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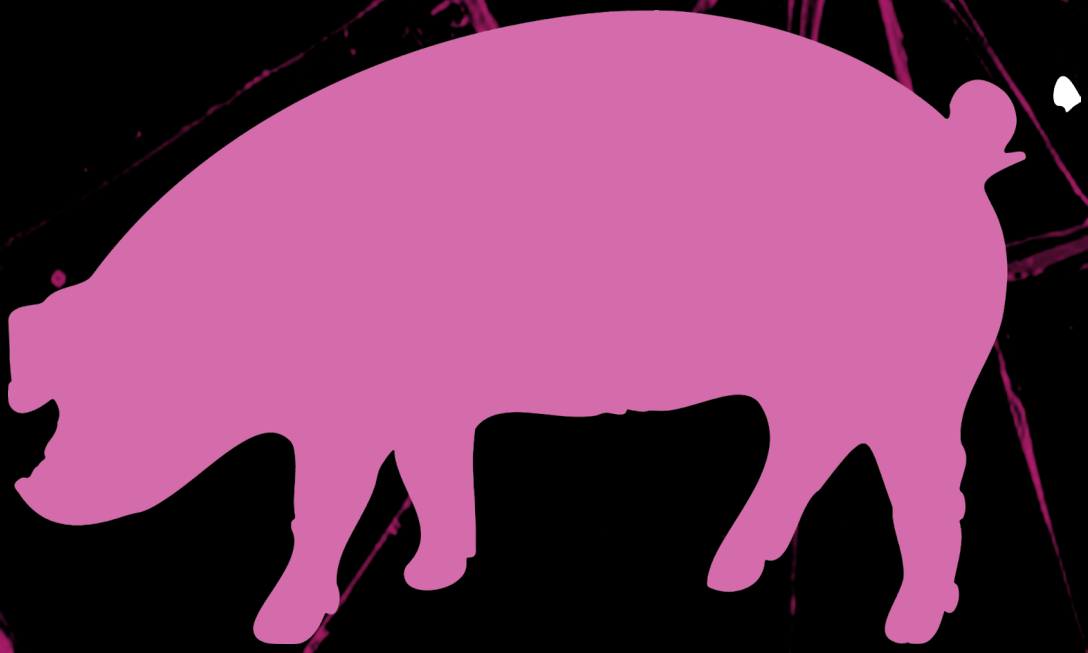
DIALOGUES WITH TECHNOLOGY
GUEST EDITED BY LUCA BARRA AND OSWALDO GARCÍA CRESPO



* The National Anthem_Otto Bathurst_ written by Charlie Brooker
Black Mirror T1_01

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SERIES has two main purposes: first, to respond to the surge of scholarly interest in TV series in the past few years, and compensate for the lack of international journals specializing in TV seriality; and second, to focus on TV seriality through the involvement of scholars and readers from both the English-speaking world and the Mediterranean and Latin American regions. This is the reason why the journal's official languages are Italian, Spanish and English.

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EDITORIAL

INTRODUCTION: DIALOGUES WITH TECHNOLOGY

LUCA BARRA
OSWALDO GARCÍA CRESPO

Across their history, film and television have constantly been influenced by technological evolutions, both in their impact on audiovisual production and distribution and in their long-lasting relevance in narratives and representations. The entire development of Hollywood studios can also be read as an endless engagement with technical instruments and their many consequences. And even in Europe, during the period of the Weimar Republic, German studios invested large sums of money in researching and developing new technologies applied to cinema, in an attempt to challenge Hollywood's dominance and to establish a film industry with a unique identity – such effort is reflected in several studies linking that era of technological boom to the form and content of its audiovisual discourse (Langford 2008). Although technological developments have accompanied photography, cinema and television since their inception, only in periods of major changes have they became central in academic research.

In recent years, however, digital technologies have impacted so much on cultural, social and political paradigms, and have been integrated into the processes of creating and distributing cultural objects. This has established a dialogue between the computer and culture (Manovich 2001), changed the media (Bolter and Grusin 1998), and became part of the reconfiguration of digitextuality (Everett and Caldwell 2003). This context impacts the production, distribution, and promotion of television series, which then engage at a textual level with the technological challenges facing the medium. Changing audiovisual production processes and their influence on fictional narratives, distribution strategies and automated data collection and management provide a perfect

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scenario for academic researchers and professionals to analyse the dialogues between technology and serial narratives. At present, then, it is extremely pertinent to address, through a multidisciplinary approach, how technology has impacted fictional serial narratives across cinema, television and digital media, as well as research into these narratives.

TV series are at the forefront of the challenges faced by an industry with high technological specificity. This can be seen in seemingly prosaic but nevertheless pressing issues: one example could be found in the difficulties of correctly streaming the *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019) episode "The Long Night" (8.03), with battles represented in great display, with changing contrast ratios and under-exposure, but also some backlash related to the streaming platform data standards; another can be symbolized by the non-linear, interactive narrative designs of the *Black Mirror* (2011-2019) episode "Bandersnatch", and of similar experiments by Netflix in comedy and factual programming. In general, the aesthetic, narrative and productive implications of visual effects, transmedia strategies, previewing systems and future scenarios of visual production (Rubin 2019) emerge as a crucial topic to be considered. Furthermore, the viewer's screens and pervasive software services lead to profound social and cultural changes that call into question creators, producers and critics' ideas of the way in which we metabolize audiovisual discourses (Nikdel 2015). It is appropriate then to take a trans-disciplinary and systemic glance to producers and creators, narratives and audiences, since television, as cinema, "needs to be considered holistically as technology, space, experience and form" (Llinares and Arnold 2015: 6).

CHANGING THE RULES OF THE GAME

The delinearization of audiovisual production, caused by the digitization of production processes for more than twenty years, has turned filmed material (in physical sets, with real characters) into just one more layer of the digital image, which is often created, with increasing technical and human resources, in the post-production stage. Thus, the so-called visible and invisible visual effects are present in any production and have expanded authors' creative boundaries, as suggested by screenwriter Angela Obón (personal communication, July 1, 2020). *The Mandalorian* (2019-), created by Jon Favreau, uses film sets in which light, locations, characters and camera movements enable an unprecedented level of handling and control. This poses both a challenge and an opportunity for creators, as they are faced with a blank page. Digital technology is somehow bringing filmmakers, directors of photography and screenwriters closer to the process of creation of animated films. Real-time, digital set creation in *The Lion King* (2019), directed by Jon Favreau as well, is a first step towards a new way of producing stories, where the filmmakers able to metabolize the new workflows resulting from this highly technological environment can be ahead of the game, as implied in a brief comment by director Carlos Theron (personal communication, July 26, 2020). Furthermore, this image processed in real time separates filmmakers and directors of photography from the classic production process and from the contact with natural settings by which to be inspired, as stated by the cinematographer Pol Turrents (personal communication, July 2, 2020).

This is perhaps why Netflix has landed as a content producer at its European headquarters emphasizing the need for highly specialized post-production professionals (Molina 2020). And the Secuoya Group, which has technically supported Netflix's arrival in Spain and the creation of its production centre, does not hesitate to point out how post-production is the differential between the platform's original content and any other production regarding a series' final look, even though this differentiation now tends to disappear, in the opinion of technical coordinator Hugo Tejados (personal communication, June 5, 2020). The democratisation of the quality standards linked to the digitization of production processes are reducing the classic disparities in the productions made by different industries and countries. On the one hand, digital platforms are responsible for creating protocols, on workflows and on technical requirements, which their contents must comply with across different countries, and this is leading to a uniformity not only of the results but also in writing, production and distribution processes. On the other hand, standard filming and lighting equipment can be afforded now by any type of production, and there is hardly any difference between the technical filming equipment for a television comedy and the equipment used in HBO or Netflix franchise series (Tejados, cited communication). According to Turrents (cited communication), these differences are fading away, even between different genres and formats, leading to the formal homogenization of the audiovisual discourse. Spots, series, video clips and documentaries often present the same features, and this is a consequence both of the technological developments and also of the lack of risk-taking in the search for innovative visual proposals.

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The very dynamics of the industry are encouraging a trend that may be determining the type of narrative approaches to serial fiction. On the one hand, the struggle between a television viewing based on weekly premieres of high impact series, connected to linear scheduling, and the model intended to increase average daily consumption, favouring the implementation of a user experience that integrates solutions aimed at binge-watching (Barra 2015; Jenner 2018; Neira 2020) also implies a different conception of serial narratives from the first steps of development. More than a revolution, this shift appears to be an oscillation, with some series, and players, choosing one or the other distribution model, and therefore stimulating a step-by-step, hype-generating fruition or a day-and-date sudden interest. It should be also recalled that Netflix offered in some systems the possibility of speeding up playback to twice as fast as normal, according to the company always respecting the artistic act, since dialogues can still be heard naturally. And on the other hand, this distribution scenario leads logically to an increased importance of knowing the audience, favoured by an individualized consumption where user data are key to the main distribution platforms' business strategies. And this is not only referring to their web interfaces or to how they organize their content. The relevance of "Bandersnatch" lies, rather than in the doubtful interactivity of its storyline, in its ability to generate qualitative data on viewers. In the same way as series thumbnails are tailored to the user profile, it is pertinent to imagine a scenario in which all these collected data have also a growing influence on the production policies.

DIGITAL IDENTITIES

The communicating vessels that connect the audiovisual creation with a social reality influenced by automation processes and ubiquitous screens also invite the fictional narrative discourse to establish a dialogue with those visual codes associated with the culture of software. Thus, the fragmentation of the discourse, the graphical user interface, or the translation of the interactive nature or video games and social networks into the audiovisual narration coexist within a context where the contemporary exponential growth of serialized fiction audiences (even increased by the Covid-19 pandemic and by the consequences of lockdowns and social distancing) will necessarily slow down, sooner or later.

Long ago freed from a tradition in which the potential of the digital medium and distribution was only measured in relation to its ability to emulate the analogue format and to improve profit margins, the impact of the technological paradigm shift can be evaluated in terms of the influence of the definition of its aesthetic and narrative identity, hybrid if you will, but taken on as its own. However, its existence requires taking risks. The search for that digital identity was bold at the beginning of the 21st century, at a peak of the digital boom. Thus, the use of digital storage devices that eliminated the need for changing reels during long shots impacted on the set design, as intellectualized by the Dogma movement and by Mike Figgis in *Timecode* (2000). Reduced production costs represented a liberation from the rigid business structures of that time, which initially allowed taking formal risks in InDigEnt productions, and even a director as Eric Rohmer, with *L'anglaise et le duc* (2001), experimented with digital image compositing in post-production. These radical proposals seem to have watered down over time, or maybe they have shifted to creative settings where the business risks associated with significant above-the-line production, promotion or distribution costs are much lower.

The revolution has become the norm, the experiments have been included in the industrial processes and in promotional and marketing campaigns, but the slow institutionalization of digital technologies must not lead us to normalize, or underestimate, its permanent aesthetic and narrative effects. Moreover, another element that has influenced the slowdown in this search for a digital visual identity is that the Internet – long promised as a space for democracy and freedom – has now turned into a large commercial area where digital marketing strategies could be used to automate a production run by the increasingly omnipresent digital distribution platforms. In the contemporary audiovisual environment, more than ever, film and TV discourse, production processes, and corporate promotion and distribution of television serials are strongly connected, and need to be considered altogether.

SOME RESEARCH TRAJECTORIES

After highlighting some key technological aspects of contemporary serial narratives, affecting aesthetics and production, distribution and audience engagement, both looking at present trends (in a sort of still image) and at some future steps (in a potential virtual scenario), the relevance of the dialogues between serial audiovisual narratives and technology, as well as the many multifaceted approaches to them, are effectively

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proved by the articles published in this special issues. Putting together different examples and varied theoretical and methodological perspectives, these contributions are able to provide at least a glimpse of the current research on the topic, as well as to open paths for further investigation.

The first essay shows how technology, throughout history, has played a far-reaching role as a mediating element, and how these aspects are underlying our representations and memories of the past. Building on semiotics and narratological instruments, Francesca Di Tonno investigates the recent phenomenon of *Ostalgie* in the German landscape, with several film and television titles also travelling abroad, and focuses on the specific case of *Deutschland83* (2015) to show how this series seeks to establish emotional connections with the local history through a thematic and aesthetic commitment to the role played by technology in the cultural and social field represented by the series. On the one hand, the research shows how the narrative construction of many episodes deals with technological objects; on the other, it reflects on the way these objects can assume different meanings and functions for the viewers. Di Tonno therefore includes technology as an inextricable part of a material and, above all, immaterial heritage.

A second article deals with "Bandersnatch", the special episode of *Black Mirror* (2011-2019), addressing the episode's proposed narrative with a critical approach. Adriano D'Aloia downplays the impact of videogames on its fictional plot. D'Aloia instead suggests how the show could be more aptly interpreted in terms of its interactivity, or rather its absence, inside the field of experimental interactive cinema, and suggests its role as part of a scenario of hybrid narratives with great potential. This work engages with both the journalistic and scholarly debate to position the media product inside a series of fruitful poles: interactive and interpretative cooperation, actuality and virtuality, self-awareness and self-citation, free choice and control, co-authorship and authority, and decision-making and randomness. All these contradictions make this episode exemplary of many trends of a digital audiovisual strongly affected by technologies. D'Aloia appeals both to the need to avoid any determinism and to the digital media's ability to inspire new aesthetic and narrative territories, with anthropological implications.

After looking at the dialogues with technology as a past representation with new meanings, and as a current condition that affects both the aesthetic and narrative development and the experience of the viewer, in the third article technologies become an increasingly relevant instrument of analysis, able to open the serial texts to a better, and deeper, understanding. Software, while intervening in the functioning of our economies, societies and personal relationships, has also integrated research by automating data collection and management, enabling the development of new methodologies. Carmen Gregori Signes uses software to automate pattern searching in the dialogues of the first two seasons of *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991). With this technique, it is confirmed and spotlighted the frequency of references to victims in the conversations across the episodes, and as a consequence the relationships between characters are better understood, defining a genre and helping the viewer to navigate complex plots.

Finally, technology becomes a mediating element for serial narratives, encouraging their foreign distribution, global circulation and even a contemporary boom, in the so-called "peak television", encouraged by mainstream networks, pay operators, digital platforms and social media. The last article thus observes the influence that improved audiovisual content distribution technologies have had on programming and scheduling techniques. Focusing on the pan-Arab region and especially on the Kuwaiti television system, Ahmad Hayat shows how technological changes have strongly impacted both the acquisition of foreign ready-made TV series and the production of local original ones. The focus on the commissioning process and on the serial design helps in understanding how industrial and technical developments have determined the choice of specific narratives inside serial contents and have helped to correctly meet the many different cultural sensitivities of Muslim audiences.

The articles included in this special issue constitute only a small step in the wider task of investigating the many entanglements between digital technologies and writing, production, distribution and fruition of television (and audiovisual) serial narratives. However, we hope that this small step can be helpful in understanding how relevant this element is in the contemporary media landscape, both at a national and a global level, and in fostering the interest towards aesthetic and narrative aspects, production tools and routines, distribution strategies and platforms, promotional tools and discourse, transmedia strategies, audience engagement. In all these directions, there is abundant space for further research.

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

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KEYWORDS
Cold War; Germany; serial; technology; transmedia.

ABSTRACT
The article analyzes the German television series *Deutschland83* on air, not only in Germany, since 2015. The author wants to demonstrate how the use of representation in the eight episodes of the series of numerous technological objects from the Cold War period represents a way to tell in Germany's recent past before reunification to a new generation audience. From a methodological point of view, the article leans on semiotic and cultural studies themes, analyzing for each episode which type of technological object is highlighted by the plot and why. In the article neither the historical reconstruction nor the summary of the eight episodes of the series are left out.
The vintage technological objects present in the *Deutschland83* series can be divided into objects of common use and objects not of common use: in the first case, the objects have the task of historically contextualizing the series, in the second case, the objects not of common use they have the task of influencing the whole plot centered on the espionage activities of the protagonist Martin / Moritz and his attempt to thwart nuclear war.

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

Ostalgie is a crasis between the German words *Osten* (East) and *Nostalgie* (Nostalgia). (The word officially entered the German vocabulary in 1993 when the *Gesellschaft für Deutsche Sprache*[3] included it among the ten most representative words of that year).[4] Born in the 1990s as a common feeling of nostalgia for life in the GDR (DDR)[5], or East Germany, *Ostalgie* soon became featured as a trend of costume with the recovery, in fact, of objects, living styles and clothing, typical of a world that has now disappeared or that perhaps did not exist at all. In short, it became a nostalgia for a country that "is never the country it was, but what one would have wanted it to be: as such, a refuge from the aggressions of history, a space of resistance to the cancellation of the past, the claim of a difference" (Banchelli 2006: 13).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

From Propp we also know how all the elements of a narrative, as well as these magical means, are linked together by a series of well catalogable functions, so that if we want to consider the magical means from the point of view of their transmission, which, in the series occurs frequently in relation to technological objects of the second type not in common use, then we can refer to two main types of functions:

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

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

DEUTSCHLAND83

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

22 Ibidem.

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

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

As often happens, the first series always turns out to be the densest in meaning and most faithful to the original aesthetic idea. In *Deutschland83*, the plot certainly does not stand out in originality: in the autumn of 1983, in the height of the Cold War, NATO announced military maneuvers in West Germany, a signal received, both in Moscow and in East Berlin, as a preparation for the so-called first nuclear strike to the East; the frontier soldier Martin Rauch is recruited by his aunt, a collaborator of the *HVA - Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung*, the foreign intelligence secret service of the Ministry for State Security, better known as the Stasi. Martin is forced to infiltrate in disguise in the West and report the secret plans of NATO and the *Bundeswehr*, that is the apparatus of the armed forces of the Federal Republic of Germany[24]. Thus begins the most classic of spy stories, in which each ingredient appears predisposed to involve the viewer in the dichotomy of good vs. bad, usual and reassuring since everyone already knows which side to be on. Instead things are different and the first episode of the series, which partly represents its summa and contains its stylistic code, shows that it is still possible to invent a way of talking about the Cold War without fear of repeating paths already beaten.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

They are uncommon technological objects that take on enormous importance in the Cold War phase told in *Deutschland83*: in fact, the Pershing II were modified for medium range delivery and armed with nuclear warheads. The aim of the users of these missiles, namely the United States and West Germany, which were the only holders, was to hit the most western countries of the Soviet bloc, such as Ukraine, Belarus or Lithuania. The missiles were an advanced technology, partly unknown in the Soviet Union[27], and Martin will have the task not only of making this technology known to HWA by photographing the technical data sheets of the Pershing II, but also and above all of intercepting the West's plans for the actual launch of the missiles. The latter in fact represented the classic technology voted, in war, to the so-called 'overkilling', that is to say the risk of using such powerful and lethal weapons (nuclear weapons) capable of killing the enemy, many more times than necessary, as well as, given the use of nuclear weapons, to exterminate even themselves. In fact, in the series, General Edel's greatest concern is precisely to see the German territory exterminated in its entirety without distinction of East and West if these missiles were used.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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AGAINST INTERACTIVITY. PHENOMENOLOGICAL NOTES ON *BLACK MIRROR: BANDERSNATCH*

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ABSTRACT
Interactive cinema is one of the most interesting areas of experimentation with storytelling form. *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (2018), a stand-alone episode of the acclaimed British television series available on Netflix, has restarted the debate around this genre. This article offers a discussion of several critical elements inherent to the experience of viewing *Bandersnatch*, specifically those related to its interactive, meta-reflexive, and ludic nature. The tensions between interactive and interpretative cooperation, between actuality and virtuality, between self-reflexivity and self-referentiality, between free choice and control, between co-authorship and authority, and between gaming and gambling, bring out the contradictions of a product characteristic of the current transmedial landscape.

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1. A PROVOCATIVE OPENING

Let us suppose for a moment that I am not a great lover of videogames, have had no previous experience with interactive cinema, am unfamiliar with the "book-game" genre and the "choose-your-own adventure" philosophy, and do not have any nostalgia for the pop culture of the 1980s. In that case, an attitude of resistance toward *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (2018), the interactive episode of the acclaimed British anthology series *Black Mirror*, would be understandable. Let me proclaim myself an old-fashioned spectator: I have no desire to choose how the film proceeds by reacting to the bifurcations that are continually offered to me. This is not out of inattention or laziness, but rather by choice: I choose not to choose, and to let the narration proceed unaware of my presence. Even if I do not interact by tinkering with the remote control, in fact, the flow remains unbroken, and after ten seconds one of the two alternative paths will nonetheless be taken. In this way, I am opposed to the interactivity of the experience that is being offered to me, and watch *Bandersnatch* in a "classical" and defiantly conservative mode.

What might be the motivations behind my skeptical attitude, in opposition to the enthusiasm for interactivity that has aroused the hyper-textualist imaginations of wide swathes of both the public and the critics? Bearing in mind (and partially departing from) the long-standing debate surrounding interactive storytelling (Koenitz et al. 2015; Cardona-Rivera et al. 2018), in the following pages I will attempt to draw out several reasons based on a critical phenomenology of *my* viewing experience of *Bandersnatch*. The analysis will show how a number of seemingly innovative and linguistically original aspects of the episode are in fact points of weakness, which make the interactive experience one that exists more on paper than in reality. Furthermore, it argues that the form of "actual interactivity" provided by the digital streaming platform that enables this experience (i.e. Netflix) is very minor compared to the "virtual interactivity" that characterizes all forms of use of complex narrative content. I will argue that rather than allowing the spectator to carry out a truly creative act that would elevate him/her to the level of the co-author of the text (Montani 2019), the platform-based and apparently "open" nature of *Bandersnatch*'s interactivity negatively impacts the spectator's capacity to participate in the narrative's unfolding.

The "freedom of choice" that *Bandersnatch* promotes makes the viewing experience individual and not replicable among different users (or only incidentally): each narrative path is singular and different from all the possible others. This characteristic constitutes its most original aspect, but at the same time is the main limitation I will identify in the proposed analysis. On the methodological level, this analysis can only be auto-ethnographic and its results cannot be generalized without risking determinism. The concrete spectator protagonist of this analysis is voluntarily disposed to physical passivity (laying on a sofa in a relaxing condition) and voluntarily opposed to the request for interactivity made by the film. The attitude of "uninteractivity" described here is overtly in contrast with the invitation of this specific film and, more generally, with the ludic nature of interactive television. It has to be said also that *Bandersnatch* is an attempt to make interactive fiction accessible through the Netflix platform (that has 180 million subscribers worldwide) for a mainstream audience that is not familiar with this genre. In brief, in order to discuss the tensions between narrative architecture and audience participation at work within interactive streamed technologies, the analysis deliberately adopts a provocative position and focuses on the effects of interactive digital TV on the "classic" linear-film engagement. Given these premises and acknowledging these limitations, this article should be considered as a starting point for further discussion on the potentialities and the limits of contemporary interactive storytelling in audiovisual media at the intersection between film and TV studies, audience studies and game studies.

2. GLYPHS AND DRUGS

Before beginning, it is worth recalling that *Bandersnatch*, which premiered on Netflix on 28 December 2018, is a standalone episode of the series *Black Mirror*, created by Charlie Brooker and first broadcast on Channel 4 before becoming available through Netflix. Despite the anthology character of the series, of which each episode has a different cast and plot, there is always a focus on the damaging effects of the abuse of digital technologies on both individual and social levels, in an exaggerated but plausible future, one that is not so distant from our time and our way of using technological media. (For the most recent publications that analyze the philosophical implications of *Black Mirror*'s relationships between humanity and technology, see Cirucci and Vacker 2018; McSweeney and Joy 2019; Laraway 2020; Gibson and Carden 2020).

Unlike the other episodes of the series, *Bandersnatch* is characterized, as I have already noted, by the interactive nature of the narration, and more precisely by the possibility of

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deciding in which direction the story goes by making a choice each time the film offers a "fork." It is almost impossible to summarize the plot in a few lines, given that its (apparently) open nature offers multiple possible paths through around 40 bifurcations, with a total of 150 minutes of footage divided into 250 segments. With more than a trillion variations or ways to explore the narrative, the film's duration can range from 40 to 150 minutes, with an average running time of 90 minutes, depending on the choices made by the spectator, with five main possible endings.

I will only provide some basic information about the plot. Significantly set in a dystopian and pre-digital 1984, *Bandersnatch* centers on the adventures of Stefan Butler, a young programmer who attempts to transform a choose-your-own-adventure style book into a videogame (hence, the meta- and auto-referential nature of narration). Stefan suffers from psychological disturbances related to the death of his mother when he was a child and does not have a good relationship with his father, who obliges him to see a therapist. At the gaming development company Tuckersoft, Stefan meets Colin Ritman, creator of cutting-edge videogames, who influences his creative and entrepreneurial choices, and attempts to convince him of the existence of a parallel reality, pushing him to use psychedelic drugs.

The binary options offered to the spectator vary in weight and significance: some are seemingly innocuous (two types of cereal to choose from at breakfast), others concern cultural consumption (which tape to listen to in a Walkman while taking the bus), and many pertain to psychological or existential dilemmas (whether to kill or spare the father, to attack the therapist or not). While some choices betray a product placement strategy within the film (Elnahla 2019: 3), others emphasize the characteristically negative way in which *Black Mirror* represents the relationship between humans and technology—albeit in the "vintage" variation offered by this specific episode. It seems to me that, in almost all cases, the choice is between an option that will let Stefan maintain a calm and rational attitude, and one that instead unleashes his impulses and makes him react to his problems violently. Each choice influences the way that the protagonist creates the videogame, leading to one of the five endings, each corresponding to a different evaluation of the videogame (or its failure to be completed) by a critic.

The forks are symbolized by glyphs, the visible signs of a diagrammatic bifurcation of paths and their progressive multiplications, and hence of the narrative's indeterminate development. Here, we might already note some of the paradoxical limitations that the particular nature of *Bandersnatch* imposes on the traditional modes of viewing in the digital age: once a decision has been made, one cannot turn back; I cannot rewind or fast-forward by using the timeline, as became possible for anyone with any film after the advent of the VCR. However, it is possible for some decisions to automatically lead to a previous point in the narrative, thus generating forced loops (which in turn lead me to opt for the alternative choice). The film cannot be downloaded onto my devices and enjoyed offline, as most of Netflix's catalog can; it can be watched more than one time, but each time the choices made previously are cleared. As I have already noted, this means that the viewing experience is unique and differs from spectator to spectator; that each successive viewing by the same spectator is always different from the previous one; and that each possible successive viewing is influenced by the previous ones, in particular by the first.

3. CONCENTRIC TRANSMEDIAL INTERACTIVITY

Another necessary introductory note concerns the interactive genre to which *Bandersnatch* belongs. Interactive cinema has its origins in the big-screen adaption of Edward Packard's 1976 novel *Sugarcane Island*, part of the "which-way" or "choose-your-adventure" genre popular in the '70s and '80s (for a historical account see Hales 2015). At the beginning of the 2000s, media theory began to explore in depth the characteristics, questions, and ambiguities of this genre within contemporary digital culture (Manovich 2001; Lunenfeld 2002; Shaul 2008).

Looking only at more recent years and following Zecca's useful classification (2015), we can distinguish between different types of interactive films in relation to: 1) their distribution platform or viewing mode (theater, DVD, mobile devices, Internet); 2) the complexity of their hypertextual structure (with "real disjunctions" if the paths and the ending are truly multiple or "false disjunctions" if instead the choices lead back to a single path); 3) the level of the effective participation of the user (simply choosing between multiple options or carrying out game-like tasks); 4) their social-productive function (they are not only alternatives to traditional films, but also artistic projections, independent productions, viral marketing projects, grassroots practices, or even social advertising). Such offerings never had any real success due to a number of reluctances on the part of critics, the public, and above all the

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market (in terms of both production and advertising), but the attention gained by *Bandersnatch* has reawakened awareness of the genre. The relevance of this title to the current discourses on media is closely linked to the new viewing possibilities offered by streaming online platforms. The ability to navigate the content in real time gives me the impression of narrative continuity, choice after choice, even if it is simply a matter of selecting the next video from a range of possibilities, as in the choice of the service's entire catalog. In fact, consulting the catalog of any streaming platform is an experience of interaction in the sense, however limited, of a choice between available options and the personalized construction of a program (or even a narrative that links different titles to one another, despite the fact that they are arranged by the recommender algorithmic system). *Bandersnatch* operates on the same principle, bringing it within the narrative itself.

As Shaviro (2010) stresses, the cultural passage from cinema to television, and from television to digital media, transformed the cinema not only into a digital product, but also into a digitalized experience. Obviously, the adjective "digital" is not limited to only signifying the production and distribution of a film through digital methods and platforms. The huge qualitative leap, instead, lies in the possibility for the user to interact with images and narratives, manipulating them, commenting on them, sharing them, and reshaping the viewing experience into active practices of semantic enrichment. This "viewser"—as Daly (2010) defines him/her, joining "viewer" with "user"—is the real protagonist of the crossmedial and transmedial adventure of "Cinema 3.0" (Daly 2008). The multi-route path of *Bandersnatch* within a "decision tree" structure (Salen and Zimmerman 2003) is in fact a hypertext, with a series of nodes that serve as connection points within and between texts, and create links between different stories.

Bandersnatch's narrative transmediality, however, is "concentric," since it begins within the film's narrative (a book being transformed into a videogame) and moves to the exterior through the form of an interactive film, which is moreover distributed through a post-televisual platform that calls for a performative mode of use, which itself triggers further extensions characteristic of the participatory culture of the Internet (Jenkins 2006). It is, in effect, the very singularity of the viewing experience that incentivizes the construction of a virtual community for the sharing of individual experiences, in search of a shared meaning precisely as a function of the multiple ways to watch the film (or of all possible "Bandersnatches").

4. CLICK FETISH AND BODIES UNDER CONTROL

I will now examine in detail the elements of weakness that, in my experience, paradoxically emerge from the linguistic innovations of *Bandersnatch* as an interactive work. I would like to note above all that for the spectator who is not predisposed to take part in an interactive experience—as was the case for me—the obligation to physically make a choice, armed with a Smart TV remote or touching a tablet display, can disturb the natural form of narrative engagement. I admit that I confused the initial guide giving instructions with the film's prologue. Once I understand what is required of me, I am not particularly disposed to interact, perhaps due to fatigue at the end of a work day, or the sedentary posture that normally characterizes my viewing of a film or an episode of a series while sitting on a couch. In fact, this physical gesture, however minimal and quick, continually "awakens" me from physical relaxation, imposing itself as a factor that makes me self-aware of my status as spectator, with the result of keeping me emotionally removed from the events of the narrative.

This seems to be an intentional reflexive strategy, meant to make me meditate on the mode of the narrative's construction (and thus on the impact of technology upon daily life) and not only on its content. On the one hand, I am supposed to derive pleasure from the digital control (or rather, control via the finger itself) of the content through a device (in my case the remote control, but it could also have been a mouse, or a tablet or smartphone's touch screen)—what Everett (2004) has called the "click fetish." On the other hand, there is a lost opportunity for relaxation and entertainment (the dystopian atmosphere of this and all of the stories in *Black Mirror* notwithstanding...), during which I am repeatedly disturbed by an unwanted physical engagement that obligates me to exit from the usual participatory paradigm and accept a more literal form of interactivity, similar to the one required by a videogame, albeit in a much more rudimentary form.

However, if it may seem obvious that a greater cognitive focus is obtained through the reduction of motility—the case of cinematic experience in a theater, in which movements are limited and attention is focused (with relevant yet rare exceptions; Klinger 1989) —it is also plausible that a small amount of corporeal activation leads to greater affective participation. On this front, it has to be noted that the contemporary trend of viewing audiovisual content through touch screen post-TV-set devices such as smartphones and tablets encourages mobility (the movement of body in space) and motility (the use of

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body to interact with the device) and reduces the gap between the human body and technologies. As Ben-Arie and Knoeller (2015) note, the "progressive embodiment" of technological extensions—that is, the reciprocal adaptations of the human body and mind to nonhuman interface (Biocca 1997)—implies "an optimized user who is willing to perform gestures and allow these to be captured. It requires a more affective and less cognitive subject, a communicator, a consumer, a player rather than a producer; a performing user" (Ben-Arie and Knoeller 2015: 62). Paradoxically, the result of such technological embodiment is an unintentional concession to the nonhuman intelligence that captures, registers, compares, predicts and uses for commercial purposes our gestural expression and corporeal behavior. The illusion of controlling the interface is exactly what allows the interface to control me. While propagandizing the freedom of the performative act of interaction, digital interfaces such as streaming platforms (namely Netflix, in the case of *Bandersnatch*), "progressively subvert the notion of user agency" (Ben-Arie and Knoeller 2015: 62). I will return to the topic of control later on.

5. INTERPRETATIVE COOPERATION AND INTERACTIVE COOPERATION

Semiotics, narratology, and cognitive psychology, applied to literature and cinema, have already extensively described the constitutionally "open" form of any given work, which *always* requires an activity of comprehension and "interpretative cooperation" from its reader (Eco 1979). And even if it is not required, *homo semioticus* has an innate tendency to fill in the gaps with which a story is deliberately strewn, or simply to logically link the presented events together (even when there is no logic at all), and above all to hypothesize and predict future ones. As has been noted, however, it is necessary to distinguish between "interpretative cooperation" and "interactive cooperation" (Montani 2014). The first concerns the effort, even a great one, that the spectator is called upon to make in order to understand a more or less cryptic or complex narrative, such as in the genre of "puzzle-films" (Buckland 2009) or "mind-game films" (Elsaesser 2009). The diagrammatic structure of *Bandersnatch* is an emblematic example of narratives in which flashbacks, travel in time, and temporal dislocations abound. The binary process of making choices and the resulting combinations, the complexity of the causal chain, and the presence of multiple possible endings situates *Bandersnatch* within this genre.

However, given *Bandersnatch*'s specific nature, interpretative cooperation is associated with interactive cooperation. As Montani explains, "Interactivity requires that the text be *constituted* through cooperative activity" (2019). Differently from the former, interpretative cooperation resides in the unique and aleatory character of every single version of *Bandersnatch* that emerges from my viewing, which is supposed to be different from that of anyone else. Such a constitutive act precedes the text's comprehension, insofar as "Only after having constituted it [the spectator] will find himself in the conditions necessary to attempt to understand, and to feel, what he has gradually composed" (Montani 2019). The act of the constitution of the text itself is thus fundamental to its comprehension: without the first, the second would not even exist. It is as though all of the possible routes that can be taken are potentially present from the beginning of the path, and my choices actualize them at given moments, without any apparent predetermination.

It seems to me that in both cases—interpretative cooperation (*Bandersnatch* as a puzzle film) and interactive cooperation (*Bandersnatch* as an interactive film)—my activity and pleasure of narrative comprehension or composition takes precedence over the content. Cognitive or "navigational" tasks prevail over narrative and visual involvement; structure takes precedence over causality.

I realize that it is not, in fact, the gestural activation of the choice in itself (however modest) that frustrates my interactive experience. Rather, the paradigm of "constitutive interactivity" (i.e. "interpretative cooperation") has a serious effect on the form of the narrative itself. How can I be happy with the ending I have reached if, choosing differently, I can arrive at all of the others? Can I really say I have seen *Bandersnatch* without having taken all of the paths and reached all of the endings? The hypothesis of constitutive interactivity is based on the existence of possibilities that are only virtually present until the moment of their actualization, but clashes with the actually predetermined nature of the narrative. Suddenly, I see the multiplication of possible endings, and paths to reach them, as a false virtuality. I have the impression that the different paths and endings are not really alternatives, but in fact all exist potentially and synchronically (it is the viewing of *Bandersnatch* in the "no choice" mode that produces a perfect version that includes them all). There are not as many *Bandersnatch*es as there are alternative possibilities; rather, *Bandersnatch* is the actualized, linearized, and diachronically distended aggregate of all of the possibilities.

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The analysis of the episode that has been offered thus far erroneously takes account only of the first viewing. However, as I have argued, it makes more sense to also consider the subsequent viewings and the ways in which they are influenced by preceding ones. This influence is also present within a single viewing, insofar as I understand that my choices may lead to a dead end and a consequent rewinding that requires me to go through the same fragment again, this time opting for the choice that was not previously selected. The principle of "retroactive causality"—choices in the present that modify not only the future but the past as well (for the application of this concept to film, see Elsaesser 2014)—seems to condition a single viewing of *Bandersnatch*, but the effect is even greater if we think of the experience as the aggregate form of all possibilities, in which the spectator will tend to choose a path based on possible future events of the narrative that s/he already knows as a result of previously undertaken ones.

6. GOODFELLAS

It is interesting that the choices preselected by the film in the case of my refusal to interact are always the most reasonable, balanced, and peaceful ones for the protagonist, at least in instances in which it is not merely a case of choosing between two brands of breakfast cereal. Indeed, Stefan accepts working in the offices of the production house, does not get angry with his father, doesn't kill him (or even if he does, doesn't cut him into pieces), regularly takes his medicine, goes to the psychiatrist rather than following Colin, tries to flee rather than attacking ...in short, despite everything, doggedly resisting his impulses, Stefan is truly a good boy! And the ideal spectator that Netflix anticipates is also a good boy (perhaps they thought that I would be offended if they had imagined me as a parricidal, unstable manic-depressive paranoiac. And if, instead, I had chosen, what criteria would I have applied? Would I have sought to maintain the protagonist's calm, out of an unwarranted sense of duty, or would I have let loose the devil inside me?).

Here, I realize the trick. Through a system of renunciation (the only means of resistance that I have), I force the artifice to unmask itself; I discover that this pseudo-interactivity is subtended by a falsely experimental mechanism that only gives the temporary impression of proceeding via trial and error. Every "rational" choice, in fact, leads to premature endings, and thus to a routine that will take me back to where I was, and automatically force upon me the path that I previously missed, almost as though correcting the wrong answer to a multiple-choice question. If I want to go any further, I have to choose the most depraved option; sooner or later I must decide to follow Colin. Someone or *something* has already chosen for me, and offers me an interactivity that is only illusory. As we will see, this is a deceptive author, not because *it* hides itself or is unreliable, but because it brazenly and meta-reflexively reveals itself, and finally gives away its own mendacity by doing what it wants anyway.

Virtuality thus only seemingly prevails over directionality: both options exist to disregard my choice, which is simply cancelled as I watch. Behind the mask of authorial democracy an authoritarian regime is concealed. All of this redundant interactivity begins to frustrate me, ends up being a bother, and I am tired of having to start once again from the beginning. I am almost imbued with nostalgia for the old beloved film in which someone else decides in my place (and better than I would) and in which one emotionally fights to reach *one* ending, whether happy or sad! Another crucial theme forcefully emerges: the distribution of authorship. The gimmick (and the pretense) of *Bandersnatch* and of all interactive films lies in the way that they transfer some of the choices usually made by the author to the spectator. During a traditional viewing experience, the principle force and narrative efficacy lie fundamentally in what the spectator gives up to the author. Here, it seems instead that the author, possessed by "hypertext mania", is ready to abdicate, or at least give up large portions of his control to me. However, this is pure illusion.

As I have already suggested, and as Elnahla notes as well (2019), in *Bandersnatch* the illusion of control is refuted by three factors. First, it is not possible to use the navigation bar to go back and forth on the timeline, as one can for linear films: this obliges me to respect the consequentiality of the flow of possible choices. Second, I have only a limited amount of time (10 seconds) to choose which direction to go in; otherwise, the system decides for me, imposing its own choice. Finally, some choices clearly lead towards a decision that the system considers to be correct (with a flashing "go back" that forces a return to an earlier point). In this way, despite the impression that I have a real capacity to direct things, it is the author and the technological interface who reveal themselves to be the true controllers of the narrative, on the basis of a series of decisions that have clearly already been made. Might the contradictory character of the forced choice, despite the impression of infinite choice, be a way to make me aware of the illusion? As we will see now, the ten-

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sion between the illusion of the spectator's *authoriality* and the effective *authority* of the text is, reflexively, the main theme of *Bandersnatch*.

7. THE AUTHOR? FUCK YEAH!

My reputation as a good boy begins to be thrown into doubt when I am asked if I might not like some more action in a film that is beginning to get a little annoying. To signal this shift in genre, the episode gives me the choice not between "Yes" or "No," but between "Yes" and "Fuck yeah." The intensifying repetition of what is ultimately the same option might be the apex of my co-authorship, in which I can even choose to transform a drama into an action film (with plenty of karate). Instead, giving me my options and at the same time making it clear that I am limited to two variations of the same option, the real author seems to finally reclaim the authority. And indeed, if I do *not* choose to flee through the window, Stefan finds himself on the set of *Bandersnatch*, in a meta-reflexive folding in of the text upon itself.

This self-reflexivity is an integral part of the "defamiliarizing" genre to which *Bandersnatch* belongs: even prior to the negative conception of technology that is typical of all of the episodes of *Black Mirror*, the complexity of non-linear narrative provides a means for reflection and critical "activation"—a dynamic that is in itself opposed to classical emotional engagement. Thus, we touch upon a crucial point. As Conley and Burroughs write, "The audience constantly switches between the perception of endless choice and the reality of blockages, false promises, and pointless repetitions" (2020: 9). *Bandersnatch*'s narrative is not weak simply due to its repeated and structural schizophrenia, but above all as a result of its self-reflexivity, its insistent leading to a closed circle that sooner or later reveals the limits of a world that pretends to be infinite.

The use of interactivity and the self-referential rhetoric reach a historical apex with *Bandersnatch*. Sucked into a paranoid spiral, Stefan never ceases to obsess over "not having control," thinking that "free will is an illusion," everything is a conspiracy, we are in a "cosmic diagram," and so forth (and this is indeed the case, given that he is a character in a film, even if he is oblivious to this). However, instead of trying to develop this theme in a critical sense, *Bandersnatch* ends up layering its reflection on free will onto a metalinguistic discourse. Stefan tries to act, to rebel against forced choices, refusing to take the ones that I suggest, and wants a sign. He gets the Netflix "N" and a spectator that writes to him from the future through his computer monitor.

This is the moment when the ambiguity between autonomy and control becomes most evident. The meta-reflexive sequences show that it is not Stefan's mind that is ill, but that of someone else that makes him make mistakes. The self-referential folding-in at least allows me to find my place. If there is a diegetic spectator who is writing from another dimension, then that is not me. And even Stefan, at a certain point, finds his own position. He betrays himself when he renounces philology in order to descend into compromises with the market: "I've been trying to give the player too much choice … and now they've only got the illusion of free will, but really I decide the ending." Just as a film usually behaves, *Bandersnatch* resists the spectator's expectations and rejects my choices, even if it sometimes guesses them, anticipating them only to thwart them.

8. IMPRESSION OF UNPREDICTABILITY

The gamic logic behind *Bandersnatch* affects my participation in the narrative unfolding. Since *Bandersnatch* poses itself halfway between a "database cinema" based on algorithms (Manovich 2001) and a very basic "decision-making" game, the interactive mode in which the story unveils itself conditions the pleasure of experiencing the narrative. In fact, the two options that appear on the screen at every fork end up anticipating and sometime revealing both the possible paths (e.g. killing the father/giving up), further unraveling the narrative, undermining emotional alignment, and neutralizing suspense. Each *dichotomy* announces a path that will sooner or later—in the virtual set of all possible choices— be taken. The pleasure is reduced to the ludic act of choice, and the rest is pure compliance with a pre-determined path. The pleasure of discovery is more important than its content; the real destination is the journey, as they say. By thus demanding the spectator's choice and by promising full control over the story, literal interactivity (interactive cooperation) ends up destroying psychological interactivity (interpretative cooperation). By contrast, in the "classical" viewing experience it was precisely the suspension of the outcome of a crucial event or the interior conflict inherent in an important choice that filled the spectator's experience (corporeal as well) with action. As Kinder argues, "Despite their subjection to the laws of causality, most narratives create the illusion that anything can happen, whereas

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most games present a closed world with a clearly defined set of rules" (2002: 125).

The psychological dynamic with which we usually participate in the development of a plot, particularly at pivot points, is in a sense comparable to that of a particular type of game: gambling, that is, the total concession of any decision-making to an uncontrollable entity (as is indeed the case), which we nonetheless have the impression of being able to control. Obviously, each story is predestined to follow a single trajectory, but what counts is the way in which the outcome of an event is experienced by the spectator: with incertitude, a sense of unpredictability and trepidation, despite the consciousness of the fixedness and irrefutability of a destiny that is *already written*. This is a phenomenon that I call "impression of unpredictability" (D'Aloia 2013), which *Bandersnatch* gives up in favor of the illusion of interactivity.

9. PLAYING WITH FIRE

The stance I adopted in the last paragraph could seem narrow-minded in respect to both the closed-*versus*-open notion of narrativity and the passive-*versus*-active role of the audience. A short incursion into the relationship between interactive storytelling and game studies would help to clarify my perspective. The ludic performativity inherent to interactive cinema is typical of its "ludification" (Larsen 2017) and, more generally, of the gamification of contemporary audiovisual experience (including television), in which the human and the machine cooperate in order to generate a narrative (Galloway 2004).

As has already been noted with regard to its "concentric" or meta-transmediality, *Bandersnatch* is not only the story of a book that Stefan tries to transform into a videogame, but is itself a game from the moment at which the spectator is called upon to move the character between various "levels" of his path. In his classification of moments of gamic action, Galloway (2004) distinguishes between diegetic/non-diegetic actions (whether they are taking place inside/outside the narrative world) and human/machine actions (whether they are generated by the input of the user or by the machine). The fact that *Bandersnatch* allows one to experience the narrative both actively (by opting between the alternatives) or inactively (the next scene is automatically played whether or not an option is selected) denotes a key difference between this form of interactive TV and video games: "to consume a narrative, video games require interactions between humans and machines while interactive television provides the option for interaction without the necessity" (Stoldt 2019). As Kinder argues, the distinction between participation and passive readings that characterized the contemporary discourse comparing games and narratives "can be treated more productively as a continuum" (2002: 122). Interactivity – as factual intervention on the narrative – and cognitive activity – to decipher more or less complex storytelling – are both forms of agency, and "all narrative forms accommodate more passive modes or response, even games" (Kinder 2002: 123).

The tension between autonomy and control, between freedom of choice touted by the participatory media and the predetermination of the narrative within a pre-structured algorithm (Hebben 2019) raises a crucial question: am I really an active subject who plays with the fate of the character, or am I instead a passive one who is being "played" by a superior entity—the game master? "Do I have to start again?," Stefan repeatedly asks himself, alluding meta-reflexively to the nature of the video game in which (with growing awareness) he is inserted. Just like in a video game, failure causes the player to lose a life, and to start again from the beginning of the level or from a "checkpoint." Even the theme of the impermanence of death is explicitly dealt with through the suicide of Colin, who under the effects of drugs throws himself off the balcony to demonstrate to Stefan the existence of a parallel reality, or rather of an alternative path that the player will look for in his/her next "life" to reach his/her goal, or to find the "Easter egg."

This suggests that the real stakes of the game do not lie in the mere construction of one story among a set of possibilities, but rather in exploring the meta-textual level and entering the diegesis in search of those clues that get to the most desirable ending. As films such as Steven Spielberg's *Ready Player One* (2018) clearly explain, access to the Easter egg is granted exclusively to those players (and spectators) with a profound and "retro-maniacal" knowledge of the creative logic behind the game. Similarly, *Bandersnatch* will be most enjoyed by that niche of spectators who are part of the subculture familiar with interactive fiction games or with the choose-your-adventure genre, or who have a nostalgic passion for '80s pop culture.

10. THE BIG N

Every choice I am forced to make constitutes a moment of self-analysis. At each fork I ask myself: did I make the right

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choice? What kind of story am I writing? Am I bringing it to a conclusion too quickly? These questions concern *my* compositional activity, but they do not really have any effect on the direction of the film's narrative path, which has the diagrammatic form of an algorithm. The success of the ludic nature of my experience only further weakens the value of the linkages that I am laboriously called upon to construct. While in a game I can peacefully die and start again, here the unmasking of the illusion that I have just discussed is intentional and intentionally inscribed within the interaction with the narrative. Stefan becomes increasingly aware that someone is controlling him, but at the same time, through the meta-reflexive folding-in of the narrative, I too, as spectator/player, increasingly gain consciousness that someone is controlling me.

At this point it is clear to me that the brazen display of the N and the appearance in the text of the spectator who controls Stefan's free will both express the same anxiety about control that slyly pervades *Bandersnatch*. As Elhnahla stresses, "The interactive film genre is a soft form of panoptic surveillance" (2019: 4), one that is also typical of contemporary reality and television and the "surveillance society" more broadly. The spectator's scopophilia, a characteristic trait of the filmic experience (Metz 1982), is turned back onto me, as I am monitored in the choices through which I think I am satisfying my own voyeuristic urges.

In short, *Black Mirror* uses Netflix to put one over on me for the umpteenth time. The idea is that interactivity represents a kind of vaccine against the negative effects of digital technologies to which I and all of us would otherwise be passively submitted (Conley and Burroughs 2020: 3); but in the attempt to obtain this immunity I am drawn into a trap, and I fall into a new deception. I thought that I had transformed my role of passive observer into being Stefan's direct interlocutor, even carrying out for a moment the role of the omniscient narrator. Instead, just as I become aware of the dangers of technology, I discover that I have been a victim of it, trapped in a diagram and an algorithm, played by a game, controlled precisely because I am a controller. "Bandersnatch is thus critiquing acquiescence while simultaneously legitimizing Netflix's usage of algorithms" (Conley and Burroughs 2020: 9). As I stated earlier, the catalogue of Netflix itself is ultimately a game of choices, an interactive super-text to which, unaware, all of its subscribers adhere, myself included. Here too, as within *Bandersnatch*, I find myself seemingly before an infinite catalogue of choices, but in reality I am subject to the chains of the will of an Author.

11. IN THE ENDS

Let me try to sketch a summary of what I have tried to bring out in these reflections on *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch*. A phenomenology of my individual experience allowed me to identify a series of "tensions" in the narrative architecture and in the role of the spectator: between interactive and interpretative cooperation (or, between performative and psychological participation), between actuality and virtuality (or, between the poverty of effective choice and the richness of potential choices), between self-reflexivity and self-referentiality (or, between self-awareness and self-citation), between co-authorship and authority (or, between the illusion of choice and control), and between gaming and gambling (or, between decision-making and randomness). When "old" media like film and TV series encounter the "new" media of streaming platforms and smart devices, linguistic and narrative experimentation reaches extremely interesting and original levels, although beneath the spotlights of the mainstream market and not within the localized or elite niches occupied by artworks.

The impact of interactivity, virtuality, meta-referentiality, surveillance, and gaming logic on forms of established media experience reveals several contradictions in the crossmedial and transmedial hybridization of distribution platforms, devices, and in modalities of spectatorship. The arguments that, a bit provocatively, I have tried to make here are not meant to advance an aversion to interactivity founded on the simplistic and reductive idea that *Bandersnatch* is not a film because it is too interactive, and is not a video game because it is not interactive enough. There is little doubt that *Bandersnatch* could open the way to a greater interpenetration between types and modalities of audiovisual experience and that the new media environments offered by streaming on-demand services platforms like Netflix offer an ideal site for this possibility to take shape. As often happens, the "quality" intellectual products that gain commercial success represent privileged cases for discussing the critical relationship between pure concessions to cultural fashions and the anthropological implications of the evolution of our relationship with media.

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VICTIM-NAMING IN THE MURDER MYSTERY TV SERIES *TWIN PEAKS*: A CORPUS-STYLISTIC STUDY.

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KEYWORDS
corpus-stylistics; crime; murder mystery series; Twin Peaks.

ABSTRACT
Corpus linguistics is advancing rapidly in the study of a wide variety of genres but is still in its infancy in the study of TV series, a genre consumed daily by millions of viewers. Murder mystery series are one of the most popular and proliferous, but no studies, to date, have used corpus-stylistics methodologies in the analysis of the pivotal character of the victim in the whole narrative. This paper applies said methodology in the hope of shedding some light on the quantitative and qualitative relationship between the participation roles of the characters, and the frequency and distribution of victim-naming choices in the dialogue of the first two seasons of the acclaimed TV series *Twin Peaks*. The analysis proves that textual reference to the victim is a central genre-cohesive device which may serve as a waymark to guide the audience throughout the many subplots of the series.

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1. INTRODUCTION

For centuries, true and fictional crime have been a matter of study in a wide array of disciplines both outside and within criminology (e.g., psychology, economics, biology, medicine, sociology, literature), although modern crime fiction as we know it today started in the 19th century. Crime has been ascertained as one of the most recurrent topics featuring in practically all commercial genres, thanks to its easy adaptation to any media: print, radio, television, film, graphic novel, computer games, virtual reality and new technologies (Alexander 2010). In the past few years, fictional television murder mysteries have thrived. *Murder mysteries* is here used as an umbrella term for drama and comedy crime, detective and procedural genres whose plot revolves around solving the mystery of a murder rather than other types of crime (e.g., mugging, blackmail, rape, etc.). To date, only Netflix, one of the leading streaming platforms, has published on its Mystery Tribune webpage (2019) a report on a selection of the best 57 murder mystery series on crime. While most are fairly short-lived, some others like *Twin Peaks* (ABC 1990-1991), the object of study in this paper, have long pervaded our culture.

For a text to be culturally recognised as belonging to a particular genre or text-type, say Murder Mystery Series (henceforth MMS), it must fulfil certain criteria. *Genre* and *text-type* are often interchangeably used in the literature (McEnery et al. 2006). Similarly, the concept of television genre (Mittell 2004) is still fuzzy, although it is widely used to identify different types of programmes for audience and production purposes. Biber (1989) distinguished between 'external' and 'internal' criteria (cf. Atkins et al. 1992; Lee 2001) when classifying texts to construct a corpus for linguistic analysis. External criteria are essentially non-linguistic, such as purpose, audience and activity type, while internal criteria are defined linguistically. Once the text is captured and subject to analysis, there will be a range of linguistic features that can contribute to its characterisation in terms of internal evidence, such as the distribution of words, and the lexical or grammatical features throughout the corpus. Unfortunately, as Lee (2001) argues, there are "as yet, no widely-accepted or established text-type categories consisting of texts which cut across traditionally recognised genres on the basis of internal linguistic features". Atkins et al. (1992) already highlighted that internal criteria are not independent of the external ones and that the interrelation between them is of primary value for corpus studies.

The present paper is an attempt to contribute to this line of research by exploring the linguistic choices for 'victim-naming' (Tabbert 2015) that characters use to refer to the victim of murder, *Laura Palmer*, in a corpus that contains the dialogues of the first two seasons of the MMS *Twin Peaks*. The analysis set out to explore internal as well as external criteria. I looked at the distribution and relationship between the linguistic choices (internal criteria) that characters used for naming the victim, such as: *name, name + surname, noun phrase* and to their participation role (Dynel 2011; Brock 2015; Messerli 2017) as 'investigators, perpetrators, victims, the community' and 'others' (external criteria). The present article contributes to fill a niche in the field of linguistics and TV studies (Jenner 2016) by analysing the function of certain linguistic features, such as the choice of naming (Gregori-Signes 2020), in the dialogues of television series. Ultimately, the article seeks to propose a tentative but replicable analytical framework that uses *victim-naming* as a benchmark to study character relationships in MMS.

During the Golden Age of Detective Fiction (1920s and 1930s), plots became more complex, usually involving more than one crime - one of them a murder - and a large number of characters, many of whom were suspects. The place and the community in which the crimes occurred were also given more prominence. There is quite general agreement among scholars that there are three basic participation roles (Todorov 1977; Gregoriou 2007) in modern crime fiction: the *investigator/s*, the *perpetrator/s* and the *victim/s*. According to Messerli (2017: 26), the participation framework (Goffman 1981; Schiffrin 1987) of a murder mystery captures both the relations between speakers and the relation of those speakers to their own discourse and that of other characters (Gregori-Signes 2005), as well as to the relevant participants outside the fictional artefact (Kozloff 2000). Thus, the characters' choices to refer to the victim (e.g., *my daughter, my best friend*) in *Twin Peaks* will possibly reveal how they relate to the victim of murder *Laura Palmer.*

In the real world, victims are a fundamental object of study in a wide array of disciplines, such as victimology, social justice, criminology, psychology and education, among others (cf. Davies et al. 2007; Petherick and Sinnamon 2017), whereas in fiction, the victim of murder has often been disregarded as the least important role (Wright 1946: 40 in Gregoriou 2007: 58). The difference between reality and fiction is that in MMS, as its name suggests, the victim is (potentially) dead and the audience will (most probably) know how and why s/he has been murdered when the narrative closes. In real life,

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this is not always the case, as the large number of unsolved murders proves.

Previous studies on the victim in mystery fiction come from fields other than linguistic-oriented disciplines (e.g., literary studies, media and cultural studies). Mills's (2020), study of young women's victimhood in Hughes' novel *In a Lonely Place,* in line with previous works, claims that the victim is one piece of a puzzle, a necessary point of contact between the victim and the detective (cf. Pyrhönen 1999). Lloyd (2013) discusses how insistent the voices of the dead can be in the solving of a fictional crime, while Bolin (2018: 21) asserts that the victim's memory is in itself a character. Along the same lines, Knight (2004: 87-8) claims that, in the context of post-war fiction:

> The victim has some wealth and authority [...]. Most of the real suspects will be relatives or close associates of the important dead person, and they will almost all have something to hide that makes them become what Wells (1913) recommended as a series of suspects.

Knight's (2004) description would probably fit not only *Laura Palmer*, the victim in *Twin Peaks*, but many other fictional victims in murder mysteries. In the case of *Twin Peaks*, when the world saw the image of LP wrapped in a white plastic bag, billions of viewers became concerned, week after week, about her fate, her problems and her true identity (Susca 2018). Finding out "Who killed Laura Palmer" became material for newspapers, magazines, TV chat shows and radio programmes (Alexander 1993: 128). These circumstances turned LP into, possibly, the most famous victim of murder in the history of TV. In this regard, *Twin Peaks* could probably be held partly responsible for the "American obsession" with "the dead girl on the show" (Bolin 2018) a tendency still present in many television series nowadays (e.g., *True Detective*, *Shetland*, *Sharp Objects*, *The Killing*, *Dublin Murders*).Corpus stylistic and corpus discourse analysis on the dialogue of television series (Gregori-Signes 2017) is a growing field of interest, as the many publications available indicate (cf. Bednarek and Zago 2019 for an updated bibliography). Linguistic studies on MMS and, in particular, those that focus on the role of the victim are, however, still scarce. Outside of fiction, Tabbert's (2015) critical linguistic and computational corpus study compares UK and German press *victim-naming* as well as the referring terms for crime, victims and offenders. A recent publication by Menti (2019) applies corpus linguistics methodologies (frequency lists, keywords and concordancing) to study media representations of crime, criminals and victims in two TV series, BBC's *Sherlock* and American CBS's *Elementary.* Menti concludes that the most frequent victims are men, although the crimes fall on a broader range of criminal activity rather than just murder.

In this article, the analysis of *victim-naming* in *Twin Peaks* made use of critical corpus stylistic techniques (Stubbs 2005; Mahlberg and Wiegand 2018; McIntyre and Walker 2019), thus relying on computational methods to uncover patterns that would have been difficult to obtain without the use of computers. The decision to analyse victim-naming was corpus-driven (Tognini-Bonelli 2001), after a first quantitative exploration which indicated the convenience to explore further the co-text of the forms *Laura/ Laura Palmer.* The main assumption preceding the analysis was that the victim was central to the narrative, since there is no MMS without a (potential) victim. If this were the case, this should somehow be reflected in the dialogue. The results confirmed that the frequency and distribution of victim-naming among characters acts as a key cohesive feature and a pivotal structuring element in the corpus.

The rest of the paper is organised as follows. Section 2 justifies the choice of the TV series *Twin Peaks* as an object of study. Section 3 briefly delves into the levels of communication and the participation roles of characters in MMS. Section 4 places victim-naming analysis within the realm of corpus stylistics, describes the corpus and outlines the methodology. Section 5 illustrates the analysis, while section 6 draws the conclusions and final considerations.

2. WHY *TWIN PEAKS*? WHY LAURA PALMER?

Twin Peaks, the object of study in this article, revolutionised and opened up the 'golden age of television'. It is considered a cult ground-breaking TV serial, a forerunner of high-quality television and a necessary referent for anyone interested in television series. As claimed by many critics, very few series can be said to have influenced the genre as much as *Twin Peaks* did. Furthermore, the interest in *Twin Peaks* was recently revived with the broadcast of its third season, *The Return* (2017), which increased the already large number of publications dedicated to *Twin Peaks* as a whole (Innocenti et al. 2016).

The storyline in *Twin Peaks* circles around the murder of seventeen-year-old homecoming queen Laura Palmer,

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with Special Agent Dale Cooper heading the investigation into the murder. *Twin Peaks* has been described as a hybrid TV series where we can find soap opera, murder mystery, horror, (melo)drama, comedy, and high school romance with heavy tinges of surrealism and fantasy**.** However, the centrality of the murder plot, the focus of this article, is recognised by many publications as the main plotline for the whole series.

Several reasons support the choice of *Twin Peaks* to explore the role of the victim of murder. First, I firmly believe that the study of newer products becomes more comprehensible when compared to the classics. At the time when it was premiered, *Twin Peaks* was the first to break the generic mould of television MMS (Hartwig 2013) by carrying out the investigation of a crime over two seasons. Until then, most series featured a different crime every week. Secondly, *Twin Peaks* is the only case in the history of television which has effectively "tested" the consequences that "the disappearance of the victim" had for the plot and the audience. When the two producers, Mark Frost and David Lynch, were forced by ABC to reveal the *whodunnit*, the series began its downward spiral and the narrative derived in a series of unsuccessful, unrelated-to-the-murder subplots (Hoffman and Grace 2017). Thirdly, because, as argued in the introduction, no other victim in the history of TV has surpassed the boundaries of fiction in the way Laura Palmer did.

We should mention that, as is the case with other MMS, there are other victims of murder, both potential (for example, Andrew, Josie's husband, who had allegedly been murdered, turns out to be alive in episode 2.11), and actual victims. Very briefly, murder victims in season 1 are the following: Bernie Renault is murdered by Leo Johnson, and Jacques Renault by Leland. In season 2, Emory Battis is shot by Jean Renault and Blackie O'Reilly is stabbed by Jean Renault; a bodyguard is stabbed by Hawk; Maddy, LP's cousin, is murdered by Leland; Cooper shoots Jean Renault; Erik Powell is stabbed by Windom Earle; Jonathan Kumagai is shot by Josie Packard; Malcom Sloan shot by Evelyn Marsh; Rusty Tomasky shot with a crossbow by Windom Earle; Leo Johnson shot dead by Earle; Hank Jennings was stabbed by inmates in his prison. Additionally, several other characters die by intentional accidents. Despite the high number of victims, the main one around whom the murder plot develops is undoubtedly Laura Palmer.

The confluence of the factors mentioned in this section makes *Twin Peaks* an ideal candidate to explore the relationship between victim-naming and the participation roles of the different characters in the narrative. The present research, however, is based on extensive viewing of both contemporary and less recent crime fiction serials, and, in particular those series that feature women as victims.

3. PARTICIPATION FRAMEWORK AND PARTICIPATION ROLES IN MURDER MYSTERY SERIES

Goffman (1981) introduced the terms participation status/role and participation framework (Clark 1992) as a means to analyse the various interactional roles played by the different people involved in an interactional setting (Schiffrin 1987). Drawing on Goffman's (1981) categories, studies on television discourse point out the existence of two basic levels of communication (Burger 1984, Richardson 2010, Dynel 2011, Brock 2015, Messerli 2017), the fictional and the real one. Level (1) or the *external circle* (Burger 1984) is the communication level between the *collective sender* (i.e., writers, directors, producers etc.) and the audience. Level (2) is the *inter-character* (Dynel 2011), or the fictional level, in which characters communicate with each other. This research analyses the dialogue at the fictional level, although it recurs to external sources in order to contextualise certain twists in the narrative, which may have been caused by external facts,

	Participation role	Realisations	Twin-Peaks' characters
Compulsory	Victim/s	people	Laura Palmer
		(other)	
	Investigator/s	law-enforcement	Cooper
		representatives	Sheriff Truman
		amateurs	Donna
		casual	
	Perpetrators	people	Bob/Leland
		(other)	
Optional	The Community	suspects	Leo
		accomplices	Jacques Renault
		family relations	Maddy, Sarah
		social relations	Donna, James
	Other	animals	Waldo, a parrot
		fantastic beings	Bob

TABLE 1. PARTICIPATION ROLES IN MURDER MYSTERY SERIES.

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such as the early revelation of *whodunnit* in episode 2.07. Following Bednarek (2018: 7), I use the term *dialogue* to refer to speech by one, two or more characters as well as between several characters. This would include monologues, dialogues as well as voice-over narration and asides.

As reported in the literature on MMS, there are three compulsory participation roles (Cawelti 1976, Todorov 1977, Gregoriou 2007) in the inter-character level in MMS: the *investigator/s*, the *victim/s* and the *perpetrator*/s. To this I would add two more categories: *The community* and *Other*. Table 1 illustrates with examples each of these categories by resorting to characters that appear in *Twin Peaks*.

In its simplest version, MMS plots involve at least one victim murdered by a perpetrator who will be pursued by the investigators. The family and the social relations will resent the death of the victim and acclaim or regret the actions of the investigators. However, participation roles are dynamic, can have multiple realisations (e.g., more than one victim) and may be enacted by different social categories (police, strangers, thieves, neighbours, women, wives etc.), that is, the same character may embrace more than one role (e.g., in *Twin Peaks*, Dr. Hayman is a friend of LP but also the doctor in charge of the forensic report). Participation roles can also fluctuate within the same episode, or from season to season (a suspect stops being so), according to plot development and denouement. Besides, all categories are susceptible of becoming optional, as in those series in which the plot revolves around alleged murder cases. That is, the alleged victim and perpetrator stop being so when the victim is known to be alive.

The *investigators* are characters that get involved in the criminal investigation either as law enforcement representatives (detectives, policemen), amateurs (e.g., Agatha Christie's Miss Marple, Kerry Greenwood's Miss Fisher) or laypeople (other characters who get involved in the crime investigation). At the same time, the degree to which they may get involved in the murder investigation may vary (a journalist in *Sharp Objects* vs. Cooper, an FBI agent in *Twin Peaks). The community* is here used as a broad term to refer to the participation role of characters that are related either to the victim (e.g., people in the same village, friends, even the killer him/herself etc.) or to the crime (Todorov 1977). Finally, *Other* characters are those that are not human (e.g., animals or fantastic beings). For example, an alpaca is decapitated in *The Stranger* (Netflix, 2020).

As for the victim, a MMS must have at least a (potential) victim. Very often, as the series progresses, victims will add up. For instance, in the first and second season of *The Killing* (AMC, 2011-2014), two members of the Police Force (Sarah Linden and Stephen Holder) investigate the death of a teenager, Rosie (the only victim), while, in the third season, the same investigation leads to discover the crimes of a serial killer, who happens to be Linden's former partner, James Skinner, the leader of the Seattle Police Department's Special Investigations Unit.

An example of innovation and plurality in the manipulation of participation roles can be seen in the acclaimed series *How to Get Away with Murder* (ABC, 2014-2020). The first season of the series features Annalise Keating, a law professor at the prestigious Middleton University and a prominent criminal law attorney who becomes entwined in a murder plot with four of her five interns-students (multiple killers) and her two employees (Frank and Bonnie). There are multiple victims (Liza, Rebecca Stutter, Sam) and multiple suspects, which are presented through an abundance of *in medias res*, flashbacks and flashforwards, which will only eventually be solved for the audience. In turn, a whole community can also be guilty of complicity (*The Gloaming*, ABC, 2014-2020). The heterogeneity and multiple realisation of participation roles should therefore be conceived as fluid and dynamic (Clark 1992, Brock 2015: 31) since possible combinations are innumerable. Although, as is generally admitted, the genre still remains true to its origins and aims.

4. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

4.1. The study corpus

The study corpus contains the first two seasons of *Twin Peaks,* as illustrated in Table 2 below. The third season was discarded, since it was broadcast 25 years later (*Twin Peaks:*

Season	Episodes	Originally aired		
		First aired	Last aired	Network
1	8 (100-107)	April 8, 1990	May 23, 1990	ABC
2	22 (201-222)	September 30, 1990	June 10, 1991	ABC
3	18	May 21, 2017	September 3, 2017	Showtime

TABLE 2. *TWIN PEAKS* SEASONS

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The Return), and the plot had moved away from the murder of Laura Palmer, already solved in episode 7.02.

For the purposes of the study, a main corpus (Corpus A) and a subcorpus (Corpus B) were built. The transcripts were retrieved from different online sources and the texts were manually checked, cleaned and annotated. It was necessary to format the corpus so that it could be processed with the software toolkit AntConc (2019).

The main corpus contains 117,919 tokens and 7,903 word types. *Twin Peaks* has more than 175 characters[1] (16 main, 6 secondary, 34 recurring casts- according to Wikipedia and others), so Corpus B includes only those characters that use *Laura/Palmer* (henceforth stands for both Laura and Laura Palmer) more than 5 times, a subjective threshold that was set after checking the total number of times *Laura/Palmer* was used in the dialogues.

Corpus A. Twin Peaks. Seasons 1 and 2
Corpus B. Individual files for selected characters

TABLE 3. STUDY CORPORA

4.2. Corpus Stylistics and Victim-naming

Corpus Stylistics (Mahlberg and Wiegand 2018; McIntyre and Walker 2019), the methodology applied for the analysis of the victim-naming in *Twin Peaks*, resorts to a combination of methodologies associated with corpus linguistics (CL) and stylistics in order to study the nature of texts. Stylistics (Carter and Simpson 1989; Malhberg 2013; Mahlberg and Wiegand 2018) is often described as the study of the language of literary texts. CL can be defined as the study of language based on examples of 'real life' language use, supported by software that "acts as an aid to the researcher by allowing the linguistic data to be quickly surveyed" (McEnery and Baker 2015: 2). As argued by Tabbert (2015), CL follows the principles of rigour, transparency and replicability by relying on statistics and computational methods that help uncover linguistic patterns, which are difficult to obtain when we try to process large quantities of data without using computers.

Among the 10 textual-conceptual categories that Jeffries (2010:15) describes as useful for the critical analyst to find out "what a text is doing" are *naming* and *describing.* Jeffries (2010) claims that *naming* is a broad descriptive term covering a number of linguistic practices: a) the choice of a noun to indicate a referent; b) the construction of a noun phrase with modifiers to further determine the nature of the referent; c) the decision to use a 'name' rather than, for example, express as a (verbal) process. The study of *naming* is related to that of *forms of address* (Jefferson 1973; Leech 1999; Wood and Kroger 1991; Bednarek 2011; Formentelli 2019; Gregori-Signes 2020). Biber et al. (1999: 1108) expound that vocatives (cf. McCarthy and O'Keeffe 2003) can take many forms: endearments (*darling*), family terms (*Mummy*), familiarisers (*mate, bro*), familiarised first names (*Paulie*), full first names (*Dianne*), title and surname (*Miss Johns*), honorifics (*Sir*); and others, such as nicknames (*you reds*), and even elaborated nominal structures such as: *those of you who want to bring your pets along.* Tabbert (2015: 103-4) argues that:

> the nominal reference for a victim is one of the major constructive devices because it can foreground certain aspects of the victim's personality (Clark 1992: 211). The lexical choice of one word over another creates a map (Fowler 1991: 82) which attributes values (Mayr and Machin 2012: 28) [...] By foregrounding the victim's relations to other people as in the categories 'social role' and 'family relations', these naming choices construct the victim as being part of a social system.

This research, however, differs from Tabbert's in that here the interest is stylistic rather than social, and the victim is fictional rather than real. The objective is to find out what the function of victim-naming is, as a narrative device, for the genre MMS. The analysis set out to answer the following questions:

> i) Is the victim quantitatively salient, verbally?
> ii) What does the distribution and the frequency of victim-naming in the dialogues reveal about the whole murder mystery narrative?
> iii) Does the choice of victim-naming by different characters reveal their relationship with the victim as well as their participation roles in the genre MMS?

1 Complete cast at https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0098936/fullcredits (last accessed 11-07-19).

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The decision to analyse victim-naming was corpus-driven and proceeded as follows. First, the frequency wordlist indicated the presence of various victim-naming items. However, frequency alone, as claimed in CL, is not an accurate indicator (Stubbs 2005:12) of the centrality of the victim, unless we check its relevance in the whole corpus. A scrutiny of the concordance (Mahlberg and Wiegand 2018) plot for the terms *Laura/Palmer* tested their distribution. A qualitative interpretation of the concordances determined its role in the structure of the narrative. Apart from proper names (*Laura/Palmer)* and noun phrases (*the body of the dead girl*), the concordance lines of the pronoun *she* were manually examined through the *fileview tool* in AntConc to discern those cases that referred to the victim. Additionally, a semi-manual exploration of concordances and collocations allowed me to extract a list of less frequent significant terms for victim-referring, such as terms of endearment (*my baby, my child)*, social relations (*my friend*) and other terms which referred to the victim (*the body of the victim*). As illustrated in Table 4 below, all those cases of victim-naming amounted to the quantitative presence of the victim in the narrative.

The second step was to assign each of those terms to the characters who uttered them, which were grouped according to their participation framework, i.e., *investigator, perpetrator, victim, the community/social relations*, *other* (cf. Table 1). This provided a clear picture of the linguistic patterns used for victim-naming across episodes, individual characters, and the whole narrative. Finally, the occurrences of *Laura/ Laura Palmer*, the two most frequent victim-naming items, were explored in depth.

5. ANALYSING THE PRESENCE OF THE VICTIM

5.1. Quantitative saliency and distribution of victim-naming

The frequency wordlist partly illustrated in Fig. 1 signposted the quantitative relevance of the victim Laura Palmer (henceforth LP[2]) in the corpus. Sometimes the name *Laura* appeared on its own, while others it was followed by her surname *Palmer. Laura* (first name) was, in fact, the first most

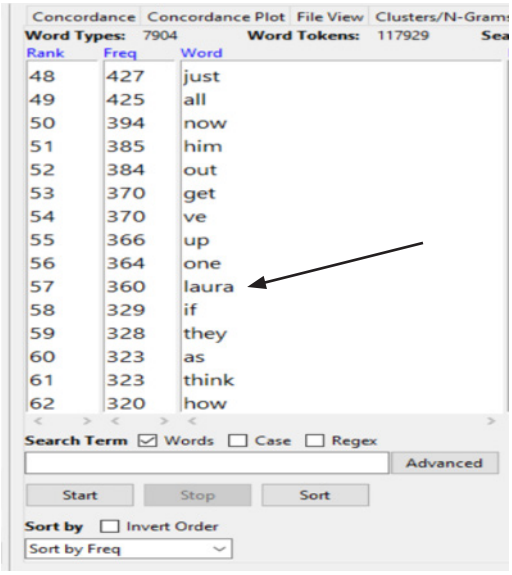

FIG. 1. FREQUENCY WORD LIST OF *TWIN PEAKS*

frequent lexical word (rank 57,360 instances, 2,489.06 per million) in the corpus, and occupied the 2nd position after applying a stoplist which excluded common function words such as prepositions and articles. The exploration of the concordances showed *Laura Palmer* (name+ surname) as the second most common victim-naming form.

Previous studies in fiction point out the tendency of characters relevant to the plot to be among the most frequent words in the corpus (Culpeper 2001, Bednarek 2010,). However, as it is commonly claimed by CL, the total frequency should be further analysed by looking at the dispersion plot which will allow us to assess the relevance of a character (Gregori-Signes 2020) throughout the entire series

As observed in Fig. 2, the two most frequent forms for victim-naming are distributed throughout the whole two seasons, although they are accumulated in the first 27 episodes.

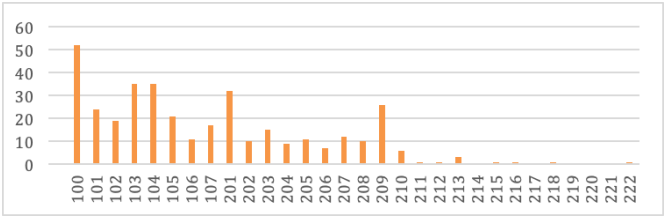

FIG. 2. CONCORDANCE PLOT FOR LAURA/LAURA PALMER

2 The abbreviation LP is used to talk about the character and *Laura/Palmer* in italics is used to refer to the terms themselves (*Laura vs. Laura Palmer).*

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In episode 2.07, the truth about LP's murder is disclosed: how it happened, why, who and what was behind her murder. In the subsequent episodes up to episode 2.11, the details of her murder are brought up and explained (a total of 57 occurrences). It was Leland (possessed by Bob, the interdimensional entity), Laura's father, who raped and murdered his own daughter, possibly influenced by Bob (Hoffman and Grace 2017). In example 1 below, Agent Cooper describes Leland's involvement in the crime.

> (1)
> COOPER: Laura was writing about Bob in her diary. Leland found it, ripped out the pages. She knew he was on to her. It was Leland who placed that call from Ben Horne's office to Laura the night she died. He was the third man outside Jacques' cabin window. He took the girls to the train car. It was his blood we found not Ben Horne's [2.09].

Lynch himself explains (in Hoffman and Grace 2017: 59) how the decisions of the ABC network put pressure on them:

> The way we pitched this thing was a murder mystery but that murder mystery was eventually to become the background story. [....] We were not going to solve the murder for a long time. They didn't like that. And they forced us to, you know, bet to Laura's Killer (in Hoffman and Grace 2017: 59).

Frequency	Victim-naming term	Character
71	Laura Palmer	many characters
289	Laura	many characters
194	she (LP)	many characters
9	my baby	Father, mother
3	my daughter	Leland
2	my best friend	Donna
1	your best friend	Cooper
3	my friend	Audrey
2	his daughter	Judge Lodwick
2	my girlfriend	Bobby
1	your girlfriend	Mike to Bobby
1	your girlfriend	Truman to Bobby
2	my little girl	Leland
2	the dead girl	Cooper
1	Miss Laura Palmer	Josie
1	her daughter	Cooper (to Sarah)
1	Leland's daughter	Jerry
1	your best friend	Cooper (to Donna)
1	my only child	Sarah
1	Palmer	Albert FBI Agent
1	this child	Priest
1	The body of the victim	Cooper
1	our friend	Gersten (Donna's Sister)
1	The little lady	Albert FBI Agent
Total	**592 cases**	

TABLE 4. VICTIM-NAMING NOUNS AND PHRASES

After these revelations, there is a drastic drop of victim-naming in the dialogues (only 4 mentions of Laura from episode 2.13 till the final episode, 2.22), and the narrative derives in a series of subplots unrelated to the murder mystery. As Lynch himself declared, they found it difficult to continue with the narrative flow in a way that would be equally interesting for the audience. These results point towards considering the victim as a key cohesive element in the narrative in the murder mysteries.

5.2. Victim-naming and participation roles

As can be observed in Table 4 below, the first name *Laura* (289), without any enhancement, is the most frequent referring form for the victim, followed by her full name *Laura Palmer* (71). To this we should add the pronoun *she,* which registers 194 occurrences while the rest of forms used to refer to LP are scarce.

Differently from the tendency in conversation, where "pronouns tend to be slightly more common than nouns" (Biber 1999), in *Twin Peaks* there is a prevalence of proper nouns (Laura/Palmer) over pronouns for victim-naming. Following in frequency is the pronoun *she* (194 cases), which was checked manually to discard cases which did not refer to LP. Far less frequent victim-naming noun phrases included *my daughter, my baby, my girlfriend*, *my only child*, which reveal family and social relations with the victim. These forms are pragmatically relevant (Ridley 2016), since they disclose the relationship between the victim and the characters. The concordances and collocations for these terms were then individually analysed, including their dispersion patterns across the whole narrative and across characters (Culpeper 2001).

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My baby (7 Leland, 2 Sarah) and *my little girl* (2 Leland) appear in highly emotional moments when LP's parents lament the death of their daughter (*my daughter,* Leland 3). Equally, the last hit of *my baby* emerges once more in episode 2.07, while Leland/Bob is dancing with agonising Maddy - LP's cousin and doppelgänger. This scene reveals how LP was murdered. Leland's face alternates between Leland and Bob, revealing to the audience that he is possessed by this surreal character. This scene was at the time described by Alexander (1993), as "possibly the most brutal sequence ever made for American prime-television" and still today has not lost any of its power.

Other terms of endearment and kinship introduce Laura's social relations (*my/our friend*), *my best friend* (Donna), *your/ my girlfriend* (Bobby); *her/his daughter; my daughter; my only child* (Laura's parents, Sarah and Leland). The priest refers to Laura as *this child*, a child of his parish he has known since birth. LP also tutored a disabled child and gave English lessons to Josie, who refers to her as *Miss Palmer*, a term of admiration and respect (cf. Murray 2002). However, and essential to the genre itself, LP is also identified as the victim of murder, no longer alive with NPs such as *the dead girl* or *the body of the victim*, and ironically referred to by Albert, the FBI agent, as *the little lady* when he found out that LP used cocaine.

> (2)
> ALBERT: Okay, first of all, contents of envelope found in Palmer diary, cocaine. Toxicology results also positive. News flash, the little lady had a habit. Next we got fibers of twine embedded in her wrists and upper arms [1.03].

The analysis then turned to examine the distribution of the two most frequent victim-naming terms among characters: first name (*Laura*) followed by first name+ surname (*Laura Palmer*). The first name (*Laura*) indicates closeness and identifies the victim both for the characters and for the audience, while her name + surname (Laura Palmer) identifies her as a unique member of their community. Table 5 below shows the number of times each character used *Laura/ Palmer* (columns 1 and 2), the number of words uttered by each one in the whole two seasons (column 3), their role (column 4) in the series as well as their category within the genre MMS (column 5).

Two patterns emerged from the analysis. First, the participation roles with a frequency higher than 5 (with the exception of Waldo, 4 cases) coincide with those characters listed in outside sources as primary or secondary. All of them name the victim more than five times. Secondly, as expected, her family and close social relations prefer the use of first name. Her parents, for example, never use the formal *Laura Palmer*, and are the only ones that use forms of endearment (*my baby*), as observed in Table 4 above. Her cousin only uses *Laura*, and so do Bobby and James, her boyfriend and lover respectively, as well as Harold, a friend, to whom she told her secrets. The same applies for Audrey (2 *Laura Palmer*) and Donna (1 *Laura Palmer*), who only use the more formal *Laura Palmer* when talking to the police or to strangers. At the same time, both Donna and Audrey act not so much as a friends, but as an amateur investigators.

The *investigators* proper are Cooper, Sheriff Truman and Albert (occasional support). In quantitative terms, both policemen, Cooper and Truman, alternate almost symmetri-

	Laura	Laura Palmer	Word tokens	Participation roles	MMS genre´-categories
Cooper	41	42	19018	police/FBI	investigator
Sheriff Truman	13	10	7575	police/sheriff	investigator/ community
Albert	6	1		police	investigator
Dr. Jacoby	19	1	4629	Psychiatrist	investigator/ community
Dr. Hayward	7	3	4034	doctor	investigator/ community
Donna	44	1	1611	best friend	community/ social relations
Audrey	24	2	2594	schoolmate	community/ social relations
Leland	18	0	2399	father	community/ family relations
Sarah	18	0	622	mother	community/ family relations
Maddy	16	0	1028	cousin	community/ social relations
James	14	0	2827	mover	community/ social relations
Bobby	12	0	3862	Boyfriend	community/ social relations
Harold	8	0	794	friend/ acquaintance	community/ social relations
Waldo	4	0		other-animal	parrot

TABLE 5. INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERS' USE OF LAURA VS. LAURA PALMER

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cally between the use of *Laura* and *Laura Palmer* (Cooper: *Laura Palmer* 42 times and 41 *Laura;* Truman: *Laura* 13 times, and 10 *Laura Palmer*). On the other hand, Cooper, the main detective and the protagonist of the series, outnumbers almost three times the total frequency of the use of the terms *Laura* and *Laura Palmer*. Agent Cooper mentions Laura/Palmer 83 times while Truman only 23. Truman's duality is suggestive of his mixed feelings towards the victim: LP is not only a victim of murder, but a teenager from his hometown, someone he has known probably since she was a child. As for Cooper, he is an outsider who soon gets fascinated with the town and its inhabitants. As early as in episode 1.03, he tells his secretary Diane that he may well end up living in *Twin Peaks* (*I may look into purchasing a piece of property at what I assume will be a very reasonable price* 1.03) as it happens at the end of the series. When he first arrived, he referred to *Laura Palmer* as *the dead girl* on two occasions (e.g., *Can someone give me a copy of the coroner's report on the dead girl?* 1.00), then moves on to alternate between *Laura* and *Laura Palmer* indicating his involvement with the case and the community of *Twin Peaks*. In the end, he falls in love with Annie and becomes Bob, the evil member of the community and killer of LP. The conflict between his feelings towards the victim are reflected in his alternation between the familiar first name *Laura,* and the more distant, respectful and formal *Laura Palmer* (Biber et al. 1999: 1132). Moreover, in his role as the main detective, he is the character with the highest frequency of victim-naming.

Dr. Jacoby (*Laura* 19; *Laura Palmer* 1) and Dr. Hayward (*Laura* 10; *Laura Palmer* 3) also have a dual relationship with the victim. They are citizens, thus part of the community, friends of LP and the doctors of the community. Dr. Hayward is Laura's doctor and as such, he helped deliver her into the world. But he is also the father of her best friend, Donna. As such, he only uses the more formal *Laura Palmer* when talking to the police early in the series, while discussing the details of the autopsy. The same pattern is reproduced with Dr. Jacoby who was her psychiatrist and lover at the same time. He only uses her full name once, as illustrated in example 3.

> (3)
> DR. JACOBY: Look the-the fact that-that Laura Palmer sought medication, no matter how dubious, was actually a positive sign. My own personal investigation, I suspect, will be ongoing for the rest of my life [2.03].

Regarding *the community/ social relations*, Donna is Laura's best friend and Audrey is one of her schoolmates and the sister of the boy Laura tutored. Both of them prefer *Laura.* Donna, Laura's best friend, mentions her almost double the amount of times Audrey does (Donna 44 times and Audrey 24 times). Both of them use the more formal *Laura Palmer* only once. Audrey does so when in conversation with Agent Cooper, the FBI agent (*Can I sit here? Thank you. You're here investigating the murder of Laura Palmer* 1.03), and Donna, while talking to the people to whom Laura delivered food (*I- I'm taking over Laura Palmer's place on the Meals on Wheels* 2.02).

As for the men in Laura Palmer's life, her boyfriend Bobby and her secret lover James, both use *Laura* almost the same amount of times, 12 and 14 respectively. Finally, Harold's participation role as a friend is more tangential. Harold is a lonely character whom Laura met through her job at *Meals on Wheels*. She delivered food to Harold and she confided him her secret diary. The distribution of the cases of victim-naming by Harold prove his tangency to the plot: they are concentrated in two episodes: 6 of the 8 cases are in 2.03, the remaining in 2.04. Finally, Albert is an FBI agent who occasionally assists Cooper in the investigation, and he is only present in a few episodes; that is why he mentions the victim only 6 times.

There are some other characters who name *Laura/Palmer* 4 times. These characters are proved to be marginally related to the crime itself. First, Jacques (4), Jerry (2), Emory (4), Leo (1) and Ben (4). All of them took advantage of Laura's sexual services when she was working as a prostitute in the *Black Lodge*. Waldo (4) is the parrot that was in the cabin when she got murdered, and Ronette (4) is the girl who was with Laura when she was murdered but managed to escape. The name of Laura appears also in the tapes she left for Dr. Jacoby and as part of the cluster *the night Laura Palmer died*, which is used as a time referent for other story lines, a common device to relate to the ongoing plot in MMS.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this article was to find out whether there was a quantitative relationship between the frequency and distribution of victim-naming choices and the participation roles of the characters in the series *Twin Peaks*. This relationship was confirmed by applying quantitative text-based analysis using corpus techniques and always making qualitative, functional interpretations of quantitative patterns (Biber 1989).

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The exploration of the victim-naming terms revealed a series of patterns present across the whole narrative. The first-name (*Laura*) of the victim was the first most frequent form; followed by *name + surname* (*Laura Palmer*). Others included noun phrases with or without modifier (*my best friend, your girlfriend*), which coincided with some of the patterns identified by Tabbert (2015), although in quantitative terms there is a clear prevalence of the first name over the other referring forms. As for participation roles, the community hardly ever used the formal *Laura Palmer*, while the investigators seem to alternate between that and the more intimate *Laura*, which indicates their internal conflict regarding the victim.

These results proved the validity of applying corpus-stylistics methodologies to the analysis of TV discourse when looking for possible linguistic patterns and their functions. Accordingly, the verbal presence of the victim has been proved to be an essential genre-cohesive device that gives coherence and *reason d'etre* to the genre itself, acting as a waymark in the narrative progression, an element which the audience relies upon in order to make sense of the many possible subplots immersed in fictional murder series.

Admittedly, the results on *Twin Peaks* may or may not apply entirely to victims in other murder mystery series. However, the results obtained may help sustain that, to a certain degree, this analysis can be useful to discern the function of victims in other MMS. In this sense, this study contributes to fill in a niche neglected in the study of the television series genre: the analysis of the structure of narrative plots (Bednarek 2018) which are developed in the form of dialogue. Since creativity and innovation is cultivated by television series in their strive to gain a greater audience share, studies like this open a field of research still vastly unexplored, in which each series leaves a stone that is waiting to be unturned.

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The Killing (2011-2014)
Sharp Objects (2018)
Sherlock (2010-)
Shetland (2013-)-
The Stranger (2020)
True Detective (2014-)
Twin Peaks (1990-1991)
Twin Peaks: The Return (2017)

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PUTTING THE SERIAL IN CONTEXT: COMPARING THE STORYTELLING PROCESSES OF CONTEMPORARY PRIMETIME KUWAITI TELEVISION DRAMAS WITH AMERICAN NETWORK DRAMAS

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KEYWORDS
TV series; TV narrative; pan-Arab TV production; Kuwaiti dramas; American dramas.

ABSTRACT
Strictly designed with distinct narrative characteristics to accommodate the thirty day schedule of the holy month of Ramadan, Kuwaiti television dramas broadcast in a proliferated television landscape confined by the Arabic language, and which consists of television institutions operating from various Arab countries that compete for the vast pan-Arab audience. These unique broadcasting conditions inform the program-making practices that shape the construction of narratives across the pan-Arab region. Like American network dramas, Kuwaiti dramas depend on advertising and syndication to generate revenue but the pan-Arab region's technological adaptation transformed the production conditions and the commissioning processes of these dramas. By comparing the commissioning process of Kuwaiti television dramas with American network dramas, this article examines the development of the storytelling practices involved in shaping their narrative conventions and illuminates the manifestation of their industrial specificities in their narrative designs. The analyses of primary interviews with writers and representative dramas suggest that the unique shared broadcasting conditions of the pan-Arab region, accompanied by the particular operations of a television industry within the region, contribute to the commissioning process and designs of television dramas, and the challenges of this competitive language-confined environment underpins the prominent and intense implementation of serialized elements in Kuwaiti television dramas.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Despite having a similar revenue model to American broadcast networks, the drastic and distinct development of satellite technologies in the Middle East formed a competitive television environment that requires a set of narrative conventions to function within the boundaries of the holy month of Ramadan. These developments prioritize the need to produce thirty episodes of serialized scripted dramas and achieve complete narrative closure by the end of the month. The formation of this type of programming developed in response to the ritual habits of Muslim societies and the technological developments of media systems in the Middle East. During Ramadan, Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset and alter their daily activities accordingly. Therefore, television becomes a significant leisure activity and networks preserve and prepare exceptional and quality programs for Ramadan. With the capacity of modern satellite technologies facilitating the rise of media cities across the region, giving access to Arab audiences and allowing networks from varying states to compete with each other, a competitive language-confined television environment formed with high demand for drama production. These social and technological particularities distinguish the production of Arab narrative forms from other television dramas worldwide.

However, each country's television institution in the Middle East develops its own form of programming in an attempt to compete for the diverse pan-Arab audience. Naomi Sakr asserts that, "it is plausible to take a broad view of Arab television as an interconnected set of cultural industries, where production and exchange takes place across a market circumscribed not by tariffs or jurisdiction but by language" (2007: 2), thus making the region a unique television landscape that is dictated by shared broadcasting conditions. With Kuwait being one of the leading drama producers in the pan-Arab region (Sakr 2007), and American dramas being the prominent and most exported worldwide (Hoskins and Mirus 1988: 499–515; Nelson 2007), comparing the processes that shape their specific conventions reveals the practices that constitute their distinctions, illuminates the production conditions and modifications contributing to program development in both television landscapes, and highlights the institutional particularities that are impacted by certain industrial shifts and how these alterations are reflected in the narrative constructions of series dramas. By foregrounding these transformations, this paper illustrates that a television industry's technological adaptation, informing the norms and conditions of distribution, contributes to the development of specific narrative elements and ultimately the construction of a programming format. More precisely, the aim of this study is to foreground how these various production dynamics contribute to the commissioning process and the employment of narrative elements in order to accommodate specific means of program production, circulation, and consumption.

With Ramadan being "The most important season for Arab television when the industry shows its very best productions, viewership soars, advertising rates peak and television programmes become topics of daily conversation" (Kraidy and Khalil 2009: 99), the demand for drama production increases and countries with established industries become beneficiaries. Kuwait leads other Gulf Cooperation Council countries (GCC) in drama production output and is one of the top three exporters in the pan-Arab region (Al Mukrashi 2015). Using the Arabic term "Khaleeji" to identify GCC productions, Suzy Karajian, Assistant General Manager at Sabbah Pictures, states that, "Around 90% of Khaleeji productions take place in Kuwait" (BroadcastPro 2014). Being one of the most prominent distributors in the region, Kuwaiti dramas are central to commissioning processes and essential to television networks across the pan-Arab region. This significance and the region's free-to-air revenue model draws comparisons with other similar revenue models such as American broadcast television. However, Anthony Smith (2019) cautions that there are certain national, economic, institutional, and technological specificities that distinguish the narrative designs of series programs. These specificities impact the methods utilized to construct storylines, episodes, and seasons. Although these specificities are relevant to television industries worldwide, this article asks: how and why do the implications of specificities vary from one television industry to another? To what extent have technological advancements of television industries altered the commissioning processes and the development of television dramas? Finally, how and why have narrative designs been directly influenced by the modifications of these specificities and to what extent are serialized elements incorporated to address these disruptive challenges? To understand these processes, this article will compare and examine the specificities from a Kuwaiti context to detail the extent of serialization employed in response to the contemporary proliferated television landscape. The purpose of the comparison is to detail the growth and implementation of the concentrated level of serialization in contemporary Kuwaiti television programs and to demonstrate how and why their designs differ from American network dramas.

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The article draws upon primary interviews with three Kuwaiti writers and provides textual evidence from three culturally significant and representative dramas of this era, *Altendail* (2008), *Zawarat Al Khamis* (2010), and *Etr Alrouh* (2018). However, as shown elsewhere in the region (Salamandra 2011), writers' work status and reputation can be threatened and harmed when sensitive information regarding censorship and regulations is disclosed. Since this article contains such sensitive information and because the majority of Arab governments are structurally authoritarian, the identities of the interviewees are concealed. To protect writers' identities, this paper labels every writer with a number for identification purposes. In this way, the information can be used to support the analyses and draw conclusions.

2. ARAB AND AMERICAN TELEVISION DRAMAS

Despite permeating primetime hours during Ramadan, there are only few accounts devoted to national drama productions in the pan-Arab region. Christa Salamandra addresses the politics of drama production in Syria (2008: 177–89; 2011: 157–67; 2013) and Rebecca Joubin investigates the representations of cultural identities in Syrian dramas (2020). Furthermore, Lila Abu-Lughod provides two profound accounts that highlight the Egyptian government's utilization of soap operas to convey specific national ideologies (1993: 493–513; 2004). However, their accounts neglect the narrative designs that these industries produce and the practices involved in developing their formal properties. Other scholars have focused on the technological shifts and the role of satellites in the expansion of television networks and the rise of media cities across the region (Fakhreddine 2001; Khalil 2013; Sakr 2007). Although these studies provide insights into the production environment, they fail to acknowledge the impact that such technological conditions and alterations have on the narrative characteristics of television programs. What they do acknowledge however is the industrial transformations occurring and the impact they have on issues of regional program circulation. These inquiries establish a framework for understanding the historical development of the television landscape in the pan-Arab region, and differentiate the region from other distinguishable transformations occurring elsewhere.

Although satellite technologies first emerged in the pan-Arab region in 1990, more advanced satellites with greater capacity for channel carriage, Nilesate 101 and 102, launched in 1998 and 1999 (Sakr 2002). Prior to these advancements, the television landscape in the pan-Arab region consisted of a limited amount of networks, mostly state-owned, in a region considered to be certain with less sophisticated and fractured audiences for the available networks. However, the advanced satellites facilitated the increase in the amount of regional networks and created program innovation possibilities that would potentially form a competitive environment in what was once considered an underdeveloped region (Kraidy 2002). Such advancements informed the characteristics of series dramas as networks began to compete for pan-Arab audiences and altered their commissioning processes to increase their market shares.

In response to these technological developments, Kuwaiti dramas have undergone substantial modifications at the episodic and season levels. Dramas that once consisted of eleven and thirteen episodes during the pre-satellite era (1961-1990), increased to fifteen episodes during the satellite era (1990-2000), before moving towards a thirty-episode season in the network proliferation era (2000 onward) and occupy the daily broadcast schedule of Ramadan (Hayat 2020). Changes in the amount of episodes are derived from the demands placed by regional networks, the technological advancements providing access across the region, and the level of competition generated by the rapid increase in Arab television networks. Not only have these technological disruptions informed the amount of episodes produced, but they also contributed to the changes in the attributes of the form. As a result, contemporary Kuwaiti dramas are designed to accommodate these industrial transformations and function to address these unprecedented challenges. However, technological developments have also occurred in American television but their employment of serialized storylines evolved alongside a more traditional episodic form due to the production conditions surrounding the industry.

Amanda Lotz (2014) clarifies the specificities of the developmental periods that American television underwent and highlights her eras as the network era (1952-1980s), the multi-channel transition era (1980s-mid 2000s), and the post-network era (mid 2000s onward) to illuminate the shifts in production practices and program innovations created by the changes in distribution models and commercial imperatives. These transformations cleared the path for the emergence of basic cable and premium cable network models resulting in the construction of unprecedented program forms. As a result, these industrial shifts informed the sto-

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rytelling changes occurring in American broadcast dramas. The impact of these transformations is exemplified in many accounts that detail the development of the features of American broadcast dramas. Jane Feuer (1986) argues that two forms of series dramas permeated American broadcast television, the serial and the episodic, but Jeffrey Sconce (2004) explains that developments in programming due to the rise of cable networks created a mixed form of narrative that combines features from both formats. He contends that American broadcast dramas provide serialized plots with each episode containing an episode-specific dilemma that is introduced and resolved during an episode. However, Jason Mittell (2006: 29–40) clarifies that there is an enhanced emphasis on serialization rather than a mixture of the serial and the episodic in these complex narratives. Thus, while serialization dominates primetime dramas in American broadcast television, the episodic dilemma remains crucial to the commissioning process of these shows. Also, because of this shifting emphasis on serialization, Smith (2019) argues that these shows modify the serialization of soap operas to fit their primetime hours and accommodate the scheduling and viewer targeting strategies of American broadcast networks. These changes in the commissioning process of serialization transpired in an attempt to lure broad demographics, deliver them to advertisers, and compete during an uncertain industrial period where basic cable and subscription-based network models were challenging the status quo (Lotz 2014; Mittell 2010). With these accounts detailing the unique developments that impacted the constitution of contemporary American network dramas, the particularities of the television landscape in the pan-Arab region informed the creation of different types of series programs with customized narrative characteristics. The next section will examine the factors informing the development of characters in Kuwaiti dramas and compare them with American broadcast dramas to distinguish the particularities of their employment and foreground the influence that certain industrial transformations in the pan-Arab region have on the increased emphasis of serialization within the Kuwaiti storytelling industry.

3. CONTEXTUALIZING CHARACTERS

American network dramas, because of the endeavor to continue for multiple seasons, emphasize an investment in character development and establish opportunities for complex storytelling. This form of complex characterization is applied to target the sophisticated upscale audiences that advertisers maintain as lucrative spenders and keep as many demographics invested for multiple seasons (Smith 2019). By having characters grow and evolve, the objective to produce subsequent seasons and maintain series longevity is executed (Newman 2006: 16–28). Despite these complex initiatives, there are certain character types utilized to accommodate advertising preferences. Unlike the dubious traits that are typical of characters from basic and premium cable networks (Dunleavy 2017; Mittell 2015b), broadcast networks ensure that their characters are strictly constructed to avoid extreme dubious behavior and appeal to a broader audience. According to Smith, "As many advertisers might balk at associating their brand with an ongoing character who repeatedly carries out heinous actions, networks usually typically ensure that protagonists' flaws run only so deep" (2019: 61). Such considerations for advertising preferences highlight the impact that the complicated commercial conditions have on the development of characters and the extent of advertising influence on the employment of certain storytelling elements in American broadcast networks. It is through this adherence to the commercial conditions of broadcast networks and the targeting of wider demographics that these characters are constructed.

Similarly, Kuwaiti dramas employ complex characters, but the national specificity and the sophisticated relationship between advertisers and networks in the pan-Arab region provide a different dynamic for character construction. Kuwaiti dramas are designed as one-off seasons in a production environment that requires an episode per day to fill the thirty day schedule of Ramadan. Thus, Kuwaiti dramas are also seeking series longevity but for a single month rather than multiple seasons. To achieve these daily broadcast objectives, character growth and change becomes a significant element to keep and ensure that invested viewers are rewarded with character revelations as the season progresses.

However, networks in the Middle East operate from countries that have specific content regulations and censorship criteria. These regulations vary between countries, and networks broadcasting from a specific country must comply with the nation's established standards to avoid lawsuits and license suspensions (Sakr 2007). Therefore, each country in the pan-Arab region restricts and establishes its own standards for portrayals, which depend on the state's ideological objectives.

The lack of the immoral dubious protagonist in Kuwaiti dramas is derived from the regulations enforced by the cen-

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sorship department at the Ministry of Information of Kuwait rather than the mere pressure of advertisers and their preferences. The censorship department must approve scripts before production can take place in Kuwait. If production takes place without the censorship department's approval, the department will prohibit the show from being broadcast. In 2018, eight shows were banned from broadcasting on any network operating from Kuwait because they failed to adhere to the censorship department's standards and proceeded without obtaining script approval (Abdul Sattar 2018). As a result, writing dubious and hideous protagonists is a risk for writers seeking to obtain script approval. One writer declares, "The censorship department rejected one of my scripts because one of my storylines had a business man cheat and steal from his partner. The script was rejected and the censorship department informed me that Kuwaitis are not cheaters or thieves" (Writer 2). In this way, issues of representation and conveyance are central to the decision-making process of narrative designers. In Kuwait, such restrictions and preferences are motivated by the state's use of media to promote and encourage certain values to construct a state-serving Kuwaiti identity (Crystal 2016). These imposed regulations prohibit the construction of hideous Kuwaiti protagonists because such portrayals can be deemed offensive to the prevailing Islamic and tribal values of Kuwaiti society. With the state's perception of dramas as ideological publicity tools, and to avoid social displeasures and endorse specific identities and values, the censorship department restricts such immoral protagonists and prefers conventional characterization. These restrictions support the censorship department's aim of preventing controversial conveyances (Al-Husaini 2016).

Because of these regulations, there are notable gender-specific representations in Kuwaiti dramas (Al-Qazwini 2015). For example, men protagonists who engage in romantic affairs in *Altendail*, *Zawarat Al Khamis*, and *Etr Alrouh* have their relationships culminate in second marriages. This is because relationships that culminate in second marriages are permitted in Islamic jurisprudence and consequently the Kuwaiti constitution. By ending in second marriages, the behaviors of these protagonists are deemed acceptable rather than controversial. Characters who fail to culminate their romantic relationships in second marriages are positioned as antagonists in the narrative. In this way, the romantic affairs are considered conventional and state-serving by the censorship department. Contrarily, women protagonists never engage in such romantic relationships because according to Islamic jurisprudence and Kuwaiti law, a woman is only allowed to marry one man at a time. Therefore, having women protagonists engage in romantic affairs is considered a heinous act in Kuwaiti culture. Clarifying the procedures involved when planning these portrayals, an interviewee explains that "Our society treats this issue as sensitive and the censorship department's restrictions require adultery to be committed by the characters of men and not women" (Writer 1). This gender-specific framing of polygamy adheres to the state's official religion and promotes Islamic constructs to serve the country's national identity as an Islamic country. Because of these state-controlled regulations, advertisers focus on stardom and are more concerned with the quality of stars attached to these dramas instead of the type and moral of the program's protagonist, since interferences are more complicated and unachievable in this broadcasting environment. Another writer explains,

> One of the more significant factors for script evaluation by networks is the amount of stars attached to a script. Networks and production houses desire scripts that have stars attached to them. Actually, this is a criterion for approval. This is the way for them to attract sponsors. Stars bring more sponsors and networks want to attract as many sponsors as possible (Writer 3).

Because stardom is crucial to the commissioning process of these dramas and because advertisers acknowledge the regulations that networks and producers adhere to when designing characters, advertisers are certain that characters are morally conventional and refrain from suggesting specific character types or advise on storyline direction. However, to accommodate these star-driven conditions, the persistent occurrence of the show's stars in every episode and an extensive serialization of every storyline to achieve this persistence are mandatory for revenue generation. Therefore, writers refrain from providing episodic dilemmas or stand-alone story of the week episodes that are typical of American network dramas. Mittell elaborates, "Complex dramas like *The X-Files*, *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, *Angel*, and *The Sopranos* often oscillate between long-term arc storytelling and stand-alone episodes" (2006: 33). These types of episodic elements devote a significant amount of episodic time to the episode's conflict, or focus on a never again referenced story. By doing so, other storylines become deemphasized and the potential to increase the amount of ongoing serialized arcs lessens considerably. This will keep the focus on specific stars without

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presenting the others and while episode-specific conflicts and story of the week episodes function to add depth to protagonists in American network dramas (Lotz 2013), Kuwaiti dramas utilize character complexity through subplot variety and involvement. This form of representation supports the broadcasting strategies of networks during the competitive landscape of the network proliferation era. By ensuring that the show's stars are available in every episode and that their plots are being presented, storylines are then constantly revisited in an attempt to reach all invested viewers and various demographics.

This star occurrence necessity motivates the utilization of multiple serialized storylines for each star of the show. As a result, star characters must address and resolve more than one conflict and are therefore influential to the development and resolution of multiple storylines. By situating these star characters as influential figures to the development of the majority of storylines, a star character's involvement in a storyline reveals character perspective and informs the plot's thematic meaning. Thus, a star character's longevity becomes essential to the show's aim of achieving complete narrative closure by the end of the month and the comprehension of the narrative's intended meaning. For instance, Moza's character in *Zawarat Al Khamis* must intervene in her sons' marriages to keep them from fracturing. At the same time, she must save her daughter from her chaotic marriage and help her divorce her husband. In this way, viewers learn Moza's views about the patriarchal system and its convenience through her involvement in other subplots. They also witness the character evolve and form a specific perspective through this involvement. For Moza, this system is only applicable when it is convenient to the family. While this is ongoing, Moza must also address her own dysfunctional marriage and her husband's ongoing affair with her sister, which is the main storyline of the show. In this way, marginal and less significant storylines become central to the character's growth, and the character's involvement in these storylines enhances their value and reveals the narrative's thematic meaning. By necessitating the character's involvement, the character's continuous existence becomes mandatory for conflict resolution and single-season character longevity and complexity is therefore achieved. This form of character complexity is accommodating for networks, advertisers, and demographic diversity.

Although this strategy is available and utilized in American network dramas, it is implemented at a higher level and is central to the serial design of Kuwaiti dramas. The distinction here is that American dramas do suspend some protagonists as seasons progress, depending on actor contracts, availability, and continuity (Mittell 2015a). In many instances the suspension occurs in later seasons rather than the first season of the show. However, actor contracts in Kuwaiti dramas, because of their single season Ramadan-centered construction, pertain to a single season only. Once closure is achieved, the show is over without any potential or plan for subsequent seasons. In this way, character longevity for a single season is granted since producing multiple seasons is not part of the show's planning and an actor's involvement for future seasons is therefore unnecessary. This capitalization on star characters in the narrative design is crucial to the show's market value. For instance, suspending star characters before season's end could decrease the show's market value and risk its potential to lure brands as the season progresses. To capitalize on the show's signed stars; persistently revisiting their storylines supports the commercial conditions of the single-season commitment.

This single season character longevity approach also serves economic and viewer targeting purposes. By expanding the narrative canvas with additional storylines and raising the importance level of the less significant storylines, writers are able to attach a limited amount of star actors instead of increasing the amount of stars and consequently the show's budget. Sakr explains that "In this environment, spending $2 million on a single musalsal was no longer unusual, as producers competed with each other to sign up the most popular actors and provide them with lavish or unusual sets" (2007: 126). However, signing costly star actors increases the budget tremendously but since it is a priority in this environment, writers incorporate a limited amount of star characters and increase the amount of serialized storylines that require their involvement to keep the show affordable and lucrative within a specific budget. This is cost-efficient for Kuwaiti dramas because Kuwaiti star actors are amongst the highest paid in the region, and the expensive cost of signing star actors can occupy up to half of the production budget (Al-Shammari 2016). With a limited amount of stars that constantly appear in every episode and address more than one conflict, writers are able to limit production costs, address broader social issues and provide diverse characters to reach various audience segments, and keep the series commercially attractive for advertisers. This will broaden the show's demographic appeal and as a result, make it serviceable for diverse brands.

This section highlighted the rationale prompting the writing of complex characters in Kuwaiti dramas and compared these processes to American broadcast dramas. American

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broadcast dramas aim to continue for multiple seasons and generate revenue on a long-term basis, compete with sophisticated revenue models, and accommodate diverse audience segments, demographics, and brands. Therefore, the utilization of complex characters functions to support these initiatives. However, Kuwaiti dramas construct complex characters but must adhere to the regulations imposed by The Ministry of Information, have star actors central and continuous in their narrative designs to satisfy advertisers, and at the same time diversify storylines to reach wider segments and demographics. These commissioning differences not only inform characterization but also the episode design of these serialized plots, which the next section will detail.

4. EPISODE AND STORYLINE DESIGNS

Because of the star-centered necessities, episodes of Kuwaiti dramas contain more storylines than episodes of American network dramas and their construction is consequently impacted by this distinction. Unlike the rapid intercut between four to five storylines, typical of American network dramas, episodes of Kuwaiti dramas consist of six to eight storylines without an episode-specific conflict. American network dramas utilize a flexi-narrative approach where four to five plots are presented with one of the plots being episodic in nature to execute their audience targeting objectives (Nelson 1997). Smith explains that "The perception within the network environment that a brisk presentation of storyworld is a reliable method with which to hold viewers' attention (and thus deliver them to advertisers) underpins this plotting technique" (2019: 62). With scenes being short in length, American dramas are able to ensure that the intercut serves their targeting approach by addressing the various invested viewers and provide enough narrative time to the episode-specific dilemma to attract the casual viewer. According to Michael Newman, "Episodic closure is thus a product of an industrial context in which serials are under increasing pressure to offer episodic pleasure to casual viewers at the same time additional, serialized pleasures to their faithful regulars" (2006: 20).

While this form of episodic design is motivated by these specific viewer targeting initiatives, the need for star reoccurrence and the focus on invested viewers only in Kuwaiti dramas motivate a different type of episode design. Kuwaiti dramas offer a structure that emphasizes the presentation of most of the available storylines rather than a brisk presentation of each and as a result, scenes can last longer than those presented in American dramas. The strategy is to provide a vast number of storylines within the episode and achieve their star-driven season-long serialized objectives. This increase in storyline per episode approach will accommodate the diverse pan-Arab audience by constantly offering various demographics and segments their preferred storyline. For instance, presenting and leaving star characters in uncertain situations and providing a hiatus for their conflicts in every episode increases the level of seriality provided and implies that these characters will continue to exist and evolve for invested viewers. This forms a higher amount of cliff-hangers than the four to six provided in American network dramas. In this way, the presented storyline is always left in a hiatus before shifting to another storyline. Even when a storyline is left in a hiatus midway through the episode, its revisiting can sometimes occur in the subsequent episode and as a result, the hiatus will serve to tempt engaged audiences for the following episode. Because of this emphasis on serialization, constrained by the boundaries of Ramadan, episodic closure is non-existent in Kuwaiti dramas and a continuous form of episode design is the preferred approach.

Because there is an emphasis on storyline presentation and the need to have all storylines ongoing until they reach the last two episodes of the season and resolve, writers balance their organization of storylines to avoid narrative repetition and exhaustion. In *Altendail*, *Zawarat Al Khamis*, and *Etr Alrouh*, the majority of episodes contain six to seven storylines with some containing all eight storylines. Only two to four out of thirty episodes have five storylines. Although a storyline's episodic time and progression varies, storylines that contain less episodic time than the ones emphasized will serve to remind viewers of their existence for future progression. This allows the spread of significant plot points for all storylines across the season rather than develop gradually and concurrently.

Through this balancing design, the employed strategy is therefore invitational rather than attention-driven. However, developing storylines in this serialized form with the aim of keeping star actors involved and relevant in almost every episode requires manipulating storyline presentation. For instance, less significant storylines can be interwoven and occupy the majority of episodic time early in the season before shifting the focus to more significant main plots later in the season, which is the case in *Zawarat Al Khamis*. Also, as exemplified in *Etr Alrouh*, the balance could develop one of the major plots early in the season along with other subplots before slowing this group's progression and shifting the

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focus to another group of plots later on. Since star actors will almost always be involved in less significant subplots, this process keeps every episode intriguing throughout the season and disperses plot events across the narrative. Such a strategy provokes audience excitement for the long-term season objectives (Writer 1).

This presentational approach informs the length and design of scenes in Kuwaiti dramas. Since the progression and presentation of storylines in Kuwaiti dramas vary between episodes, scenes are designed to build narrative bytes and offer enough narrative detail for a presented storyline during an episode to achieve this balance and emphasize specific storylines. Both Kuwaiti dramas and American broadcast dramas offer scenes that are two minutes in length but instead of a rapid intercut between storylines, Kuwaiti dramas oscillate between two minute scene lengths and multiple two minute scenes to build sequences focusing on a single storyline before shifting to another storyline. Therefore, some storylines are presented for more than two minutes and can last for five minutes before shifting to another storyline. If divided into narrative bytes, which Nelson (1997) explains as the amount of screen time given to a storyline before shifting to another storyline and are usually two minutes in length in American network dramas, Kuwaiti episodes utilize bytes that are two to five minutes in length. By providing lengthier narrative bytes, certain storylines become centralized during an episode, making it possible to balance the narrative progression of six to eight storylines across the season. As one writer notes, "Usually thirty pages equate to a single episode and that is what matters most. The duration of the scene is not something I emphasize" (Writer 3). Thus, the organization of plot events across the season dictates the construction of scenes in Kuwaiti episodes.

This lengthier byte design resembles the subscription-based dramas that are commissioned by American premium cable networks (Smith 2011: 36–51). The difference is that subscription-based dramas depend on subscription fees rather than advertising revenue which provides their narrative designers the ability to increase scene length in order to convey character reactions and intensify moments. Additionally, subscription-based dramas have longer scene lengths than American broadcast dramas (approximately three minutes) but they also intercut between storylines and rarely build sequences that can last for more than three minutes. Because Kuwaiti writers are unaware of the placement of commercial slots during pre-production and networks determine these decisions after the show has been completely written and produced, they have more flexibility in their scene and episode construction. The lack of ad-break awareness provides Kuwaiti writers the same design opportunities available for premium cable models but they utilize their scenes differently. Kuwaiti writers are not only able to offer character reactions for plot events, but intensify revelations through moments of silence and emphasize a character's arc through event details, develop a character's decision-making process, and detail the aftermath of events through these multiple scene sequences. In the process, this permits writers to centralize specific storylines, keep other less-emphasized storylines relevant, and support the continuity of all storylines for the duration of the season. This form of byte design is explained by one of the writers:

> Sometimes my episodes offer ten scenes that make up the entire episode and other times I find out that a single scene equals six other scenes in other episodes. So it really depends on what I am trying to convey during the episode (Writer 1).

For networks, this episodic design supports their revenue generation efforts by facilitating the incorporation of additional commercial slots during episodes and provides opportunities for advertisers to join the program at any point during the season, which explains the lack of predetermined commercial break placement during pre-production. One writer notes, "Networks attract advertisers after the show has been written and they fail to guess or predetermine the amount of advertising breaks before airing the show because the amount of breaks can continue to increase during the season" (Writer 1). Another writer adds that "They input breaks at any point within the episode and sometimes break the logic of the scene. As a writer, I cannot predict where a commercial break occurs to at least be able to construct my scenes and episodes accordingly" (Writer 3). Without predetermining commercial slots, networks are able to add additional ad-breaks, invite more advertisers as the season progresses, and continue to reconsider the cost of every slot depending on the ratings for each episode. Networks are then able to capitalize on their commercial slots and provide as many slots as possible during an episode to increase their revenue and cover the costs spent on signing star actors.

With conflicts being serialized to capitalize on the attached stars, it makes the show more appealing for advertisers and allows the network to promote the season as a large cohesive narrative unit and assure continuity and consis-

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tency. Therefore, writers abstain from providing stand-alone episodes because they would depart the storyworld and suspend some of the star characters and their storylines. While this is beneficial for the commissioning process of American broadcast dramas because of the strategy's usefulness in syndication and reruns (Newman 2006: 16–28), this form of storytelling is risky in a star-driven Kuwaiti format because a ratings spike for one of these stand-alone episodes fails to offer any projection of success for subsequent episodes. This makes it more difficult for networks to convince more brands to join for subsequent episodes because it fractures the season's progressive unity. With syndication usually preferred during Ramadan rather than a later time due to the month's exceptional escalated viewership, keeping a serialized narrative chronology ongoing without departing the storyworld in certain episodes serves the broadcasting conditions of Ramadan and accommodates different network schedules and audience segments.

The preference for syndication during Ramadan comes from the possibility of reaching vast pan-Arab audiences regardless of airtime hours. This is not to neglect that audience reach and appeal varies between timeslots, but even non-primetime hours during Ramadan have escalated viewership numbers. A recent YouGovsurvey commissioned by Netflix reveals that viewership during Ramadan increases by 78%, making the holy month a priority for product marketing (Hawkes 2018). Since networks with syndication rights are only obligated to air the show after the first-run, they become significant windows for the budget planning process of various brands and markets. For instance, a show's first-run can air on one network early in the evening and the syndicated airtime would broadcast the same night a couple of hours apart on a different network. In this way, diverse audience segments can be reached. For advertisers willing to target a specific audience segment with their products, this syndication process offers them the opportunity to address their desired market. In this way, networks with second and third syndication rights become beneficiaries because they accommodate various viewing schedules, demographics and segments, and brands. In fact, syndicating and rerunning the same show during Ramadan is more profitable for networks than reruns outside of the holy month because of ad-break rates. During Ramadan, a thirty second primetime ad-break costs approximately 12,750 USD, while the non-Ramadan thirty second break costs 8,000 USD (Statista 2016). This increase in ad cost is also relevant for late night hours. Despite the spike in ad-rates, this proliferated season presents an opportunity to reach broader audiences and "If advertisers can hitch themselves to the right program, the benefits can extend well beyond the season" (Carrington 2013). Therefore, syndication during Ramadan is significantly profitable for networks and advertisers regardless of the type of syndication rights acquired.

This is different from American broadcast dramas where syndication can usually happen out of order for years to come. Therefore, it is profitable for their commissioning process to provide episodic dilemmas and stand-alone episodes that would enhance their comprehensibility regardless of the broadcasting aims and schedules of various networks. Contrarily, the ritual and cultural norms of audiences during Ramadan in a proliferated pan-Arab marketplace require an intensified form of serial storytelling with a high level of character investment to target the invested viewer rather than the casual viewer. Justifying this emphasis on episodic serialization, one writer maintains that "My scenes are serialized with the purpose of enticing viewers for subsequent scenes and episodes" (Writer 2). Utilizing the episode's narrative time to present the majority of storylines supports the development of characters and the serialized conflicts to suit the production conditions and viewing habits of Ramadan audiences without jeopardizing any of the show's stars.

This episodic design distinguishes Kuwaiti television dramas from American network dramas and highlights the extent of serialization employed for a converging, institutionally diverse, and language stipulated media environment. Despite the similarity in terms of revenue generation streams, the various economic, national, audience, and technological specificities dictate the construction of Kuwaiti dramas' characters, episodes, and seasons. By considering these conditions, Kuwaiti writers are able to construct a narrative form that can accommodate the boundaries of the holy month of Ramadan in a competitive landscape and develop a cultural product that is distinct through specific storytelling elements and procedures. These designs are motivated by the level of competition generated by the technological advancements of satellites in the pan-Arab region.

5. CONCLUSION

This article set out to highlight how differences in technological and industrial developments pertaining to specific media environments inform the employment of serialized elements in drama productions. By comparing primetime Kuwaiti dra-

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mas with American broadcast dramas, the study illustrates the rationale prompting certain narrative designs and the role of the particularities surrounding specific broadcasting operations in the commissioning process. These operations impact the practices developed by narrative designers and distinguish one television industry from another. Although the revenue model of both Kuwaiti and American network dramas is supported by advertisers and syndication to generate profits, the correlation between the national, economic, technological, and audience specificities pertaining to their television industries dictate the program-making practices and extent of serialization employed. Moreover, the details of the development processes of the pan-Arab specificities, influenced by the growth and carriage improvement of satellite technologies, contribute significantly and are reflected in the narrative characteristics of their productions. In the process, these sophisticated and particular conditions establish a framework for program development.

The audience specificity of the pan-Arab region during Ramadan, the technological developments permitting accessibility across the pan-Arab region, the censorship and regulations imposed by the broadcasting nation, and the revenue streams shared across the region are significant factors informing the development and constitution of Kuwaiti television dramas. Such particularities differ drastically from developments occurring in American television where the commercial imperatives and competition between broadcast, cable, and premium cable network models established a different television environment that informed other narrative innovations. As this paper has shown, the commissioning of certain television dramas depends on the development of these specificities, and the construction of specific narrative characteristics are designed in response to the television landscape's alterations and a cultural industry's technological adaptation. Because of these alterations in the pan-Arab region, a modified form of serialization became standardized in the Kuwaiti television industry and functions as an instrument to compete and captivate in the network proliferation era. For networks, keeping their viewers and advertisers until the last day of Ramadan is a priority that can be achieved by the capabilities of serialized storytelling.

The Kuwaiti case offers a critical example of a cultural industry's technological adaptation within the broader pan-Arab region and displays that despite the academic categorization of Arab dramas as one broad entity, every nation's narrative modifications varies and this is reflected in its institutions' narrative characteristics. Although there are shared revenue and broadcasting conditions that every Arab country operates within, there are also national specificities concerning every country's television industry that contribute to the construction of their narratives. Kuwaiti writers address the conditions of the pan-Arab landscape through an enhanced level of serialization. Further inquiries can illuminate the construction of other dramas across the pan-Arab region and detail their developments in a changing, complex, and proliferated television environment.

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