for transpeople," while *The Advocate* (Anderson-Minshall, 2014) dubs the show "television revolution." *Transparent* has increased visibility for LGBTQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual) individuals and underscored the need for a deep exploration of the heterosexism (homophobia) and cissexism (transphobia) that pervade much mainstream American programming (Lee and Meyer, 2010; Manuel, 2009).

For many LGBTQIA individuals and the people who support their struggle for identity affirmation and legal rights, *Transparent* reflects progress and offers proof that the dominant cultural narrative is broadening and expanding by depicting alternative representations of sexuality and gender identity. Concurrently developing during the recent rise in visibility of LGBTQIA characters and themes among television programming, a humanistic discourse in feminist theory has tried to account for the various ways in which the corporeal body is exposed, made vulnerable, and often dispossessed of capital, property, legal rights, and autonomy. This discourse, often called "corporeal humanism", acknowledges the human experience as one steeped in vulnerability and contingent upon human relations, all the while considering implications of globalization and the imperfection of the human imaginary to conceptualize what it means to be an individual (Bergoffen, 2000; Brown, 2006; Butler, 2004, 2006; Murphy, 2011; Said, 1995). When contextualized through the framework of corporeal humanism, and more specifically, dispossession (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013), *Transparent* highlights the countless ways in which the transgender individual is continually depicted as a figure of privation, lacking stability, incapable of claiming authenticity or anonymity, and devoid of recognition as comprehendible. *Transparent* underscores the need for a critical reconsideration of media (mis)representations of gender expansive[1] individuals, especially considering the program's cisgender[2] discourse of "coming out" and the way in which "coming out" embodies dispossession and (dis)embodies its gender expansive protagonist, Maura.

DISPOSSESSION AS TRANSGENDER "COMING OUT"

In *Dispossession: The Performative and the Political*, Butler and Athanasiou ask readers to consider, "what happens to the language of representation when it encounters the marked corporeality –at once all too represented and radically unrepresentable" (2013:132). Gender expansive people, so regularly defined by and through their bodies, illustrate the "radically unrepresentable". As their genitals are invariably used to signify their identity, they are dispossessed of the autonomy to name themselves. Butler and Athanasiou (2013) define dispossession as a precarious state that denies one's readability as a human being worthy of rights. They explain, "It is through stabilizing norms of gender, sexuality, nationality, raciality, able-bodiedness, land and capital ownership that subjects are interpellated to fulfill the conditions of possibility for their appearance to be recognized as human" (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013: 195). The transgender body, as text, is unintelligible in the dominant, cisgender, heteronormative media discourse, which frames it as an anomaly or an aberration and focuses on the physicality of the text, or body (ie one's Adam's apple, chest, hairline, voice pitch, etc.). The cisgender reading of the transgender body as seemingly incompatible with the binary, or dominant ideology of gender, leads to a preoccupation, particularly among media representations,

1 For more on the use of the terms "trans*", "transgender", and "gender expansiveness", see Ehrensaft (2011), Battles & Hilton-Morrow (2015), and Gender Spectrum (2016). Believing that the term "gender expansive" captures the positive connotation of an identity marker that challenges the gender binary, the authors use this term throughout this paper while occasionally using "transgender," the term used on *Transparent*.

2 This term is an adjective marking one whose gender identity remains consistent with their sex assignment at birth. It is an antonym to "transgender". For more, see Brydum (2015).

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with what a transgender individual could conceal and/or lack (ie. phallus, womb, or the capacity to sexually reproduce), especially regarding their genitalia.

According to Gozlan (2011), post-operative transgender individuals, in having no fertile reproductive organs, represent inadequacy or deprivation. Summarizing dispossession, Butler and Athanasiou explain, "being is defined as having; having is constructed as an essential prerequisite of proper human being" (2013: 13). Being in a state of not having what is considered a prerequisite to establish gender identity, the transgender individual is dispossessed of authenticity, often regarded as using "preferred" pronouns, or as a "Frankenstein version of the real thing" (Mandell, 2016). Gozlan calls post-operative genitalia "a reminder of impossibility and meaninglessness, a hole leading to no certain place (...) a sort of leftover of an impossible wish, carrying the mark of the endless desire concealed in the wish" (2011: 50). This dispossession of the transgender body, coupled with the assumption that "coming out" is requisite for the transgender individual, underscores what Butler and Athanasiou call the "conceit" of self-transparency, whereby those whose lives and bodies appear transparent gain greater autonomy and power in society (2013: 14). "Coming out" is often portrayed in media as the means by which one may achieve this autonomy through transparency.

"Coming out" to share atypical sex and/or gender identity markers has recently been popularized by the "It Gets Better Project" (Savage and Terry, 2016), a website dedicated to archiving the "coming out" stories of LGBTQIA individuals and promising people that through "coming out" life dramatically improves[3]. Despite giving seemingly positive media attention to gender expansive people, this "coming out" rhetoric perfectly illustrates the othering of the transgender body as some*thing* that requires an announcement or a warning.

To elucidate the dispossession and vulnerability of a transgender character "coming out," Butler and Athanasiou (2013) analyze *Strella* (P. H. Koutras, 2009), a film about a transgender (MTF) sex worker in 21st century Athens. They call the film's "coming out" scene "the revelation of the transgender secret –a scene that plays cinematographically with light and shadows, bodies and specters– de-mythifies and re-mythifies a desire for recognition that lays bare the limits of the representable and the effaceable and defies the elementary structures of kinship intelligibility" (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013: 57). This moment of the transgender "coming out" is precisely what *Transparent* reiterates and reconstructs throughout its pilot season. Aligned with the neoliberal virtues of individualism and exceptionalism (Gill, 1995; Springer, 2012), the show depicts Maura's gender transition as one that is isolated from the long history (and current state) of systemic prejudice and ideological violence perpetrated, especially by influential mental and medical health professionals, against gender expansive people in the United States and globally. As Wallace and Alexander argue, "Exposing this history has the potential not only to challenge the supposed naturalness of the hetero/homo binary but also to illustrate the basic parameters of moving from a position of marginalized invisibility into a public discourse" (2015:808). The narrative arc of the pathologization of gender expansiveness in America as well as the phrase "coming out" must be considered in order to contextualize Maura's character within the larger framework of the American "transgender experience" that *Transparent* ignores in its pilot season.

TRANSGENDER DISPOSSESSION THROUGH PATHOLOGIZATION

Created by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) in 1952, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), has been used as a manual, or "gold standard," for mental health professionals to create terminology and systems of classification for mental illnesses. Although in 1973 homosexuality was declassified in the DSMII as a mental disturbance (APA, 1973: 44), non-normative sexual desires (such as "transvestic fetishism" and "hypersexuality") and gender expansiveness continue to be pathologized. According to the first version of the DSM, or DSM-I, homosexuality was defined as a "personality disorder" (APA, 1952: 13), which was lumped under "sexual deviations" 4. The APA considered "cross dressing" a mental illness comparable to pedophilia and rape.

3 "It does get better, for some people, some of the time. And sometimes, it even gets better all on its own. But things are far more likely to improve for children in crisis if someone makes things better; if change isn't just something for those bullied teens to look forward to, but something that all of us have the responsibility to create" (Doyle, 2010). "The 'it gets better' line is an evocative and hopeful promise, but it announces a dubious progress narrative. The campaign promulgates a homonormative set of instructions that includes urban migration, social mobility, romantic partnerships, and general mimicry of white, Protestant, American heterosexuals" (Krutzsch, 2014).

4 "The diagnosis will specify the type of the pathologic behavior, such as homosexuality, transvestism, pedophilia, fetishism and sexual sadism (including rape, sexual assault, mutilation)" (DSM, 1952, 39).

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The pathologization of gender expansiveness led to utter privation for individuals constructing their identity outside of the binary of heteronormativity during the middle of the 20th century[5]. In 2014, the APA developed the term "Gender Dysphoria"[6] in the DSM-5 to "diagnose" those who seek to transition genders. The DSM-5 has moved away from focusing on one's personality or sexual identity as being disordered and instead concentrates on the psychological distress one may encounter prior to transitioning. Thus, although the semantics surrounding the "diagnosis" of gender expansiveness have seen a tremendous mutation over time, the mental health community has tenaciously held fast to the belief that every individual should identify as *either* male *or* female[7].

This gender policing has led to complex systems and criteria that one must navigate and meet in order to maneuver through the transition process, one that is costly and difficult due to the professional intervention required by the health care industry[8] as well as the discriminatory practices committed against gender expansive patients by medical professionals and physicians[9]. It is important to note that although heterosexism and xenophobia are both known contributing factors to the struggles gender expansive people often encounter, neither heterosexism nor xenophobia has been categorized by the APA as a mental or personality disorder.

Thus, it is imperative that the historical trajectory be accounted for when examining the current medical response to, discriminatory practices against, and media representations of gender expansive individuals. "If one examines the historical trajectory of LGBT[QIA] populations in the United States, it is clear that stigma has exerted an enormous and continuing influence on the life and consequently the health status of LGBT[QIA] individuals" (Institute of Medicine, 2011). Gender expansive people face discriminatory practices in settings traditionally known to "do no harm," and they are often thereby dispossessed of the opportunity to practice self-care[10].

When media depictions of the "transgender experience"[11] ignore systemic discrimination against transgender people, the construction of a hatred that was, and is, so pervasive throughout mental health and medical professional communities, they risk reinforcing transgender hatred as being a "normal" cisgender reaction to gender expansiveness. The failure of *Transparent,* in season one, to address the social and political implications of atypical gender performance, especially when characterizing its protagonist as a professor of Political Science, may reflect a mere oversight or, in fact, reveal the how ubiquitous cisgender privilege is in the way that it routinely dispossesses gender expansive individuals.

"COMING OUT" AS DISPOSSESSION IN *TRANSPARENT*

Butler and Athanasiou assert that dispossession can occur through "self-policing guilt and shame" (2013: 55). As Maura prepares herself to "come out" as identifying as female, she expresses her guilt and shame at a support group meeting at the Los Angeles LGBT Center. Maura laments over the time that passes while she does not speak with her children and

5 LGBTQIA Americans were dishonorably discharged from the U.S. military, fired from the federal government under Eisenhower's executive order 10450 (1953 - 1993), discriminated against in every conceivable manner, and are still often blocked from procuring legal forms of identification (Milan, 2014) and using public restrooms (Ford, 2015).

6 The DSM-III (1980) classified gender expansive people as having "Gender Identity Disorder" or "GID" rather than as being afflicted with "transsexualism." As opposed to being considered a Personality Disorder, GID was placed in the category of Sexual Disorders.

7 The preferred mode of being in this binary is a state in which one's sex labeled by a medical doctor at one's birth remains congruent with one's gender identity throughout life.

8 According to the World Professional Association for Transgender Health, Inc. (WPATH), formerly, the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association, Inc., HBIGDA (2011), people seeking to affirm their gender as one not listed on their birth certificates are required to garner letters of recommendation from mental healthcare providers to change legal identification cards, receive hormone therapy, or undergo sexual reassignment surgery. Mental health clinicians are thus in the position of gatekeeper, with the authority to permit or deny people the experience to live as to they deem appropriate. This is a lucrative process for therapists who recommend a longer, more protracted transition phase.

9 The Institute of Medicine (2011) reports that gender expansive people face protracted opprobrium from physicians, dentists, nurses, pharmacists, and generally all health care practitioners. Most medical insurance providers buttress the ideological stance against transgender patients by "severely limit[ing] transgender people's access to sex reassignment surgery or other treatments related to transgender status . . . Medicare contain[s] explicit exclusions for such treatments" (Institute of Medicine, 2011). A medical system that refuses to acknowledge the need for gender reassignment procedures thereby relegates all such procedures, and the people who seek to have them, to the frivolous fringes of society.

10 *Findings of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey*, (Haas, Rodgers, and Herman, 2014) found that 27% of the study's participants reported that their physicians had denied them care at least once due to their discomfort in caring for a gender creative individual (12). Additionally, 23% affirmed that they "have postponed or not tried to get needed medical care when [they were] sick or injured because of disrespect or discrimination from doctors or other health care providers" (Haas, et al., 2014, 12).

11 This phrase is often used in media; however, the notion that gender expansive people all share a common narrative or existence is as fictive as any "cisgender experience" would be.

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apologizes to the support group for breaking her promise to "come out" ("Pilot" 1.01). Immediately, the power of the cisgender gaze is apparent. According to *Transparent*, cisgender people will have difficulty learning that someone they know is transgender. Moreover, transgender people owe cisgender people an explanation for their transition and must afford cisgender people the time to "process" this change in their reality. This cisgender privilege, resulting from the normalization of the rigid gender binary policed and enforced through various sociopolitical entities, frames Maura's experience as abnormal, to the extent that she is not cisgender, and dispossesses her of the autonomy to define her gender freely.

Maura must "come out" not merely to live authentically, but to comfort her cisgender family. This "coming out" stimulates within the show's cisgender characters a quasi-recovery period, during which they grapple with identifying someone else as a different gender[12]. Indeed, Soloway's comment on the matter of her transgender parent's "coming out" was, "Good thing I have a TV show that I'm writing so that I can process all this stuff" (Grow, 2014). "Coming out" in *Transparent* is an obligatory act performed for cisgender individuals, an act that affords cisgender people the opportunity to wrestle with a change that seems to affect them more than it does the individual in transition.

The phrase "coming out" with its roots in feminism and mental health, highlights the conflation between sexuality and gender and the linkage to mental illness that has historically stigmatized transgender individuals. Repeatedly utilized by the show's producers, characters, supporters, and critics, "coming out" was borrowed from gay, lesbian, and bisexual communities who coined it during second-wave feminism, which used the phrase to empower women, gays, and lesbians to fight for civil rights through increasing visibility. In recent years, however, the term has been co-opted by mental health professionals employing it to refer to the process by which people with mental illness disclose their statuses to friends and family (Corrigan and Matthew, 2003; Corrigan, Kosyluk, and Rusch, 2013; Moses, 2011; Roe and Davidson, 2005). This new phenomenon is highly problematic for a host of reasons, not the least of which is that it could result in the return to the tightly woven association between being LGBTQIA and being mentally ill, a connection that, because of the pathologization of gender expansive individuals by the APA and medical professionals, was never completely severed.

In *Transparent*, "coming out" refers to the process through which the lead character, Maura, notifies cisgender friends and family of the intention to gender transition. An inseparable component of this process, as characterized on the show, are the feelings of release, relief, and redemption from an older, inauthentic identity or body. "Coming out" begins for Maura a new manner of relating to and with cisgender family members and friends, and a new process for cisgender family and friends to relate to Maura. It is significant to note that Maura's family and friends do not view her transition as an opportunity to inquire about the constructed nature of their own gender identities and as to the entitlements they possess resulting from their cisgender identity marker. Instead, much like Soloway (Grow, 2014), they feel they need time to "process" Maura's gender transition, as if their reaction to, or opinion about, her transition might, or should, have an impact on her gender identity.

Maura first explains her intention to transition when she is surprised by her oldest daughter, Sarah (Amy Landecker). Maura, wearing women's clothes, walks into her bedroom to discover Sarah (married to husband, Len) and her ex-partner, Tammy (Gillian Vigman) (married to wife, Barb) kissing. Having secretly entered the home when Maura was away, Sarah and Tammy are shocked when Maura finds them in her bedroom. It is significant to note that although this scene features two married women (only one of whom self-identifies as lesbian) kissing, the shock value stems from Sarah's "father", legally identified as "Mort", wearing a floral print dress. Maura's "coming out", or "forcing out", as it were, eclipses the adultery between Sarah and Tammy. Maura is dispossessed of sovereignty in her own home. Maura's autonomy, represented by her Southern California mansion, is downsized considerably, as she moves into a small apartment in West Hollywood (the stereotypical emblem of all things LGBTQIA). As her former home is invaded, so too is her privacy, and she is forced to unveil what no cisgender person must: a "true" gender identity. Maura's home becomes a metaphor for the privilege of heterosexual reproductive coupling. As she is dispossessed of a heteronormative gender identity, she dispossesses herself of the home that represents it. This self-dispossession reflects her character's internalized transphobia, as she moves herself to the fringes of society, literally and metaphorically.

Each episode that follows exposes Maura's internalized transphobia as her character is conflicted with incongruities, deceptions, and evasions of the "truth" of her gender identity. Her internalized transphobia is portrayed as customary as Maura tries to explain how she felt as a child. As though read-

12 Additionally, Maura's cisgender relatives must begin to think of Maura as a lesbian, as she remains attracted to women upon transitioning.

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ing a passage from the DSM-5 on Gender Dysphoria, Maura explains to Sarah:

> When I was a kid, ever since I was five,
> I felt that something was not right.
> And, uh, I couldn't tell anyone about
> my feminine side. It was a different time,
> you know, a very different time...
> and I just, um, I had to keep it all –
> all of those feelings to myself
>
> ("The Letting Go", 1.02)

By describing how she felt as though something were wrong and that the problem emanated from within her and not from others' gender policing, Maura reinscribes the pathologization of gender expansiveness. Further, by acknowledging that she had "gender dysphoria" and hid it, at the early age of five, nonetheless, she reinforces the rhetoric of concealment. To Maura, her "feminine side" was "not right". This opportunity is a ripe moment for *Transparent* to explore why that was so, indeed, why femininity itself is still often "not right". Instead, the topic is brushed aside, as though sexism no longer exists, as though the 21st century has ushered in a new era that is all-accepting and gender blind.

When she says she "had" to keep her feelings to herself, Maura alludes to the socio-political forces at work when she was a child, yet allows room for the audience to speculate any number of reasons for her decision not to live according to her sense of authenticity. In fact, Maura did not "decide" to "keep" all of those "feelings" to herself. It is highly probable that influential people in her life actively taught her how to perform her gender and policed her gender performance. Maura's acknowledgement that something was "not right" *with her* reinforces the "wrong body" rhetoric that constitutes the dominant media discourse on transgender issues today. For Maura's daughter, Sarah, the only way in which to understand the transgender "coming out" process is to describe it as the recognition that something is not right. More specifically, she comes to understand that her father's body is not right. This "wrong body" rhetoric epitomizes the dispossession of the transgender individual by the cisgender normative ideology.

When Sarah tells her husband, Len (Rob Huebel), that Maura announced the intention to transition, Len responds with, "So the fuck what. You're dad's always been creepy" ("The Letting Go", 1.02). While it could be argued that Len's character is functioning as the antagonistic conservative, or a foil, to highlight Sarah's progressive positionality (she is having an affair with a lesbian), Sarah's response to him only reinforces the gender binary and pathologization of gender expansiveness. She contends, "This is not about being creepy. This is about being in the wrong body. It's like he's hiding. It's like he's been hiding his whole life" ("The Letting Go", 1.02. Both Len and Sarah laugh frantically throughout their conversation, highlighting, ostensibly, the absurdity of the idea of gender transition, or revealing their nervousness about the subject. Len and Sarah, positioned as cisgender, heterosexually partnered, and sexually reproductive individuals struggling through the pain of infidelity, communicate the dominant ideology of gender identity and illustrate how being transgender is still a greater social transgression being an adulterer. "Wrong body" rhetoric divests gender expansive individuals who believe it from self-determination and ultimately reinforces internalized transphobia.

Ostensibly in the hopes of garnering sympathy for transgender individuals, hegemonic media rhetoric frequently describes them as "trapped in the wrong body", effectively depriving transgender subjects of the agency to define themselves. As Mock explains, the "trapped in the wrong body" rhetoric:

> places me in the role of victim, and to those who take mainstream media depictions as truth I'm seen as a *human to be pitied* because I'm someone who needs to be saved, rather than a self-determined woman with agency and choice and the ability to define who I am in this society and who I will become in spite of it. (2012)

Employing the "wrong body" rhetoric, *Transparent* places the "blame", albeit in a sympathetic manner, for gender expansiveness squarely on the shoulders of the gender expansive person. Rather than explaining to her daughter (and the audience) how discrimination and abuse was palpable and prevailing during her childhood, Maura expresses her internalized transphobia (a misnomer for cissexism) and normalizes it as something to be confronted during the "coming out" process.

Maura was five-years-old during the civil rights movement, when the APA was actively defining gender expansiveness as a mental illness so abhorrent that people "suffering" from it could be involuntarily institutionalized, "treated" by electro-shock "therapy", and lobotomized (Blumenfeld, 2015). By ignoring this history of systemic violence, *Transparent* illustrates more in Maura's "coming out" scene about her lack of self-determination than about her liberation, as she seeks

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validation (which will never be authentication) from adulterers in her own home.

Maura's dispossession, though epitomized in her "coming out" scene with her daughter Sarah, began when she was a child as she learned how her physical body would cause others to determine her social position and mask the construction of her identity as a "natural" process. As Maura explains the measures she took to "hide" her feminine characteristics out of fear, she illustrates Butler and Athanasiou's concept of dispossession by illustrating how:

> our bodies are beyond themselves. Through our bodies we are implicated in thick and intense social processes of relatedness and interdependence; we are exposed, dismembered, given over to others, and undone by the norms that regulate desire, sexual alliance, kinship relations, and conditions of humanness. (2013: 55)

Rather than revealing the human condition as one precariously bound up in social practices and punitive norms for everyone and every body, *Transparent* often mimics tabloid culture, playing into the cisgender fear of gender expansiveness[13]. The pathologization of transgender individuals' gender expression, coupled with their gender "dishonesty", is often normalized as dispossessing them of their families.

In the second episode of *Transparent*, "The Letting Go" (1.02) Maura befriends Davina (Alexandra Billings), a transgender woman working at the Los Angeles LGBT Center, who becomes a mentor figure to Maura, offering lessons on how to walk in heels and how to sit while wearing a dress[14]. Davina explains that, prior to her own transition, a good friend of hers said, "In five years, you're going to look up, and not one of your family members is still going to be there –not one"... When Maura asks whether Davina's friend was correct, Davina says she indeed was. Consequently, *Transparent* portrays the transgender figure as one in a double bind –a person known by all, with no hope or ability to regain anonymity after transitioning, yet, dispossessed of the kinship relations which so often serve to protect and insulate individuals from social castigation.

Exploring this double bind of gender expansiveness, Halberstam explains "Eccentric, double, duplicitous, deceptive, odd, self-hating: all of these judgments swirl around the passing woman, the crossdresser, the nonoperative transsexual, the self-defined transgender person, as if other lives –gender normative live– were not odd, not duplicitous, not doubled, and contradictory at every turn" (2005: 57-58). Showing her resignation to the probable trajectory of her own "coming out" narrative, Maura replies to Davina with, "How sad". Again, *Transparent* is faced with a teachable moment, a scene in which Davina could educate Maura (and the audience) about the validity of friendship bonds and queer family constructions, yet the moment is merely used to mourn Davina's loss of her blood relatives as though this loss, too, is a "normal" part of the transgender "coming out" process. Davina's casualness and Maura's resignation during this scene substantiate the "abnormality" of the transgender individual.

As Maura ponders how her own "coming out" narrative will develop compared to Davina's, it is no wonder that she fails time and again to disclose her status as transgender. Her fear of familial rejection silences her while her repeated failure to "come out" to her family reinforces the perceived inauthenticity of her identity. *Transparent* accurately depicts the fear that many gender expansive people experience as they choose to disclose to family members; however, this fear seems to emanate from within Maura and highlight her possible lack of resolve to transition, rather than to be founded in a legitimate concern for her own physical and emotional safety. Moreover, Maura's reflections on these moments of failure frame her as an incompetent character, one who not only disappoints herself with her perceived weakness illustrated by her procrastination in "coming out" but also as one who later disappoints her family by being transgender.

Maura apologizes to her support group, saying "I made a commitment here last week that I was going to come out to my kids and I didn't do it. It just wasn't time" ("The Letting Go", 1.02). On the day Maura plans to disclose to her son, Josh (Jay Duplass), she changes from women's into men's clothing, fearing that Josh would be overwhelmed by seeing her in women's clothing. Once wearing the men's clothing, however, Maura finds it easier to play the role of "Mort" for her son, even though the scent of women's perfume lingers on her neck. Smelling the perfume, Josh assumes "Mort" to be "playing the field", an inference that Maura neither confirms nor denies. This scene sympathetically depicts the courage

13 See the Jenner media spectacle for more on how this fear is exploited and promulgated. As *People* magazine (Tauber, 2015) put it, "[Jenner] shared a deeply personal truth [Jenner] has been hiding for more than 50 years: [she] is transgender" (53). By describing Jenner as "hiding", media outlets effectively frame Jenner as a stealthy person to be feared.

14 This gender policing, as evidenced through Davina's gender coaching, is also normalized. Maura cannot merely feel like a woman and live legally as one. She must perfect her performance, especially among other transgender women, if she wants to "pass" as cisgender.

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it would require for a parent to ask their child to recognize them as a different gender; however, this "courage" is only necessary because of the rigid binary gender system so strictly enforced through social codes and norms, codes and norms that the show's characters do not interrogate, especially in season one15. Maura's lack of determination to confront Josh indicates that her gender identity is something she can seemingly hide, as opposed to Josh's gender, which appears "natural". This only reinforces the stereotype of the transgender individual as deceitful. By refusing to deny that she was "playing the field", Maura sets her son up to see her as fraudulent once she does "come out" to him.

While explaining the situation with her son to her support group, Maura claims that she wants to make her transition process as easy as possible for Josh, a young man who struggles to maintain healthy relationships with women. Again, the importance of heterosexual coupling among cisgender characters is emphasized and takes primacy over Maura's needs. In addition to using her son as an excuse to postpone "coming out", Maura claims that because her youngest daughter, Ali (Gaby Hoffman), is having difficulty finding her own stable identity, the timing is bad. Trying to protect her adult children from the discomfort she assumes they will experience through her "coming out" Maura postpones her own transition. She effectually suspends herself in an identity liminality –being neither male nor female, neither "Mort" nor Maura– only on the brink of becoming an intelligible corporeal body.

During this liminal period, Maura only wears women's clothing when completely alone and when attending support meetings. The viewer is taught that "coming out" is a prerequisite for Maura to have an identity. Further, any additionally desired efforts to express her feminine gender identity (trachea shaving, electrolysis, hormone therapy, etc.) are to be suspended until Maura's family has "processed" with her "coming out". Accordingly, there can be no true identity felt by Maura unless she has her transgender identity known, validated, and affirmed (or rejected) by her cisgender friends and family. "Coming out" for Maura, according to *Transparent*, involves a giving up of everything that once defined her as a person. She retires, changes addresses, changes clothes, and prepares herself for the seemingly inevitable loss of kinship bonds.

While speaking to Sarah about what she knows of transgender people of the past, Maura says, "People led secret lives. And people led very lonely lives, and then of course the internet was invented" ("The Letting Go", 1.02). Dispossessed of any authority over her identity, Maura seems to have been held hostage by her body, which is read as male by society. Yet, *Transparent* portrays her as not completely innocent; instead, the show consistently marks her as having been complicit to a degree by "hiding" her "true" gender identity (as if there is such a concept) since she was five. Moreover, she led a secret life, visiting transvestite camps and bars in the 1970s and 1980s, and purchasing women's clothes to surreptitiously stroke while in her office on her university campus. When *Transparent* allows Maura to claim that the internet was the solution to her years of suffering, the show discounts the decades of gender activism in America and pretends, as does the "It Gets Better" movement, that time, technology, and visibility alone unfetter the rigid constraints of the gender binary.

DISPOSSESSION AS DISIMPRISONMENT

The rhetoric of *Transparent* highlights the lack of ownership, the total dispossession of autonomy (and anatomy), that the transgender person must seemingly acknowledge in order to "come out" to be recognized as a "normal" person; however, what it fails to emphasize is how everyone, regardless of gender identity, is dispossessed of the right to create an authentic sense of selfhood. We are only and always interpreted through, reacting to, and defined according to the gaze of others. As Athanasiou writes, "We are dispossessed by others, affected by others and able to affect others. We are dispossessed by norms, prohibitions, self-policing guilt, and shame, but also by love and desire" (Butler and Anathasiou, 2013: 55). A close analysis of Maura's "coming out" reveals how, far from being a liberating act for Maura, one that enables her to own her body and possess a greater level of autonomy, "coming out" actually serves to make the world a safer place for cisgender individuals, individuals who see their process of "coming to terms with" a gender transition as superseding any needs or desires of the individual who transitions. Further, the show never tasks cisgender characters or viewers to defend why they perceive their gender identity to be congruent with their gender assignment at birth. "Coming out", and the dispossessing process it entails is seen as a process for gender expansive individuals simply because they chafe against the implicit ideology of the heteronormative gender binary.

Transparent depicts "coming out" as a social requirement, one that Maura is contractually obligated to perform if she is

15 While Maura's youngest daughter, Ali (Gaby Hoffman), seems to challenge gender roles, her promiscuity, drug use, and general capriciousness only support the stereotype that a gender expansive person may, as Maura describes Ali, "just not be able to land" ("The Letting Go", 9.26).

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to attain recognition as a human being, not as an "it" (which a cisgender woman calls her in a women's restroom). In *Violence*, Žižek describes the hidden brutality of seemingly benign social habits, particularly those through which "we are effectively obliged to do something, but [we] have to pretend that we are doing it as a free choice" (2008: 158). Maura must act as though she freely discloses her transition status, when in reality, she is obligated to do so because of a tightly knit, unnamed, obligatory set of social regulations that demands people operating outside of the fringes of normality to announce their difference in order to be accepted or rejected by the cisgender gaze16. This underscores Butler's notion of the reflexive processes involved in crafting oneself. Butler explains:

> So much depends on how we understand the 'I' who crafts herself, since it will not be a fully agentic subject who initiates the crafting. It will be an 'I' who is already crafted, but also who is compelled to craft again her crafted condition. In this way, we might think of the 'I' as an interval or relay in an ongoing process of social crafting – surely dispossessed of the status of an originating power. (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013:70)

Interpreted through Butler and Anathasious's lens of dispossession, "coming out" in *Transparent* highlights the ways in which we define (or are coerced to define) ourselves through the gaze of others. It follows, then, that if the "I" who was already crafted through ongoing social processes of definition undergoes a gender transition, it is through the very people who once incorrectly crafted one's identity that one must stimulate the revision process.

The cisgender (and largely heterosexist) individuals who commend Maura for her bravery in transitioning are the ones who originally made her "Mort". Yet, instead of using Maura's transition as an opportunity to take a critical inventory of what they consider to be "natural truths", the characters use it as the impetus to admit to having affairs, engaging in promiscuity, creating unwanted pregnancies, and abusing drugs. According to the show's summary on Amazon, *Transparent* is about "An LA family with serious boundary issues [who] have their past and future unravel when a dramatic admission causes everyone's secrets to spill out" (2016). Maura does not declare, announce, or even share her intention to transition. Rather, she admits it as one would a crime or transgression. *Transparent* seems to suggest that "anything goes" once a family accepts transgender people into their lives with open arms.

Dispossession need not be synonymous with the abnegation of autonomy, or with the acquiescence of a social infraction. On the contrary, Butler and Athanasiou seek to find a way in which the dispossessed, or "non-normative subjects, lives, and intimate ties could be legally, culturally, and affectively recognized [and] also lived beyond the normative propriety and exclusionary proprietariness that govern the operations of liberal recognition" (2013: 83). *Transparent* can offer a mode of representation envisioning how subjects existing outside of normative confines can thrive, not only despite, but indeed *because* of their dispossession. Media depictions of gender expansive individuals may offer cisgender audiences a means by which to examine all the ways in which they themselves are dispossessed by gender and thereby reveal how cisgender "privilege" is, in many ways, a misnomer.

Living under the veil of normality not only privileges cisgender individuals by virtue of offering them a cloak of anonymity, but that very normality also disadvantages them by obscuring the complexity of the construct we call gender identity. In a sense, never having to think about gender means never experiencing the self-poiesis "in which the self acts upon the terms of its formation precisely in order to open in some way to a sociality that exceeds (and possibly precedes) social regulation" (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013: 69-70). In this way, transgender dispossession can function as an ideological emancipation from gender. This reading of *Transparent*, however, depends upon the viewer's ability to perform an "oppositional decoding" (Hall, 1980). While contemporary programs may have increased the visibility of gender expansive individuals, they have done so predominantly through exoticizing and/or denigrating them. "Each side of this inequity dehumanizes trans people because the elevation of their transgressive bodies to a 'superior' position is a fictive projection, and the degeneration of their bodies into threatening 'inferior' categories can diminish or erase their claim to humanity" (Shelley, 2009: 388). Emphasizing not Maura's process of experiencing her gender, but rather her process of "coming out" to and comforting her cisgender family and acquaintances, *Transparent* positions Maura as vying for recognition as human. She desperately seeks cisgender recognition, and cisgender recognition of transgender individuals inherently dispossess transgen-

16 According to Battles and Hilton-Morrows, LGBTQIA media representation is important for showing LGBTQIA people that they exist and that they matter, and for exposing non-LGBTQIA people to LGBTQIA issues. Battles and Hilton-Morrows (2015) explain that the cisgender gaze, the dominant perspective through which media narratives are told, is "powerful and disciplining" and often treats the transgender body as a "spectacle" (2015:240).

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der individuals of self agency, as they must accede to medical and mental pathologization, "wrong body" rhetoric, social castigation, and alienation as they "come out".

When analyzed through the framework of dispossession, *Transparent* offers a foray into gender performance that can be used to interrupt the hegemonic forces of cissexism and heterosexism. Yet, media representation and increased visibility does not necessarily reflect social progress. Kessler reminds us that, "In many ways we [LGBTQIA people] are now as disproportionately represented as the straight folks" (2011: 9). Incongruent with the gender binary, transgender bodies have long been sensationalized in the media for their difference; however, if we acknowledge that our bodies are constructed outside of ourselves by linguistic, social, legal, and political regulatory practices, then we may reveal how these practices enact a certain degree of dispossession on us all – and this dispossession may indeed emancipate us from the ideological confines gender. While *Transparent* depicts Maura as a dynamic character, it also depicts her dispossession that results from sociocultural forces and from her own internalized transphobia (cissexism) as a "normal" part of "coming out". Exposing transgender dispossession in *Transparent* could disrupt the normality of cisgender privilege to open a critical dialogue about the reification of the gender binary in media.

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