

Carocci  editore

# CINÉMA & CIE

*International Film Studies Journal*

Vol. XII, no. 19 Fall 2012

New series - Semiannual

EUROPEAN TV SERIES / SÉRIES TV EUROPÉENNES

Edited by / Sous la direction de Alice Autelitano and / et Veronica Innocenti

 **Carocci editore**



CINÉMA & CIE is promoted by:

International Ph.D. Program: “Études audiovisuelles: Cinéma, Musique, Communication”  
(Università di Udine, Université Paris 3, Università Cattolica di Milano, Università di Pisa)  
Dipartimento di Storia e Tutela dei Beni Culturali  
Università degli Studi di Udine

*Subscription to CINÉMA & CIE (2 issues)*

Yearly Individual Subscription	€ 30,50
Yearly Institutional Subscription	€ 32,50
Foreign Subscription	€ 43,00
Single issue	€ 17,00
Double issue	€ 32,50

*Send orders to:* Carocci editore  
Corso Vittorio Emanuele II, 229 - 00186 Roma  
Tel. +39 06 42 81 84 17 Fax + 39 06 42 74 79 31  
Website: <http://www.carocci.it>

<http://www.cinemaetcie.net>

Cover image: *The Killing III (Forbrydelsen III, 2012)*

ISSN 2035-5270  
ISBN 978-88-430-6462-5

Printed in Italy, Litografia Varo, San Giuliano Terme (Pisa), July 2013

**Editorial Board**

*Editors*

Tim Bergfelder, University of Southampton  
Gianni Canova, Libera Università di Lingue  
e Comunicazione IULM, Milano  
Erica Carter, King's College London  
Francesco Casetti, Yale University  
Philippe Dubois, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3  
Ruggero Eugeni, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore,  
Milano  
Vinzenz Hediger, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main  
Sandra Lischi, Università degli Studi di Pisa  
Guglielmo Pescatore, Università degli Studi di Bologna  
Leonardo Quaresima, Università degli Studi di Udine

*Editorial Staff*

Mireille Berton, Université de Lausanne  
Teresa Castro, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3  
Alice Cati, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milano  
Adriano D'Aloia, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore,  
Milano  
Luisella Farinotti, Libera Università di Lingue e Comuni-  
cazione IULM, Milano  
Katja Hettich, Ruhr Universität Bochum  
Veronica Innocenti, Università degli Studi di Bologna  
Alessandra Luciano, Universiteit van Amsterdam  
Giovanna Maina, Università degli Studi di Pisa  
Elena Marcheschi, Università degli Studi di Pisa  
Francesco Pitassio, Università degli Studi di Udine  
Valentina Re, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia  
Laura Sangalli, Università degli Studi di Milano  
Ingrid Stigsdotter, Linnéuniversitetet Kalmar-Växjö  
Diana Wade, Columbia University in the City of New  
York  
Catherine Wheatley, King's College London  
Federico Zecca, Università degli Studi di Udine

*Advisory Board*

Richard Abel, University of Michigan  
François Albera, Université de Lausanne  
Rick Altman, University of Iowa  
Jacques Aumont, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3  
András Bálint Kovács, Eötvös Loránd Tudományeg-  
yetem  
Sandro Bernardi, Università degli Studi di Firenze  
Nicole Brenez, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3  
Scott Curtis, Northwestern University  
James Donald, University of New South Wales  
Richard Dyer, King's College London  
Thomas Elsaesser, Universiteit van Amsterdam

Mariagrazia Fanchi, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore,  
Milano  
André Gaudreault, Université de Montréal  
Tom Gunning, University of Chicago  
Malte Hagener, Philipps-Universität Marburg  
Erik Hedling, Lunds Universitet  
Mette Hjort, Lingnan University  
François Jost, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3  
Gertrud Koch, Freie Universität Berlin  
Hiroshi Komatsu, Waseda University  
Michèle Lagny, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3  
Gloria Lauri-Lucente, University of Malta  
Denilson Lopes, Universidade Federal de Rio de Janeiro  
Trond Lundemo, Stockholms Universitet  
Adrian Martin, Monash University  
Marc-Emmanuel Melon, Université de Liège  
Laikwan Pang, The Chinese University of Hong Kong  
Lisa Parks, University of California, Santa Barbara  
Francesco Pitassio, Università degli Studi di Udine  
Vicente Sánchez-Biosca, Universitat de València  
Bhaskar Sarkar, University of California, Santa Barbara  
Irmbert Schenk, Universität Bremen  
Petr Szczepanik, Masarykova Univerzita  
Maria Tortajada, Université de Lausanne  
Ravi Vasudevan, Centre for the Study of Developing  
Societies Delhi  
Joao Luiz Vieira, Universidade Federal Fluminense

*Board of Reviewers*

Luca Barra, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milano  
Enrico Biasin, Università degli Studi di Udine  
Claudio Bisoni, Università di Bologna  
Alexander Dohest, Universiteit Antwerpen  
Ruggero Eugeni, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore,  
Milano  
Mariagrazia Fanchi, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore,  
Milano  
Federico Giordano, Università per Stranieri di Perugia  
Malte Hagener, Philipps-Universität Marburg  
Vinzenz Hediger, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main  
Anikó Imre, University of Southern California  
François Jost, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3  
Gloria Lauri-Lucente, University of Malta  
Roberta Pearson, University of Nottingham  
Hector Perez Lopez, Universitat Politècnica de Valencia  
Guglielmo Pescatore, Università di Bologna  
Massimo Scaglioni, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore,  
Milano



CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

EUROPEAN TV SERIES / SÉRIES TV EUROPÉENNES

<i>Introduction</i> Veronica Innocenti	9
Nicolas Le Floch, <i>un bon produit « à l'export » ? Réflexions sur la diffusion et la réception internationale d'une série historique (très) française...</i> Bernard Papin	15
<i>Whodunit? Rai Tv Fiction Production Between Detection and Giallo</i> Paola Valentini	25
<i>Nordic Noir on Television: The Killing I-III</i> Gunhild Agger	39
<i>La Notion de qualité télévisuelle dans la production fictionnelle britannique</i> Stéfany Boisvert	51
There's Nothing Like an English Summer, Is There? Except an English Winter. <i>Downton Abbey, a British Cult Tv Series and Its Fandom</i> Lucia Tralli	61
<i>Imitation, Borrowing, Recycling. American Models and Polish Domestic Drama</i> Sylwia Szostak	73
<i>Turkish Television Dramas: The Economy and Beyond</i> Cem Pekman, Selin Tüzün	93
<i>The Production of Tv Fiction Adaptations in Spain (1950-2012)</i> Patricia Diego, María del Mar Grandío	105
NEW STUDIES	
<i>Image, Space, and the Contemporary Filmic Experience</i> Miriam De Rosa	119

PROJECTS & ABSTRACTS	131
REVIEWS / COMPTES-RENDUS	147
Contributors / Collaborateurs	157

EUROPEAN TV SERIES  
SÉRIES TV EUROPÉENNES





## INTRODUCTION

Veronica Innocenti, Università di Bologna

In the past few years television serial narratives have gone through some relentless changes in their structure, as well as in the way they are perceived and “used” or “re-used” by the audiences. This new wave of serial production has been quite well analyzed by scholars from different countries. Therefore, several books and essays have been published that focus on different aspects of serial productions, from the narrative construction to the audience reception. Nevertheless, the main focus of these studies seems to always be on US productions. This issue of *Cinéma & Cie* aims to draw more attention to European TV series.<sup>1</sup>

Several factors deserve the focus of this issue dedicated to serialized audiovisual content produced in Europe. First, TV serial narratives have become one of the most successful among trans-nationally distributed media products, benefiting both producers and distributors. Second, these cultural products appeal to a wide range of consumers, are a common factor across European markets (otherwise differing in many significant aspects) and are designed to be enjoyed through different devices (from conventional broadcast television to the Internet). These factors make audiovisual serialized formats suitable for investigating potential transformations/trends and the construction of the cultural imagery of media convergence in Europe. The digital production, distribution and consumption of contemporary TV series allow a continuous reshaping of content. This modularity, flexibility and fast-paced adaptation offer the opportunity for serialized content to engage in direct interchange with user communities and thus to better suit European communities’ needs and values. Thus, working on European TV series also means to take into consideration a wide and diversified landscape. In every EU country TV serial production is structured according to different industrial, technological and cultural models, leading to the affirmation of certain genres and formats. From this perspective, we think it might be useful to spend a few words on the Italian situation, where the serial production starts simultaneously to that of the public TV system.<sup>2</sup>

The first serials produced by RAI and called *sceneggiati*, mainly based on novels and literary works, date back to 1954. For a long time the “serie all’italiana” (Italian style series) has been characterized by the limited number of episodes lasting 90 minutes each and by a multistrand narrative structure. Scholars often talked about a “weak” serial model, mainly based on the already existing familiarity of the audience with the plots: biopic, products inspired by true stories and literary adaptations.<sup>3</sup> The very same definition of “serie all’italiana” was coined expressly to mark the discontinuity toward other serial formats.

The golden age of the Italian “sceneggiato” lasted until the beginning of the 1980s, when the

changes that followed the 1970s deregulation opened up the market to commercial broadcasters.<sup>4</sup> Since the 1980s scholars and audiences started talking about “telefilm” in order to refer to all those serial products, mainly coming from the US, that had just invaded the programming, especially on commercial broadcast TV.<sup>5</sup> Nowadays, the production of TV serial dramas is indicated in Italy as “fiction”. Since the mid-90s, with the resumption of national production, Italian TV serial narratives adopted a specific production system, such as soap operas, through the production of soap-like programmes such as *Un posto al sole* (1996-) and *Centovetrine* (2001-). Moreover, we have been witnessing a significant increase in those programmes that present a multi-seasonal continuity (such as *Distretto di polizia*, 2000-2012; *La squadra*, 2000-2007; *RIS – Delitti imperfetti*, 2001-2009; *Tutti pazzi per amore*, 2008-), as it often happens with American TV serial productions. The opening toward longer forms of serialization is undoubtedly mediated by the knowledge of American, European and Extra-European serial formats. It is not by chance that many Italian productions are in fact adaptations of original foreign formats, as it happens for instance with *Un medico in famiglia* (1998-) and *I Cesaroni* (2006-), based respectively on the Spanish formats *Un Médico de familia* (1995-1999) and *Los Serrano* (2003-2008); with *Love Bugs* (2004-2007), Italian adaptation of the Canadian format *Un gars, une fille* (1997-2003) and of its eponymous French version (1999-2003); but also with *La squadra*, based on the British *The Bill* (1984-2010) as well as with *Un posto al sole*, adapting to Naples the Australian format *Neighbours* (1985-). The most recent case is *In treatment* (2013-), inspired by the American production (2008-2010), which in turn based on the Israeli show *BeTipul* (2005-2008).

How does Italian TV serial production fit into a TV environment more and more characterized by technological, institutional and cultural convergence processes?<sup>6</sup> It is evident that serial narratives have become more flexible than they were in the past, overflowing the usual time and space boundaries and spreading on several channels through complex production and promotional mechanisms able to generate strong involvement and participation of the viewers. When compared to the more traditional TV programming and shows, contemporary serial production is evidently marked by an open narrative structure, by its easy replicability, immediate remixability and permanent extendibility on other media.<sup>7</sup> These features define the transmedia nature of contemporary TV serial production and allow the viewer to keep an active role in the process of construction and development of the narrative universe, fragmenting and diversifying the viewer experience in different formats and on different channels.<sup>8</sup>

As far as the formats are concerned, we are seeing the birth of new serial narrative models, originated by a matrix product designed for TV fruition. In fact, it is now very common to produce a variety of ancillary products that are originated by the diegetic fictional universe of the TV show. For instance, the viral promotional videos teasing the viewers curiosity that circulate through the videosharing platforms or the *mobisodes* and *webisodes*, designed to condense and summarize contents already offered on TV or to explore narrative patterns not already discovered by the TV weekly show.<sup>9</sup> In Italy, the traditional low serialized narrative formats representing the majority of the production of the broadcasters haven’t allowed yet the full development and exploitation of these mechanisms. Nevertheless, some efforts have been done both by broadcasters and pay TV. For example, RAI worked on the use of the Web and of its potential effect in the involvement of the viewers for the series *Tutti pazzi per amore* (season 1, 2008-2009), using for the first time some ironic viral videos that insert the series protagonists in classical film environments. On a

dedicated YouTube channel viewers could find the horror, western and sci-fi versions of the series trailers. Although very interesting and new, this formula has not been used in the following years. The reasons behind this choice must be found, among others, in the average target audience of this kind of production. Analyzing the good performance of the recent series *Volare*, it is evident that, although it had a good success on the commercial 25-54 year-old target (3.739.000 viewers), the core audience is composed by an older group of people, mainly over 65 (4.363.000 viewers) and the group 55-64 (2.219.000).<sup>10</sup>

This attitude toward the use of new media and digital technologies to support TV serial narratives is not much different if we take a look to the production of the Italian privately owned main broadcaster Mediaset. Nevertheless, as far as this broadcaster is concerned, it is possible to observe a certain interest toward the production of merchandising, able to extend the experience of vision and fruition on other channels. An example might be that of *I Cesaroni*, series from which books, music CDs, stickers, board games and much more have been originated. Still, we are not facing a transmedia storytelling project yet. Apparently, among Italian broadcasters the only one who has been working on transmedia storytelling projects is Sky that back in 2008 with the series *Quo vadis, baby?* had started this trend with a product which, originally a novel, had been adapted into a movie and found many ways of becoming transmedial, through the use of social networks (through the Facebook profiles of the series characters) or the offer of games for mobile phones. This trend continued for other Sky productions, and in particular for *Romanzo Criminale – La serie* (2008-2010, born from the same path: novel-movie-TV series) through viral videos posted on YouTube as part of the series marketing campaign. Sky production of TV serial narratives is still short in number, nevertheless the broadcaster seems to be interested in carrying on this trend through some ongoing projects, such as *Gomorra* and *Diabolik* that in some cases easily fit the transmedia storytelling design (we are thinking for instance of *Diabolik*, announced for 2014, but already present on the Web through a short trailer).

Nowadays it is possible to affirm that the investment on transmedia narrative projects by national broadcasters is still very limited. The main reason behind this trend is the average age of the target audience of the Italian series. Mediaset, Rai and Sky mainly produce prime time serial dramas and do not have productions specifically aimed to teen-agers or to target audiences highly familiarized with web and digital media. Other reasons might reside in the contraction of the broadcaster investments on this kind of production that happened after the economic crisis between 2008 and 2011. Moreover, there is a scarce policy of diversification of the sources of income, since nowadays they are limited to the DVD release, without very inadequate exploitation of the web and mobile platforms.

Still, Italian fiction confirmed itself in the past few months as the leading item in the broadcaster programming.<sup>11</sup> Italian production is in fact able to catalyze a remarkable percentage of viewers and to confirm itself as one of the most appreciated show format on national programming. For this reason, despite the high production costs, the relevant transformations undergone in the media market offer many new opportunities for this kind of emerging products. In particular, though still facing a difficulty in the serial production export, the transmedia investment might guarantee new formats and new audiences, also beyond the national borders, and together with the exploitation of new release markets might also allow for the compensation of high production costs. Moreover, investing on transmedia projects might provide the chance to take significant advantage of serial

production, using the narrative elements on different platforms and addressing them to different audiences. From the same concept many products and projects can sprout, exploiting all their potential.

As such, we believe it is very fruitful to focus this issue of the journal on European TV series, considering national specificities as an element of richness within the complex and multifaceted frame of transnational production and circulation. One of the main reasons that prompted us was to see how research and studies on European TV dramas and TV series production circulate outside the context of national studies. As a matter of fact, a big part of these researches does not go beyond the national boundaries for several reasons, such as the linguistic problem and because some of the productions, which are relevant and significant within a national context, are not sold and known abroad. Therefore, a second issue we decided to investigate is that of the circulation of European TV dramas within the EU, as well as outside of the EU. Moreover, we found particularly interesting the investigation of the domestic and American characteristics of EU TV dramas (in terms of formats, genres...) together with the peculiarities of the European modes of production.

These and other relevant issues have been acknowledged and interpreted by the contributors of this issue, who worked on some of these trajectories, intertwining for instance the analysis of specific genres (crime, neo-noir, historical) with the international circulation of these productions. This is what has been done by Bernard Papin and Gunhild Agger, whose articles are focused respectively on the French production *Nicholas Le Floch* (2008-) and on Danish *Forbrydelsen* (2007-2012) in order to analyse, in the first case, the reasons behind the international success of a product deeply rooted in French history and culture and strongly connoted by its “frenchness”. In the second case, the main focus is on the combination of the genre elements (noir and mainly Nordic noir) and its effect on the three seasons of the series. Paola Valentini worked instead on the national, productive and representative specificities, analyzing Italian detective and crime series, strongly tied to the traditional genre called *giallo*.

Another issue that has been addressed by the contributors is the relationship between European and American quality TV. This is the main focus of the article by Stéfany Boisvert, who applied the concept of quality television to British production, underlining the evolution of the concept of quality and raising questions about the future of TV production in the UK. Lucia Tralli’s article is also concerned with British quality TV, focusing on the online activity of *Downton Abbey*’s fans. Not surprisingly, TV serial narratives are among the TV formats that are considered more engaging by the audiences who are involved in a rich and intense participatory activity, commonly labeled as *fan fiction*, that is composed by several different practices. Mapping a wide range of activities including fansites, Tumblr, live-tweet, fanfictions and fanvideos, Tralli focuses on the traits of *Downton Abbey* that seem to be more appreciated by the fans and to which they dedicate more time and attention.

Finally, the last three contributions are dedicated to the analysis of national production, with the aim of overcoming that closure that often leads the research on TV serial narratives to be confined within national borders. The cases of Poland, Turkey and Spain are analyzed with a rich amount of details and data by Sylwia Szostak, Cem Pekman and Selim Tüzün, Patricia Diego and María del Mar Grandío, providing the reader with useful tools in order to approach the specific national production environment.

In Szostak’s analysis of Polish serial production of the 2000s, it is extremely relevant to keep

in mind the relationship with American production, that invaded the scheduling of Polish broadcasters after 1989, and which today represents the primary model for local production both from an aesthetic and narrative point of view. Also Turkey has a relation of dependence with the US, since in Turkey commercial TV market gained a certain solidness only in the 1990s, beginning a prosperous production activity ever since. This activity also found another incentive in the 2000s thanks to the exporting of productions that reached a wide range of countries, from Eastern Europe to Middle East. A contrary movement is instead identified by Diego and del Mar Grandío in the history of Spanish serial production, always strongly linked to the procedure of the adaptation from theatre or literature, which in recent years seems to favor the foreign (from US, Latin America and Europe) series formats replica.

Of course many topics and questions remain open, but we hope that the issue you are about to read may provide interesting and stimulating starting points for research and study into European TV series.

This introduction, written by Veronica Innocenti, has been conceived and discussed by both co-curators.

- 1 In order to deepen the analysis we list here some useful, but of course not complete, bibliographical references in chronological order. See, among others: Aniko Imre, Timothy Havens, Katalin Lustyic (eds.), *Popular Television in Eastern Europe During and Since Socialism*, Routledge, London 2012; Andreas Fickers, Catherine Johnson (eds.), *Transnational Television History. A Comparative Approach*, Routledge, New York 2012; Barbara Selznick, *Global Television: Coproducing Culture*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia 2008; Jonathan Bignell, Andreas Fickers (eds.), *A European Television History*, Wiley-Blackwell, Malden (MA)-Oxford 2008; Mary Kelly, Gianpietro Mazzoleni, Denis McQuail (eds.), *The Media in Europe. The Euromedia Handbook*, Sage, London 2004; Jérôme Bourdon, "Shakespeare, Dallas et le commissaire: une histoire de la fiction télévisée en Europe," in *Les Temps des Médias*, no. 2, 2004, pp. 176-197; Els De Bens, Hedwig de Smael, "The Inflow of American Television Fiction on European Broadcasting Channels Revisited," in *European Journal of Communication*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2001, pp. 51-76; Milly Buonanno (ed.), *Eurofiction 1998. Secondo Rapporto sulla fiction televisiva in Europa*, RAI-ERI, Roma 1998; Milly Buonanno (ed.), *Imaginary Dreamscapes. Television Fiction in Europe. First Report of the Eurofiction Project*, ULP/John Libbey, Luton 1997; Liebes Tamar, Livingstone Sonia, "European Soap Operas: The Diversification of a Genre," in *European Journal of Communication*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1998, pp. 147-180; Jean-Pierre Jézéquel (ed.), *La Production de fiction en Europe*, La Documentation française-INA, Paris 1993; Preben Sepstrup, *Transnationalisation of Television in Western Europe*, John Libbey, London 1990; Alessandro Silj, *East of Dallas. The European Challenge to American TV*, British Film Institute, London 1988.
- 2 The official beginning of the TV broadcasting in Italy is 3 January 1954.
- 3 See Milly Buonanno, *Leggere la fiction. Narrami o diva rivisitata*, Liguori, Napoli 1996, and Id., *Le formule del racconto televisivo. La sovversione del tempo nelle narrative seriali*, Sansoni, Milano 2002.
- 4 On the history of Italian television see: Franco Monteleone, *Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia. Costume, società e politica*, 6° ed., Marsilio, Venezia 2009; Aldo Grasso, *Storia della televisione italiana*, Nuova ed. aggiornata, Garzanti, Milano 2004; Francesca Anania, *Breve storia della radio e della televisione italiana*, Carocci, Roma 2004; Aldo Grasso, Massimo Scaglioni, *Che cos'è la televisione. Il piccolo schermo fra cultura e società. I generi, l'industria, il pubblico*, Garzanti, Milano 2005; Aldo Grasso, *La TV italiana dalle origini*, Garzanti, Milano 1998.
- 5 Seminal works on this topic are: Francesco Casetti (ed.), *L'immagine al plurale. Serialità e ripetizione nel cinema e nella televisione*, Marsilio, Venezia 1984, and Id. (a cura di), *Un'altra volta ancora. Strategie di comunicazione e forme di sapere nel telefilm americano in Italia*, ERI/Edizioni Rai, Torino

VERONICA INNOCENTI

1984. More recent works are: Veronica Innocenti, Guglielmo Pescatore, *Le nuove forme della serialità televisiva. Storia, linguaggio e temi*, Archetipolibri, Bologna 2008; Daniela Cardini, *La lunga serialità televisiva. Origini e modelli*, Carocci, Roma 2004.
- 6 On convergence the main reference is to Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture. Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York University Press, New York 2006. See, also, Richard Collins, *Media and Identity in Contemporary Europe: Consequences of Global Convergence*, Intellect, Bristol-Portland (OR) 2002; Aldo Grasso, Massimo Scaglioni (eds.), *Televisione convergente. La tv oltre il piccolo schermo*, LINK-RTI, Milano 2010; Massimo Scaglioni, Anna Sfondini (eds.), *MultiTv. L'esperienza televisiva nell'età della convergenza*, Carocci, Roma 2008.
  - 7 See Lev Manovich, *Software Culture*, Olivares, Milano 2010.
  - 8 See Veronica Innocenti, Guglielmo Pescatore, "Information Architecture in Contemporary Television Series," in *Journal of Information Architecture*, journalofia.org, forthcoming 2013.
  - 9 Veronica Innocenti, "This is Snack Culture And Boy, is it Tasty (not to Mention Addictive). La migrazione delle forme seriali dalla televisione al Web," in *Close Up*, no. 22, 2007, pp. 39-47.
  - 10 Source of these data is Auditel, the Italian society that collects and publishes Italian television ratings.
  - 11 Here are some data on the productions that in 2013 gained more than 20% share. On 18 and 19 February 2013 the two-episode drama *Volare – La grande storia di Domenico Modugno* (Rai1) attracted more than 11 million viewers. Very good performance also for *Un medico in famiglia* (Rai1) that attracted 7.393.000 viewers (24,90%) on 3 February 2013. On 8 January 2013 the Mediaset fiction *Ultimo. L'occhio del falco* (Canale 5) was seen by 7.048.000 viewers (24,56%). Sources of these data is Auditel, ASCA.

**NICOLAS LE FLOCH, UN BON PRODUIT « À L'EXPORT » ?  
RÉFLEXIONS SUR LA DIFFUSION ET LA RÉCEPTION INTERNATIONALE  
D'UNE SÉRIE HISTORIQUE (TRÈS) FRANÇAISE...**

Bernard Papin, Université Paris-Sud

*Abstract*

Are historical series strongly influenced by cultural references shared by the community of their intended viewers easily exportable TV products outside the borders of their original “media landscape?” The success obtained in France by made-for TV movies and series in the tradition of British “heritage film” might suggest so. However what about a series like *Nicolas Le Floch*, deeply rooted in French history and culture? This historical series, which narrates the investigations of a police superintendent in the France of Louis XV and Louis XVI, is similar in many respects to the genre of “heritage fiction:” sets and costumes are lavish, dialogues carefully written in a language reminiscent of the Age of Enlightenment. However, this quality series, where narrative efficiency is sometimes sacrificed to a finicky historical reconstruction, is exported to quite a number of countries abroad. Its few concessions to international standards or generic plasticity do not explain everything: it is precisely the *French touch* that appeals to spectators beyond national borders, as it depicts – certainly somewhat simplistically – the charm of 18<sup>th</sup>-century France as shared by collective imagination: luxury, voluptuousness and art of conversation. This is the paradox of a fiction which yet remains “heritage” at heart.

---

Les séries historiques sont-elles des produits télévisuels aisément exportables hors des frontières de leur « paysage audiovisuel » d'origine ? On peut les supposer, par nature et ambition, du moins quand elles prétendent à un « degré d'historicité »<sup>1</sup> relativement élevé, très marquées par le système de références historiques et culturelles du pays qui les a vu naître, au point peut-être de rester parfois inaccessibles aux téléspectateurs appartenant à une autre sphère culturelle. Or, le succès récurrent à la télévision française des téléfilms (*Orgueil et Préjugés*, 1995) ou des séries (*Downton Abbey*, 2010-) de la BBC dans la tradition très britannique du « heritage film » ou le triomphe sur les petits écrans du monde entier de séries comme *The Tudors* (2007-2010) semblent prouver amplement le contraire. Certes, le retentissement international de la série de Michael Hirst diffusée avec grand succès en France sur Canal+, Arte et NRJ12 peut assez aisément s'expliquer par le recours à quelques standards internationaux<sup>2</sup> mais le caractère *so british* des productions anglaises précédemment citées n'a pas été un obstacle à leur succès auprès du public français. A

quelles conditions, en termes de production et de promesse télévisuelle, de réalisation et de programmation, des œuvres qui sont *a priori* très marquées par leur contexte de production et par leur ancrage diégétique très national peuvent-elles séduire un public international ?

Pour tenter de répondre à cette question, nous prendrons ici l'exemple d'une série policière historique française dont la *francité* est particulièrement affirmée et qui constitue donc en conséquence un terrain d'étude privilégié dans le cadre de notre interrogation. La série *Nicolas Le Floch*, diffusée sur France 2 depuis 2008, conte les enquêtes d'un commissaire de police au temps de Louis XV. Si l'intrigue policière fait la part belle à des méthodes d'investigation qui ne sont pas sans évoquer des « expertises » venus d'Outre-Atlantique... la mise en scène soignée du XVIII<sup>ème</sup> siècle français, le discours sur les valeurs des Lumières et, surtout, le travail minutieux qui est fait sur la langue de l'époque semblaient condamner la série au seul marché français. Or, si on en croit la Compagnie des Phares et Balises qui la produit, elle a été vendue et diffusée dans plusieurs pays, notamment en Europe de l'Est (République tchèque, Pologne, Ukraine), en Chine et au Japon, dans plusieurs pays d'Amérique latine (Brésil, Argentine) et d'Afrique francophone et lusophone. Certes, les Lumières tendent à l'universel, mais une telle diffusion peut surprendre. Ce sont les raisons de cette diffusion quelque peu inattendue que nous nous proposons d'explorer ici, sans négliger les conditions de promotion, de programmation et (éventuellement) d'adaptation aux attentes de la réception locale de cette série, afin de tenter de mieux comprendre comment une production typiquement nationale peut devenir un bon produit à l'exportation.

## Une fiction patrimoniale de qualité...

La série *Nicolas le Floch*, adaptée<sup>3</sup> des romans de Jean-François Parot<sup>4</sup>, est une série policière historique qui nous narre les enquêtes criminelles et « extraordinaires » (c'est-à-dire directement en rapport avec la sécurité du royaume) d'un commissaire au Châtelet dans la France de Louis XV puis de Louis XVI. Elle met en scène un certain nombre de personnages historiques, notamment les deux rois de France précédemment cités et leurs lieutenants généraux de police successifs (Sartine, Le Noir), qu'elle fait cohabiter avec des personnages fictifs, tels le protagoniste, Nicolas Le Floch, son adjoint Bourdeau et ses amis, l'ancien procureur Monsieur de Noblecourt et le chirurgien de marine Semacgus, qui participent volontiers à ses enquêtes. Autre personnage déterminant, à mi-chemin de l'histoire et de la fiction, Sanson, le bourreau<sup>5</sup>, qui dans la « basse-geôle » du Châtelet procède à des « ouvertures » (des dissections qui prennent la forme d'autopsies) et fournit à Le Floch des indices souvent déterminants pour ses enquêtes.

Ces intrigues criminelles s'inscrivent dans la tradition du policier à énigme avec résolution finale en présence des protagonistes de l'affaire réunis par l'enquêteur pour les besoins de l'élucidation. Elles ont pour contexte diégétique la France du XVIII<sup>ème</sup> siècle et la reconstitution historique est particulièrement soignée avec des décors « naturels » souvent somptueux : de nombreuses scènes d'intérieur sont tournées dans des demeures aristocratiques prestigieuses et le dernier épisode diffusé a bénéficié du prestige de la galerie des Glaces à Versailles... De même, les costumes font l'objet d'une attention toute particulière. Cette série, qui en est à sa cinquième « saison » depuis 2008 (à raison de deux épisodes à chaque fois) est une série chère qui ne lésine pas sur le nombre de figurants<sup>6</sup> et qui bénéficie de réalisations de grande qualité, aux images très travaillées. Alors



que la série est actuellement menacée et « joue sa tête » du fait d'audiences jugées insuffisantes<sup>7</sup>, ses plus ardents défenseurs mettent en avant ce luxe peu commun dans la fiction télévisuelle française :

*De la soie à foison et des scènes bluffantes dans la galerie des Glaces de Versailles avec près de 250 figurants... Les yeux sont aussi à la fête. [...] Avec Edith Vesperini, chef costumière césarisée pour « Saint-Cyr » de Patricia Mazuy, chaque détail compte. Louis XV meurt. Changement de roi... et donc de mode. La garde-robe du héros est entièrement renouvelée. Un mois de travail pour des vêtements plus ajustés et plus riches, plus élégants<sup>8</sup>.*

Ce soin extrême apporté au cadre historique des intrigues criminelles entre évidemment pour beaucoup dans le succès critique de la série qui est promue et vantée dans la presse comme une série de qualité et de prestige.

Par ailleurs, les événements fictifs qui font l'objet de l'intrigue policière sont toujours plus ou moins mis en relation avec des événements historiques qui leur servent de toile de fond : la bousculade tragique de la Place Royale en 1770 après un feu d'artifice donné en l'honneur du mariage du dauphin en ouverture de l'épisode *Le Fantôme de la rue Royale* (saison 2-I) ou la « guerre des farines » dont le souvenir ressurgit dans *Le Sang des farines* (saison 5-II) et alimente l'intrigue criminelle. Dans *Le Grand veneur* (saison 3-II), l'affaire mystérieuse et tragique de la bête du Gévaudan<sup>9</sup> hante le scénario original d'Hugues Pagan. La connaissance préalable de ces références historiques n'est certes pas nécessaire pour une bonne compréhension de l'intrigue mais elles n'en constituent pas moins, même si c'est le plus souvent au titre de vagues souvenirs scolaires, un arrière-plan visant « à constituer une communauté de spectateurs unifiée par un passé commun » propre à ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler une « fiction patrimoniale »<sup>10</sup>. Au bout du compte, tout est ici réuni pour apparenter cette série policière à ces œuvres « en costumes » qui jouent sur la connivence que procure une culture partagée et qui proposent « la mise en scène d'un héritage collectif »<sup>11</sup>. Depuis les années 80, la production cinématographique et télévisuelle britannique nous a habitués à la notion de *heritage films* ou *costume dramas* où l'on trouve « des décors luxueux de grandes demeures provinciales, les paysages verdoyants de la campagne anglaise, les costumes élégants d'une époque révolue »<sup>12</sup>. Ces films ou téléfilms qui ont pour vocation de « promouvoir l'identité et la culture anglaises »<sup>13</sup> ont connu, dans le pays de Margaret Thatcher, un énorme succès. Dans *Nicolas le Floch*, les ors de Versailles, avec la galerie des Glaces comme décor de prestige, les robes des marquises et les masques des courtisanes se substituent aux beautés plus naturelles de la campagne anglaise.

Avec *Nicolas le Floch*, il semble que ce que l'on pourrait appeler *l'effet patrimonial* soit plus marqué encore si l'on précise que cette série, respectant en cela l'écriture de son modèle roman-  
esque, s'efforce, dans les dialogues de Hugues Pagan, eux-mêmes souvent directement importés des romans de Jean-François Parot, de respecter la langue du siècle de Louis XV. Contrairement à ce qui se passe dans d'autres fictions historiques où certaines tournures linguistiques ne sont là (au risque parfois du grotesque...) que pour *faire archaïque* ou, au contraire, dans lesquelles l'anachronisme linguistique est accepté, voire revendiqué à des fins de modernité supposée<sup>14</sup>, le commissaire Le Floch ne parle pas comme un policier d'aujourd'hui : les victimes dont il s'occupe ont été « homicidées » et la plupart des criminels qu'il traque ont longtemps fait « rôtir le

balai ». Les dialogues, qu'il n'est pas très courant, même sur une chaîne publique, d'entendre en *prime time*, empruntent à la langue du siècle des Lumières, avec une érudition linguistique qui est originellement celle des romans adaptés<sup>15</sup>. Ce choix d'une langue « mi-véridique, mi-fantasmée », comme le précise Jérôme Robart, l'interprète du commissaire, est assumée avec conviction par le scénariste et adaptateur Hugues Pagan : « à quoi ça sert d'imaginer une intrigue au XVIII<sup>ème</sup> siècle si c'est pour parler 'zarma' ? » Les dialogues ont donc été composés dans un français du XVIII<sup>ème</sup> siècle ou, plutôt, comme il le précise, « dans un français du XVIII<sup>ème</sup> siècle tel qu'on se l' imagine aujourd'hui »<sup>16</sup>. Il y a là une *préciosité* linguistique propre à séduire un public culturellement averti et amoureux de sa propre langue, dont il savoure l'évolution, la richesse expressive et les couleurs parfois désuètes.

... difficilement exportable ?

*A priori*, ce repliement quelque peu nostalgique sur les splendeurs révolues du passé national et les richesses du patrimoine n'est pas un bon argument de vente pour la série à l'étranger. L'effort de « recontextualisation d'un discours préexistant, créé par et pour une société et une culture différentes »<sup>17</sup> de celles du pays d'accueil, et que tout téléspectateur d'une série étrangère doit fournir pour s'approprier au mieux un produit télévisuel venu d'ailleurs, n'est-il pas ici trop exigeant ? Les intrigues criminelles et « extraordinaires » qui s'entrecroisent dans le scénario – et qui sont d'ordinaire d'une grande complexité – ont le plus souvent pour arrière-fond des conflits de pouvoir qui peuvent sembler obscurs à un téléspectateur non averti : dans *Le Crime de l'hôtel Saint-Florentin* (saison 5-I), l'intrigue criminelle se déploie sur un fond de querelle politique où la rivalité entre le ministre de Louis XV, monsieur de Saint-Florentin, et Choiseul, est mise en scène. Certes, il s'agit d'une rivalité de pouvoir et c'est là un topos narratif qui fait les beaux jours de bien des séries historiques au succès international : on conviendra néanmoins que la rivalité Saint-Florentin/Choiseul est moins immédiatement accessible à un téléspectateur de l'autre bout du monde que la rivalité entre des personnages de la stature historique d'un César et d'un Pompée, dans *Rome* (2005-2007), par exemple, dont la lutte pour le pouvoir atteint à l'universel... Par ailleurs, les beautés de la *belle* langue d'autrefois dont nous avons précédemment parlé et qui expliquent pour partie le succès de la série auprès de son public français, sont sans doute très loin d'être un atout *vendeur* et, quel que soit le procédé de traduction choisi, doublage ou sous-titrage, on peut imaginer que cette particularité de la série – qui a déjà le tort de ne pas être tournée en anglais, ce qui, en matière d'export télévisuel, ne facilite pas vraiment les choses – ne la rend pas particulièrement attractive aux yeux des diffuseurs étrangers potentiels.

A cela s'ajoutent d'autres facteurs apparemment rédhitoires qui devraient condamner la série à l'entre-soi national : un art du récit quelque peu primesautier et l'absence de toute surenchère dans la mise en scène de la violence et du sexe. L'art de la résolution de l'énigme criminelle est en effet ici assez loin des standards de l'efficacité propre aux grandes séries (américaines) à succès. Dans les épisodes de *Nicolas Le Floch*, comme dans les romans qui les inspirent, on prend son temps, on *baguenaude* volontiers, on profite de l'air du temps, de la beauté des robes ou de la somptuosité des décors : la série déploie volontiers un art consommé de la *gratuité* visuelle dans des réalisations très élaborées et à l'esthétique très soignée. Comme on le dit à la Compagnie des

Phares et Balises, *Nicolas Le Floch*, c'est de la télévision d'auteur, de la *high production value*, qui, nous l'avons déjà dit, bénéficie de budgets conséquents, bien supérieurs en tout cas à la moyenne des fictions télévisuelles, même *en costumes*. La fiction patrimoniale qu'est la série *Nicolas le Floch* participe ainsi d'une « esthétique muséale dans laquelle le plaisir de la contemplation des costumes et du décor s'ajoute au plaisir narratif, voire le supplante »<sup>18</sup>. Cette volonté de se laisser aller au plaisir de la contemplation des beautés de *l'ancien régime* du monde a pour corollaire une certaine lenteur, parfaitement assumée, dans la conduite des intrigues – lenteur qui semble avoir lassé une autre partie du public français, qui ne réserve pas toujours, nous l'avons déjà noté, le meilleur accueil à la série.

Ajoutons à cela que cette série, contrairement à certaines séries américaines (comme *Spartacus : le sang des gladiateurs*, 2010) ou même françaises (comme *Borgia*, 2011-), ne tombe jamais dans l'exhibition d'une violence complaisante. Certes, il y a à intervalles réguliers quelques images assez *saignantes* lors des autopsies ou de la reconstitution de crimes particulièrement horribles comme ceux de la main de fer du tueur dans *Le Crime de l'hôtel Saint-Florentin* mais France télévisions veille (et le CSA<sup>19</sup> aussi...) à ce que ces scènes n'excèdent pas les limites du représentable en *prime time* sur une chaîne de service public. Les combats à l'arme blanche restent dans les limites habituelles du genre très codé du « cape et d'épée » où il est de tradition de s'étriper volontiers, mais toujours avec élégance et avec un sens affirmé de l'euphémisme dans la représentation des coups portés et de leurs conséquences. Sûrement, Nicolas le Floch est parfois très rudement malmené, mais, fût-il apparemment à l'agonie, il se relève d'ordinaire très vite et prouve sa vigueur vite retrouvée auprès du premier jupon qui passe... Même retenue cependant dans l'érotisme, dans une série qui fait pourtant la part belle aux scènes d'amour et qui, dans les bandes annonces notamment, sait jouer des séductions du libertinage qui, dans l'imaginaire collectif, est propre au Siècle des Lumières. En effet, sans être un franc libertin, Nicolas Le Floch ne résiste guère à la tentation et les corps par lui dénudés et caressés sont légion au fil des épisodes... Mais même lors les scènes les plus débridées, comme celles qui ont lieu dans la maison de débauche Le Dauphin couronné ou dans les soirées les plus aristocratiquement libertines, on reste toujours dans un érotisme de bon aloi (et là encore de *prime time*) : des corps artistiquement dénudés et un art consommé de l'ellipse dans la mise en scène de l'amour.

Ajoutons pour finir ce dossier à charge quant aux potentialités de la série à *l'international* que *Nicolas Le Floch*, contrairement à quelques autres grosses productions françaises, à caractère patrimonial et/ou historique, qui se sont bien exportées, ne fait pas appel à de grandes stars du grand écran pour asseoir sa notoriété : pas de Gérard Depardieu comme dans *Les Misérables* (TF1, 2000), pas de Catherine Deneuve comme dans *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (TF1, 2003) ou de Jeanne Moreau comme dans *Les Rois maudits* (France 2, 2005). La série fait appel à des comédiens de théâtre peu connus du grand public français et si Jérôme Robart, interprète du commissaire, ne fait désormais plus qu'un avec son personnage, il est évidemment loin de bénéficier d'une notoriété internationale...

Et pourtant... En dépit de tous ces handicaps, selon la Compagnie des Phares et Balises<sup>20</sup>, la série *Nicolas Le Floch* se vend plutôt bien à l'étranger, pour une série française, pour une série historique de surcroît. Elle se vend d'ordinaire par saison mais la Géorgie, la Tchéquie et le Japon ont acheté toute la série. La Russie et la plupart des pays de l'Europe de l'est (Ukraine, Tchéquie, Pologne...) en sont très friands mais elle s'est aussi exportée en Amérique latine, en Afrique et

en Chine ! En revanche, les pays qui nous sont le plus proches par la géographie et la culture – le paradoxe n'est qu'apparent, nous y reviendrons – sont aussi les plus réfractaires : pas d'achat de la série en Europe de l'Ouest (Allemagne, Italie, Espagne<sup>21</sup>) ou au Royaume Uni. Il convient néanmoins de préciser avant de s'étonner outre mesure que ces pays sont des territoires télévisuels d'accès difficile pour toute production étrangère et, en dehors de quelques notables exceptions, ils continuent de privilégier les productions nationales. Quant aux Etats-Unis, on se doute bien qu'une production télévisuelle française n'a guère les moyens de franchir l'Atlantique.

Bien entendu, ce relatif succès international doit être contextualisé en termes de diffusion et de réception pour être évalué à sa juste valeur. En Afrique francophone, les chaînes publiques se voient offrir les épisodes par l'intermédiaire de Canal France International qui promeut les produits culturels français, sous l'égide des ministères de la Culture et des Affaires étrangères. Et si en Ukraine et Tchéquie, ce sont de grandes chaînes publiques qui diffusent la série à des heures de grande écoute<sup>22</sup>, la plupart des diffuseurs de la série à l'étranger sont des chaînes à vocation plutôt culturelle et à public parfois restreint. Au Japon, Mystery Channel est une chaîne qui propose régulièrement des séries d'auteur à un public exigeant. Au Brésil, Globo 7 est une chaîne thématique plutôt spécialisée dans les séries européennes. En Russie, Kultura est une chaîne publique à vocation culturelle, type ARTE. En Pologne, c'est une chaîne à vocation internationale (une sorte de TV5 en polonais) qui assure la diffusion. En Chine, c'est CCTV « Double V », un réseau de chaînes spécialisé dans le documentaire, qui a acheté la série. En Amérique latine hispanophone, la série est distribuée par Europa Europa, une chaîne européenne basée en Argentine et, au Québec, par une chaîne internet, filiale de Radio Canada qui cible un public plus jeune. On le voit, si *Variety* peut saluer, fait rarissime dans ce journal, « a fine time for gallic crime »<sup>23</sup>, en associant *Nicolas le Floch* à une autre série policière en costumes, *Les Petits meurtres d'Agatha Christie* (France 2, série en cours depuis 2009), il n'en reste pas moins qu'on reste dans les limites de diffusion propres à une *high production value*...

## Le paradoxe patrimonial

Quoi qu'il en soit, quels sont donc les arguments de vente de cette série à l'étranger ? Bien entendu, elle n'échappe pas totalement aux phénomènes de standardisation des produits internationaux et les multiples séductions de son hybridation générique sont évidentes. Mais il semble bien que les raisons majeures de son internationalisation soient à chercher du côté de ce qui pouvait apparaître comme son handicap majeur : cette « french touch » qui fait d'elle l'ambassadeur idéal d'une France en grande partie fantasmée.

Cette série historique emprunte les chemins assez bien balisés du genre policier et l'on peut d'ailleurs remarquer que, pour sa diffusion française, France 2 a choisi d'inscrire cette série dans sa case « polar » du vendredi soir là où elle aurait pu jouer la carte plus prestigieuse, mais plus hasardeuse en termes d'audience, du téléfilm de prestige « en costumes », chaque épisode de 90 ou 100 minutes ayant un format plus proche de celui des téléfilms unitaires que de celui des numéros des séries policières<sup>24</sup>. Chaque enquête se termine, dans la tradition du policier à énigme, par la confrontation devant le commissaire et son adjoint des suspects et des témoins et/ou victimes. Mais, modernité policière et... audiovisuelle oblige, nos policiers ont souvent recours à

des méthodes d'investigation et de résolution des énigmes qui outrepassent assez largement les moyens qui devaient être ceux de la police de Louis XV. Nous l'avons déjà évoqué brièvement, Le Floch et ses collaborateurs – dans la série bien plus encore que dans les romans de Jean-François Parot – inventent la médecine légale en pratiquant force « ouvertures » du corps des victimes et de nombreuses scènes de réflexion collective entre le bourreau Sanson, le chirurgien Semacgus et Le Floch se déroulent dans la « basse-geôle » du Châtelet : la victime, allongée sur une table d'examen, est soumise aux investigations de nos « experts ». On voit bien ici comment cette série si *française* à bien des égards paie sa dette au modèle américain dominant en matière de série policière depuis une dizaine d'années : Nicolas Le Floch, commissaire au Châtelet, c'est aussi un « expert » au temps des Lumières<sup>25</sup>.

Les enquêtes criminelles du commissaire Le Floch sont en règle générale menées en parallèle, au point d'être parfois inextricablement mêlées, aux « affaires extraordinaires » que le marquis de Ranreuil – c'est l'identité aristocratique de Nicolas Le Floch – doit conduire à bien pour assurer la sécurité du royaume ou réparer les maladroites de la souveraine (comme dans l'épisode « franchisé » *La Larme de Varsovie* (saison 3-I). Dans *L'affaire Nicolas le Floch* (saison 2-II), le commissaire est envoyé en mission secrète chez l'ennemi anglais et au début du dernier épisode diffusé à ce jour, *Le Sang des farines*, il rentre de Vienne. En liaison avec le Secret du Roi – le service secret de Sa Majesté – ou parfois contre lui, le commissaire se fait volontiers agent secret et la série nous propose des variations qui la tirent vers le genre de l'espionnage. Il faut ajouter à cela les séductions du genre « cape et d'épée », avec les duels et combats multiples que la série propose au fil des épisodes – avec notamment dans *Le Dîner de gueux* (saison 4-I) le recours au modèle du bandit au grand cœur ou du bandit d'honneur popularisé par le cinéma et la télévision des années soixante<sup>26</sup>. Les influences cinématographiques sont aussi évidentes dans l'esthétique volontiers « gothique » de certains épisodes et la série ne cherche pas à cacher la dette qui est la sienne envers *Sleepy Hollow* (1999) : le commissaire Le Floch a emprunté sans réelle vergogne la redingote noire de l'inspecteur Crane du film de Tim Burton. De son côté, *Le Fantôme de la rue Royale* convoque un fantastique très marqué par l'esthétique des films hollywoodiens du type *L'Exorciste* (William Friedkin, 1973) tandis que *Le Sang des farines* mobilise une horreur davantage dans la tradition du romantisme noir : victimes séquestrées et enchaînées, sombres souterrains, monstres errants...

L'« hybridité » générique dont nous venons de faire état et qui est, de manière un peu inattendue, « une caractéristique essentielle des fictions patrimoniales, ce qui fait leur complexité et leur richesse »<sup>27</sup>, explique que, loin de se laisser enfermer dans le carcan de leur cadre diégétique historique d'origine, elles font preuve d'une plasticité étonnante qui leur permet de séduire des publics aux motivations diverses, bien au-delà du cercle initial des amateurs d'histoire. Néanmoins, leur principal argument de vente à l'étranger semble bien résider dans ce qui constitue leur essence première : *leur capital patrimonial*. C'est là, plus que dans la plasticité générique dont nous venons de faire état, que réside, de manière assurément quelque peu paradoxale, leur force de conviction et de pénétration du marché à l'international. Non pas comme vecteur d'histoire mais comme vecteur de mythologie. Les *heritage films* britanniques ont connu et connaissent encore en France un succès certain : un récent cycle « Jane Austen » sur ARTE avec notamment le téléfilm de Simon Langton (1995, BBC) en est la démonstration renouvelée. Sans aucun doute proposent-ils, aux yeux des Britanniques eux-mêmes mais aussi des Français, la représentation d'une Angleterre

éternelle, et éternellement rêvée. De la même façon, *Nicolas Le Floch*, « finding innovative ways to meld US or Brit fictions templates with a French sense of place, taste and art »<sup>28</sup>, a su incarner une *french touch* qui séduit et fait rêver les Japonais ou les Brésiliens d'une France également *éternelle*. Versailles et ses splendeurs, les masques d'une fête galante perpétuelle, l'élégance française qui fait que l'on tue aussi bien et avec autant d'élégance avec une épée ou un bon mot, tout cela est *so french*... Loin de s'enfermer dans une identité nationale qui pourrait restreindre sa diffusion dans une *francité* embarrassante, la série joue le rôle d'« ambassadeur culturel »<sup>29</sup> de la culture française, comme le *heritage film* le fait pour la culture britannique. Mais ce n'est pas la complexité de la politique française dans les années qui précèdent la Révolution, ni la véracité historique éventuelle du contexte des intrigues, qui intéressent le téléspectateur, mais l'image rêvée, idéalisée et forcément réductrice, de l'Ancien Régime avec ses fastes finissants et son inconscience aristocratique si touchante, dans le contexte du progrès des idées des Lumières, représentées dans la série plutôt par Bourdeau que par l'aristocratie Ranreuil-le Floch mais réduites elles-aussi à quelques images d'Epinal sur la misère du peuple et l'arrogance des puissants. Alors, tout cela n'est-il que malentendu et superficialité ? Pas forcément : c'est là le rôle de cet « art du lieu commun » dont parle Anne Cauquelin<sup>30</sup> qui, dans ses approximations, voire ses réductions, nous permet de nous (re)constituer une culture commune<sup>31</sup> et d'exporter à l'étranger une image nationale dessinée à grands traits mais gratifiante.

Cette fascination pour un monde qui se meurt avec tant d'élégance ne peut néanmoins fonctionner véritablement qu'à une certaine distance : nos proches voisins européens – nous l'avons précédemment noté – ne sont guère séduits d'ordinaire par les séries étrangères. Pourraient-ils l'être davantage par celle-ci qui déploie des séductions qui ne leur sont que trop familières pour vraiment les surprendre ? Ils sont assurément moins attirés que nos lointains cousins d'Amérique ou d'Asie par les éclats de « Lumières » qu'ils revendiquent pour partie ou par des soubresauts d'une histoire qu'ils ont partagée, et parfois à leur corps défendant. Versailles est évidemment bien plus exotique pour un Japonais que pour un Anglais, un Allemand ou un Italien...

Il resterait à déterminer comment cette production télévisuelle *so french*, qui ne se vend finalement pas si mal, est véritablement *reçue* dans les différents pays où elle s'exporte. Nous l'avons déjà laissé entendre, il est difficile d'avoir des informations très précises sur la programmation de la série dans ses pays d'accueil, sans compter que « les enjeux d'une bonne programmation sont [...] très différents d'un pays à l'autre car les habitudes et les usages sociaux et culturels sont eux-mêmes très différents »<sup>32</sup> : comment dès lors apprécier à sa juste valeur le cadre de programmation ? Nous avons déjà signalé que cette série est diffusée sur des canaux essentiellement réservés à un public plutôt choisi. Mais est-elle programmée en *prime time* ou à des horaires tardifs ou peu porteurs en termes d'audience ? Est-elle présentée comme une production exceptionnelle ou un produit de série ? Dans des soirées « thématiques » dans le genre de celles d'ARTE en France ou génériquement marquées (policier, histoire, ...) ? Et, en ce qui concerne les épisodes de la série, dans quel ordre, et avec quelle fréquence ou régularité, sont-ils diffusés, les achats se faisant le plus souvent par « saison » ? L'intégrité même de la série est-elle respectée ? On peut imaginer bien des aménagements locaux : découpage éventuel des épisodes dans des formats inédits, censure locale avec adaptations aux habitudes de représentation propres au pays d'accueil (au Japon, les scènes de nudité et de pilosité ne sont guère acceptées). Sans parler du traitement

de la langue des dialogues. Subissent-ils, que l'on ait recours au doublage ou au sous-titrage, les derniers ouvrages, les traducteurs se contentant d'une traduction très littérale dans la langue locale contemporaine ? S'efforcent-ils au contraire de trouver des équivalences au français archaïque de la version originale ? Ce sont là quelques-unes des questions – sans parler, évidemment, de la question centrale de l'audience et, surtout, de la satisfaction du public – auxquelles il faudrait pouvoir répondre avant de se prononcer véritablement sur le succès international de la série, mais cela exige de minutieuses enquêtes de terrain, qu'il n'est pas aisé de conduire. De nouvelles « missions extraordinaires » s'imposeraient assurément pour vérifier que *Nicolas Le Floch*, comme la plupart des fictions patrimoniales, a bien, paradoxalement, la « capacité à conjuguer des niveaux différents d'identité (locale, régionale, internationale) »<sup>33</sup>.

- 1 Isabelle Veyrat-Masson, *Quand la télévision explore le temps. L'histoire au petit écran*, Fayard, Paris 2000, p. 84.
- 2 Et il est vrai qu'il s'agit là d'une production diffusée d'abord sur la chaîne américaine Showtime.
- 3 Néanmoins, sur les 10 épisodes produits à ce jour, seuls 6 sont des adaptations. Les épisodes des saisons 3 et 4 reposent sur des scénarios originaux du scénariste et adaptateur Hugues Pagan, le personnage ayant été « franchisé ». Néanmoins, la saison 5 en revient à des adaptations des romans de Parot.
- 4 Les romans de Jean-François Parot sont publiés aux éditions Lattès et connaissent un succès grandissant.
- 5 Les Sanson ont effectivement assumé les « basses œuvres » du royaume de France pendant plusieurs générations.
- 6 Cf. Sabine Chalvon-Demersay, *Petits rôles, silhouettes et figurants : notes de tournage*, dans Pierre-Jean Benghozi, Thomas Paris (sous la direction de), *Howard Becker et les mondes de l'art*, Ecole Polytechnique Eds, Paris 2012, pp. 85-99.
- 7 Les deux derniers épisodes diffusés en février et mars 2013 ont attiré respectivement 2,8 et 2,4 millions de téléspectateurs, ce qui ne représente qu'environ 10% des téléspectateurs présents à ce moment-là devant leur poste de télévision. Une « PDA » que France télévisions juge tout à fait insuffisante pour une série aussi chère.
- 8 Sylvain Merle, « Nicolas Le Floch joue sa tête », *leparisien.fr*, 1 mars 2013, <http://www.leparisien.fr/tv/serie-nicolas-le-floch-joue-sa-tete-01-03-2013-2608487.php>, dernier accès 12 juin 2013.
- 9 De 1764 à 1767, un prédateur – un loup monstrueux vraisemblablement – tue plus d'une centaine de personnes, essentiellement des femmes et des enfants, et en mutilé des dizaines d'autres dans les provinces du Vivarais et du Gévaudan.
- 10 Pierre Beylot, Raphaëlle Moine, *Introduction*, dans Id. (sous la direction de), *Fictions patrimoniales sur grand et petit écran. Contours et enjeux d'un genre intermédiaire*, Presses universitaires de Bordeaux, Pessac 2009, p. 16.
- 11 *Ibidem*.
- 12 Lydia Martin, *L'Angleterre de Jane Austen à l'écran : représentation et idéologie*, dans Jeanne-Marie Clerc (sous la direction de), *Cinéma, littérature, adaptations*, Editions du CERS, Montpellier 2009, p. 175.
- 13 *Ibidem*.
- 14 A ce sujet, cf. Bernard Papin, « La fiction patrimoniale de divertissement. Promesses et modalités rhétoriques d'une hybridation générique », dans *Télévision*, n° 4, avril 2013, pp. 13-28.
- 15 A ce sujet, cf. Pascale Arizmendi, « *Nicolas Le Floch* », *le Tableau de Paris de Jean-François Parot*, Presses Universitaires de Perpignan, Perpignan 2010.
- 16 *Télérama*, n° 3067, *Télérama.fr*, 28 octobre 2008.
- 17 Séverine Barthes, *Production et programmation des séries télévisées*, dans Sarah Sepulchre (sous la direction de), *Décoder les séries télévisées*, De Boeck, Bruxelles 2011, p. 47.

- 18 Pierre Beylot, Raphaëlle Moine, *Fictions patrimoniales sur grand et petit écran. Contours et enjeux d'un genre intermédiaire*, cit., p. 21.
- 19 Cet organisme de régulation de l'audiovisuel français impose le respect d'une « signalétique » destinée à protéger le jeune public d'images trop violentes ou sexuellement explicites.
- 20 La plupart des informations concernant la vente à l'étranger de la série nous ont été fournies par Yasmine Benkiran qui s'occupe de la diffusion internationale de la série au sein de la Compagnie des Phares et Balises et qui a bien voulu nous accorder un entretien à ce sujet. Qu'elle en soit ici chaleureusement remerciée.
- 21 En Espagne, cependant, la chaîne FORTE, qui réunit plusieurs chaînes régionales, pourrait prochainement diffuser la série.
- 22 Il est néanmoins très difficile d'avoir des certitudes sur ce point, sauf à enquêter de manière plus précise dans les pays concernés.
- 23 John Hopewell, « It's a fine time for gallic crime », dans *Variety*, n° 11, 2 février 2009, p. 26.
- 24 A l'origine, les épisodes avaient néanmoins été conçus pour être diffusés en deux parties de 50 minutes environ.
- 25 Cf. Hélène Monnet-Cantagrel, « Le Châtelet, déjà un *crime lab* », communication dans le cadre de la journée d'études « Fiction policière historique et série télévisée : Nicolas Le Floch, un 'expert' au temps des Lumières », Université Paris 3-Sorbonne Nouvelle, 22 mars 2013, à paraître.
- 26 Que l'on songe par exemple au personnage de La Griffé qui fait irrésistiblement penser au héros du *Cartouche* de Philippe de Broca (1962).
- 27 Pierre Beylot, Raphaëlle Moine, *Fictions patrimoniales sur grand et petit écran. Contours et enjeux d'un genre intermédiaire*, cit., p. 20.
- 28 John Hopewell, « It's a fine time for gallic crime », cit., p. 26.
- 29 Lydia Martin, *L'Angleterre de Jane Austen à l'écran : représentation et idéologie*, cit., p. 175.
- 30 Anne Cauquelin, *L'Art du lieu commun. Du bon usage de la doxa*, Paris, Seuil 1999.
- 31 Cf. Bernard Papin, *Introduction*, dans Id. (sous la direction de), *Images du Siècle des Lumières à la télévision. Construction d'une culture commune par la fiction*, De Boeck/INA, Bruxelles 2010, pp. 9-21.
- 32 Séverine Barthes, *Production et programmation des séries télévisées*, cit., p. 62.
- 33 Pierre Beylot, Raphaëlle Moine, *Fictions patrimoniales sur grand et petit écran. Contours et enjeux d'un genre intermédiaire*, cit., p. 20.



## WHODONIT? RAI TV FICTION PRODUCTION BETWEEN DETECTION AND *GIALLO*

Paola Valentini, Università di Firenze

### *Abstract*

Italian TV serial production is interesting not only in its peculiar, often paradoxical, production traits, but also because of its adventurously happy results, sometimes due to creative constraints by claustrophobic Italian television market. TV series have a physiognomy and an “Italianness” also evident in their language, since they show distinctive characteristics in terms of modes of representation and communicative pacts, in which to settle a whole television history and visual culture. This essay begins to outline this aspect from a particular vantage point: that of detective and crime series, whose history is deeply rooted in Italian culture and whose dominant traits are so different from most recent European TV series. Far from being a sign of recession, RAI public service broadcasting – in which *Il commissario Montalbano* naturally represents a relevant case – reveals the persistence of specific and well embedded traits, albeit evolved over time (a particular dynamic between opening and closure; an overwhelming and static narrative; a parataxis and accumulation of criminal performances, which closes continuously narrative development around the circle of the crime; a urban and landscape component which provokes and creates diversions, etc.). These traits are rooted and shaped in Italian culture, starting from the privileged relationship never exhausted with its literary matrix, but also from the complex and typically Italian interconnection in cultural and media domains created by *giallo*.

---

Italian theory and criticism always tend to look smugly to national TV series, which are often studied just from a strictly technical perspective – as said in 2003 by Eleonora Andreatta (now director of RAI Fiction) and Francesco Nardella – to confirm its “peculiar strategic importance for public television in virtue of its extraordinary power to represent the national imaginary and for the simultaneous opportunity to aggregate a large and various audience.”<sup>1</sup> It still remains a great difficulty in taking into account the Italian TV series as part of a visual history, in considering these products as pieces of a pattern of audiovisual narrations which convey aspects not only of Italian society and its needs and repressions, but also of the images to which society continues to relate and of the representational modes and practices which characterize it from time to time.<sup>2</sup>

In large part this unique theoretical perspective, focused mainly on production quota and details, strategy and goals, can be attributed to the anomalous Italian production system, “a closed

market in which the only two broadcasters dictate rules and the producer has no choice,<sup>3</sup> apart from transforming from an independent to a contractor and a simple project executor for RAI or Mediaset. This is an element that certainly slows down creativity and experimentations in many occasions. As stated by Carlo degli Esposti, producer of *Il commissario Montalbano*:

*In Italy, since there is no market, it is the network that decides a product's value. It is not the market to determinate the price, but the buyer. Without competition, the buyer is so strong he can force independent producers, who are creators, investors and cultural promoters of the idea, to be mere executors of productions. There is no equal relationship between broadcaster and producer, but a dependent relationship: the producer is a slave, he cannot afford to buy back his own product.<sup>4</sup>*

TV drama production, as well as the adventurous manufacturing of the series, in opposition to the solid organization and the widespread competition of formats that characterize the other TV genres,<sup>5</sup> must deal with the lack of independence of the production companies, often dominated by the owners of the capital invested directly by the network, and by the narrow Italian market with its substantial condition of consolidated duopoly. Even just investing in a pilot for only two potential customers is opposed to any commercial practice. The TV channel La7, for example, never pushed itself to co-produce or invest in Italian TV series; it did so for the first time in May 2012 orientating itself however toward a big movie-style operation. *Vi perdono ma inginocchiatevi* (Claudio Bonivento, 2012) produced by La7 with Boniventofilm and Regione Sicilia, was dedicated to a Mafia theme, dear to Italian TV series,<sup>6</sup> addressed in an everyday perspective, that of the heroic and unknown representatives of the police forces similar to the officers killed in attacks to Falcone and Borsellino and of the stories of their families after their tragic death. However, this movie-style operation choice rejected serialization, even in the form of a double episode, to gamble on the single big media event. It is not a coincidence that this made-for TV movie was inserted into the collection *Film Evento*, hosted by director of La7 News Enrico Mentana, that had already aired relevant movies, such as *Il Divo* (Paolo Sorrentino, 2008). What happens on satellite TV – which lies outside this article, focused on TV series produced by public television, and in particular by RAI – confirms in any case this scarcity in production, counting just few cases, each one, not by chance, with a relevant linkage to cinematic and authorial narration. For instance, we might remember here *Romanzo criminale – La serie* (2008-2010) based on the well-known and award-winning movie directed by Michele Placido and on Giancarlo De Cataldo's novel, and *Quo vadis, baby?* (2008) directed by Academy Award winning director Gabriele Salvatores.<sup>7</sup> Relevant names and big budget are used in order to hide TV behind cinema. Although in every other national context the broadcasting network influences the producer, it is clear that Italian production reveals prudence and timidity which is not shared, as we shall see, in Europe and that, while relying on certain “reactionary” and reassuring characters of the public broadcasting, has its roots in “an asphyxial and substantially locked market”<sup>8</sup> such as Italy is.

By virtue or despite of this – it is hard to say – Italian fiction in the last twenty years has been able to prove to be one of the flagship of competitive programming – an Italian product not only with a high international potentiality, capable of crossing European and other boundaries, but also with a strong transnational vocation, when offering, as we shall see, an image which is authentically Italian but can also simultaneously bring together “Italianness” and the idea of Italy

as developed abroad. There is no doubt about the role of the international co-productions – as experienced in 1984 with *La Piovra* (1984-2003), which counting on the investments of French Telecip, of English Channel Four and German Taurus Film, could appear almost simultaneously on the television screens of those countries. However there is more.

In front of an initial investment of 47 million Euros, *Il commissario Montalbano* has led RAI to collect 72 million and has been sold to many foreign channels, including the Australian SBS, US MHz networks, France 3 and English BBC Four. The case of this serial produced by Palomar is exemplary. When it was aired for the first time on Thursday, 6 May 1999, on RaiDue, the episode *Il ladro di merendine* was to compete with the giants of the small screen, a variety show on RaiUno with well known host Milly Carlucci (*La casa dei sogni*), and a similar detective drama lead by a well recognized actor and loved by television audiences, namely Enrico Montesano playing in *L'ispettore Giusti*. Both, the series debuting on Canale 5 and the consolidated competition of the variety show could scarcely compete against *Il commissario Montalbano*, which immediately snatched a 24.45% share of television viewers with its 6,251,000 spectators – one million more than its competitors. And the success of this product never diminished, supported by an audience of over 6 million spectators for eight seasons. When moved to RaiUno, *Gli arancini di Montalbano* nearly reached 10 million spectators and; on 2 November 2008, the episode *La vampa d'agosto* reached the record of a 37.50% share of the market with 9,219,000 viewers. The lifecycle of *Il commissario Montalbano* has been very long in Italy and the twenty-two episodes of the series aired almost three times, often rerun consecutively. Even the prequel, *Il giovane Montalbano* (2012-), an operation that could not count on the attraction of the star of Montalbano played by Luca Zingaretti, exceeded expectations, and its six episodes made RaiUno prime time leader with an average of 22% share in March 2012.

*Distretto di polizia* (2000-2012) is not far behind, debuting on 26 September 2000 immediately with a strong audience, that gradually grew during the first season from 19% to 7 million spectators and a 28% share in the final evening, surpassing even 9 million viewers with the third season, over 32% share. Also, in this case, the longevity of the program was maintained and season eleven, broadcast in 2011-12, has held a strong audience with about 3 million viewers, a share around 13.50%.

## Italian TV series: mode of production

Italian TV series, however, seem to have their own physiognomy and “Italianness” not only in terms of production. They also have linguistic elements and characters in which to settle a whole history of television and visual culture, which this article begins to outline from a particular vantage point, that of the detective and crime series, whose history is deeply rooted into Italian culture.

The presence of fiction in Italian TV listings has a relatively recent history, despite the impact that the first US series immediately had on Italians – *The Adventures of Rin Tin Tin* arrives in Italy on *TV dei ragazzi* already in 1956 and from 28 January 1959 Italian audience could also see *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. Nevertheless, these products were still marginal in the programming of the classic TV era, just relegated to shows for children or used as a filler in TV schedule, with

no real strategy for serialization and audience involvement, mainly treated as if they were small films, independent one from the other. Leaving aside for a while the phenomenon of *teleromanzo*, on which I will return shortly, the invasion of TV series exploded in two moments: the first phase, starting from the end of the Seventies, took place when the import of new TV fiction from foreign market became stronger, due to a range of factors: from the dumping policy of US production companies, to the appearance of the first Italian commercial television channels which availed themselves very quickly of these trade agreements and predatory pricing, given the need to fill their programming schedule with packed products. More unique than rare is the case already mentioned of *La Piovra*, not surprisingly often named as “the Italian answer to *Dallas*”, the only big investment in the serialized narrative television since the golden age of TV serial capable to survive in full phase of American invasion.<sup>9</sup>

But it is only in the second phase, the TV series explosion during the Nineties that Italian television finally started to invest on domestic production along with lower investments in foreign TV series. The main incentives were offered by the crisis in movies on television after film binge of the Eighties, both for the lower availability of movies that could be suitable to television needs, as for their dislocation on other media – e.g. the increasing home video market. Second, they were offered by the birth of dedicated theme channels and, at last, by the EU Directive of 1989, the so-called *Television Without Frontiers*. The latter required not only the free circulation of European television programs within the internal market and the presence of “quote of diffusion” equal to almost half of the time scheduling, but also forced networks to reinvest a portion of their earnings, from 10% to 20%, in production and co-production of national TV programmes.<sup>10</sup>

At the end of the Nineties Italy is still last in Europe for production of TV series, but the series start to expand (along with the explosion of RAI’s first soap opera *Un posto al sole* from October 1996) and to construct fidelity with their audience, while they also begin to be pushed into prime time. The last episode of *La Piovra 4* aired on 20 March 1989, featured the death of the hero, commissioner Corrado Cattani (Michele Placido), and was followed by 17,200,000 spectators with an astonishing 58.91% share, never reached before by a serial drama. In 1993, the spreading success of *Amico mio* (1993-1998) forced RAI to program for the first time a rerun immediately after the first release. And *Un medico in famiglia* (1998-), is one of the first cases in which the Italian broadcaster tries to create continuity from one season to another, airing its almost 80 episodes with very few interruptions between 1998 and 2000.

The explosion of the Italian series and the economic base of this process, the creative constraints of the particular Italian market which has already been discussed,<sup>11</sup> should not, however, distract from the fact that the Italian TV series production has acquired its own physiognomy that cannot just be closely related to commercial and contractual characteristics of its format. Closely related to their production chain, that tries to get out an industrial product from the handcraft, TV series also show distinctive characteristics in terms of modes of representation and communicative pacts. In this quick review, we will focus on detective and cop dramas, prevailing genres among TV fiction – perhaps not by chance, for RAI public service broadcasting, as well as for other broadcasters – which are rooted in the culture of typical Italian serial dramas.

In this perspective, the first feature that stands out in the mode of production of Italian fiction is definitely the size of the text. From the point of view of production the alternatives offered to Italian investors are evident and related to different budgets: made-for-TV movies, distant from

the featured films just for the fact of being especially designed and produced for TV; miniseries, a short story usually in two episodes, spread over a time of programming of few days; and, finally, continuous serials with a strong US-style industrial chain, that present twelve or twenty-four episodes every year and continues from season to season.

The special formula which, however, all of these formats assume, reveals a typical inclination of the Italian fiction, particularly evident in the detection procedure; often labeled as “all’italiana” to indicate hybridization, promiscuity, and distance from the US serial models, this production yet deserves a deeper analysis than the usual easiness to dismiss the Italian anomaly. I argue that it reveals a deep connection with the Italian culture, both of television – finding in *teleromanzo* almost an archetype of the way of using the serial elements, emblematic of Italian culture – and of cinema culture, catching typically national styles of detection and mystery.

### Closure of serial

First, detective dramas allow to half-see a kind of compressed serialization, a dialectic between opening and closing that is deeply rooted in the Italian television heritage. The completeness of serials is in fact always absolute; at both macro and micro levels, the narrative is mostly completed without presupposing a real suspension into the future, either of the single episode or from one episode to another. Single episodes have a high degree of autonomy and continuity between episodes, which has often more to do with the dynamics of life than with the strategy and the building of suspense.

*Il commissario Montalbano* naturally represents the most evident case. The closure of the serial is certainly linked to his literary matrix; it is well known that it is drawn from the novels by Andrea Camilleri, with stories set in the fictional Sicilian town of Vigàta and around the investigations of Inspector Salvo Montalbano. In the early Nineties, with record sales of *La forma dell’acqua*, this novel series had led to the emergence of a genuine literary event. The literary origin of the project is an additional element in strengthening the closing of the text, according to the best Italian tradition.

The fact that the so called “teleromanzo” used to have strong closing episodes should not be overlooked. One can mention two antithetical and macroscopic cases: in *La cittadella* (1964) Anton Giulio Majano, director who was well aware of the soul of *feuilleton*, closes each part of Archibald David Cronin’s novel in seven chapters, characterized by strong core themes (the activity in the mining village, London life, etc.). The first episode, for example, closes undoubtedly with a real “And they lived happily ever after” (with a kiss between the protagonists, the birth of the couple and their departure to town). The eruption of tragedy (the loss of a child) has postponed the onset of the next installment in a process well in contrast to the typical never-ending serial. The voice over seems to contradict what happens, predicting future disasters; but this is not enough, in fact it pulls future event in a frame which further closes the flow of the serial story in flashback’s finiteness.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, there is the different case of *I promessi sposi* (1967) directed by Sandro Bolchi. Director’s philological and exegetical attention to Manzoni’s text does not preclude the fact that each of the seven episodes organizes itself around solid and concluded thematic units (the first episode dominated by Don Abbondio, the third by narration of Monaca di Monza

played by Lea Massari, or the fifth chapter dedicated to Salvo Randone in the role of Innominato). And, again, the well-known pending closing phrases in Manzoni have no visual translation and at the most they are entrusted once again to the frame narrative and to the words of the novel “read” by Giancarlo Sbragia’s voice over.

This closure is typical and it often characterizes serials, as it will become even more evident analyzing detection as TV genre. The narrative form of Montalbano series is not different from that committed years earlier in *Le inchieste del commissario Maigret* (1964-1972) by Mario Landi, respectful of the boundaries of Simenon’s narratives. The frontier of the novel remains strong and it is used as a reinforcement of completeness. Without detracting from Camilleri’s novels, the boundary of the story is sacred and inviolable, the proof is given that the only hazard is the order chosen for the release of the TV movie, privileging first the third novel, *Il ladro di merendine*, that immediately offered an effective portrait of the protagonist; but no mixture is accepted if not, in some cases, the union of two stories.<sup>13</sup>

Closure is also internal to the texts and, as well as complete closing of criminal cases, also storylines between episodes centered around the private life of the Inspector are convoluted and proceed at least in a spiral way, while the relationship with his girlfriend is not taking off or evolving and, multiplied by continuous skirmishes with other women, is incapable of becoming a true narrative turning point. In the second episode of season four, *Gli arancini di Montalbano* (2002), both mysteries – the murder of a couple passed for an accident and the false accusation of theft for the faithful maid’s son – dissolve completely without any possible after-effects. Also private narrative line is totally healed, not developing the relationship between Montalbano and his girlfriend, who wants him to go on vacation to Paris, but closing with the long-awaited New Year’s Eve dinner with the beloved *arancini*. Moreover, even the big dog Orlando, adopted by Montalbano in the previous episode *Il senso del tatto*, that could give rise to a new story line, is quickly liquidated and ceases to exist as Montalbano gives it to his lieutenant. Even *Le ali della sfinge* (2008), punctuated by quarrels on the phone with Livia, concludes with a phone hung up, but also with the reassuring words of the woman “And bravo! You’re always the same Montalbano,” which, rather than reopen the narrative, rewinds it back. From the fifth season onwards, with Montalbano’s injury, the effect will be even more evidently enveloping and much of the narrative lines about private lives will be pigeonholed into dreamlike dimension, framed and limited to any possible real development, thus moving to a paradoxical plan, completed by the dream of his own death in the last episode of season eight. In *L’età del dubbio* (2011), while dreaming, Montalbano ends up his relationship with Livia observing the possible new storyline with Laura (Isabella Ragonese) ending with her death. Once again, to emphasize the impossible opening to new narrative turning point, it comes the weight of the frame, as the episode ends with a flashback of Laura walking on the beach and apologizing for their dispute.

The dominance of the closure in the Italian serial is therefore not simply a mode of production due to the lack of industrial production processes and to the praxis of a full packed serial, completely shot before airing.<sup>14</sup> As symbolically shown in detection – genre that by definition, with suspense as one of his principal mechanisms, should focus on dilatation and on delay – the dynamics of the Italian serial seems to overwhelm the audience in a static way, more than to drive forward ceaselessly. The difference catches the eye if we glance at non-Italian products, with which the Italian viewer has to deal mainly on theme satellite TV channels. Leaving aside

the most innovative American series – among them the conspiracy to be fixed hour by hour in *24* (2001-2010) – one might immediately think to Scandinavian TV Nordic noir, that has produced very interesting results. In Danish *Den som dræber* (internationally known as *Those Who Kill*) the ten episodes revolve around the Serial Crime Unit of Copenhagen Police, led by brave detective Katrine (Laura Bach) and introverted consultant psychiatrist Thomas (Jakob Cedergren) addressing five different cases. Creator Elsebeth Egholm, a renowned mystery writer, divided them into ten episodes linked by an unrelenting cliffhanger, in some cases almost unbearable, as well as by several dangerous occasions that affect the protagonist herself. The viewer is asked to wait a week not only for the outcome of the investigation, but to be sure for the safety of the detective herself who, for example, between the first and the second part of the first episode (*Liget i skoven, Corps in the woods*) is nothing less than buried alive.<sup>15</sup> In Italy, for rerun broadcast by Sky terrestrial digital channel Cielo, the episodes have been grouped together in pairs – confirming the power of order and reconstruction of broadcast TV. Nevertheless, this does not mean that from the narrative point of view, as well as visually and stylistically, the series turns into a totally exposed and open narrative.

But the most relevant Danish case is *Forbrydelsen (The Killing)*, whose first season only has been aired in Italy, on digital terrestrial channel Rai4. Still, this show is well known thanks to the huge success of the American remake by Fox Television in 2011, reworked with a few variations and broadcasted in Italy by FoxCrime.<sup>16</sup> The innovative idea of the creator Søren Sveistrup, often associated with the archetype of *Twin Peaks*, resides in the only crime to be solved, the death of Nanna Birk Larsen, a new Laura Palmer, that unfolds the first twenty days of the investigation by detective Sarah Lund (Sofie Gråbøl) during the 20 one-hour episodes of the first season (and even beyond in the American remake, in which the identity of the murderer is not revealed until half of the second season), between the emergence of mysteries and red herring in a gray pre-election Copenhagen.

The examples could continue with the neo-polar French production by Canal+. In *Braquo* (2009-) created by Olivier Marchal, an endless spiral of violence and corruption emerges episode after episode and drags away the four policemen from any case and episodic logic that is not the discovery of the reasons for the suicide of their leader, revenge and ultimately redemption.<sup>17</sup> *Hunted* (2012) is unconventional in both the narrative and content, exhibiting violence and sensuality of the body, most often exposed to the eyes of the viewer, of the protagonist Sam Hunter (Melissa George). Created by the well-known Frank Spotnitz simultaneously for UK BBC and US cable broadcaster Cinemax, this product unravels the plot around the special agent, leaving the viewer in full suspension at the end of each episode.<sup>18</sup> Another interesting production is *Profilage* (2009-, in Italy *Profiling*), in which the solution of the cases clouds up gradually, transformed into opportunities to reconstruct the past of the criminologist Chloe Saint Laurent (Odile Vuillemin), who finally, in season three, has an affair, gets pregnant and ultimately ends badly wounded and in life threatening conditions in the final episode, while fellow police officer is confronted with the loss of his wife and the responsibility of a child.<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps one of the most significant cases, that marks the distance from the Italian TV series, is the British drama *Luther* (2010-). Not far from Luca Zingaretti, Idris Elba also gives the Chief Inspector John Luher a strong personality, while the British product also offers a compressed form of serialization, limited to 4-6 episodes per season and therefore similar to what happens in

Italy. Creator Neil Cross greatly emphasizes intellectual acumen and investigative capacity of the detective, underlining the ambience that, far from the colors of Sicily, here depicts a dark and violent London.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the involvement of Luther in the case is very strong and profoundly changes in the course of episodes, bringing about a transformation. Equally, private life events that cross the stories are not a pale background, but a foreground element: the relationship with the former wife, who dies at the end of the first season, and especially the involvement with the psychopathic criminal Alice (Ruth Wilson) – guilty, but also seductive for her dark and mysterious side, whom Luther helps to escape from the insane asylum – unravels through all the seasons, opening them to next, unforeseen developments. Not surprisingly, the series offers a reverse pattern of detection, where the offender is known to the viewers since the very beginning. Thus, there is not the actual dissolution of the case to confirm the conclusion of the episode, but the crimes themselves are an additional trip to the mind and personality of Luther that open up to mysterious developments, unforeseen and unexpected choices of the protagonist, more than to the disclosure of the criminal.

On the other hand, as shown before, Italian TV serial tends to close claustrophobically, communicating the sense of an eternal return, rather than of a narrative development, and installing a temporality that has more to do with the myth than with the history. No coincidence that the flashback, the narrative pattern of prequel and sequel, the disruption of temporality in parallel dimensions and the “mythical” mood of the Mafia are often dominant in these series where, as in the US products from the Seventies “actions become routines, punctuated by small partial goals, which recur cyclically.”<sup>21</sup>

The same thing also happens in the continuous and more industrialized serial. In this case, the resistance to opening is also installed by the non-temporal continuity of the different seasons, often shot within a two or three years distance one from the other. It would be too simplistic to affirm this attitude is just due to production reasons, such as the engagement of the actors. For instance, *Il maresciallo Rocca* had a second season only two years after the first was aired: this second season was composed by four episodes only, while there had been six in the first season. Then it turn into a miniseries of only two episodes with season six.<sup>22</sup> However, this product remained credible to the public, showing TV series’ total abstraction from the flow of life and from the continuity of narration. Too often these situations are dealt with strictly in terms of production, following the economic logic of the spin-off or sequel, and forgetting the communicative dimension of the TV series, whose fundamental (mimetic) feature is represented by the rhythm between episodes and between seasons.

*Il maresciallo Rocca* also maintains a strong autonomy within a single episode, where the bickering of the protagonist with the sons or with the woman he is attracted to (adopting a puppy or not, how to get a dinner date, etc.) are always resolved within the single spin, with a traditional narrative structure which, not coincidentally, the authors Laura Toscano and Franco Marotta defined as inspired very closely by Maigret, played by Gino Cervi on Italian TV. Rather, narrative development is more pronounced passing season by season; if the evolution of Salvo Montalbano is measured almost exclusively in terms of interiority with a dark intensification of character’s thoughts on the fate and his ageing, the widower Giovanni Rocca (Gigi Proietti) gets married and adopts a child in season two, loses his wife (Stefania Sandrelli) in season three, remarried in season five and so on. In this case, however, the dialectical tension is resolved within the episode, the



proof is that the tragedy of the death of his wife is consumed in the penultimate episode, *Crudele destino*, which aired on 18 March 2001, so as to avoid any exaggerated cliffhanger and give the character time to recover his identity in the next episode, letting the story close and resolve by the end of the third season, with a lot of renewed balance and a bravery award for the Marshal.

## Disclosures of landscape

This brief review can already lead to two considerations. First, it is clear that, although it can be a driving force from the point of view of production, it is not entirely correct to identify, as it's often done, *La Piovra* as a prototype of the Italian television series. Originally conceived as a miniseries, it nevertheless retained and fixed only one of its character. Moreover, the moderate number of episodes and the almost infinite multiplication of seasons<sup>23</sup> is a very common trait in Italy. However, quite different is the clear infringement of the authentically Italian model of autonomy and episodic completeness. In fact, cliffhanger is the dominant structure, not only macroscopically in the transition from one season to another (the death of Cattani in season four, etc.), but also at the level of single episodes, not coincidentally never titled, refusing to close around a specific theme and almost always ending with a death, a departure or a new trigger. In the first season some episodes end with the death of an official, or the departure of the protagonist's wife, the kidnapping of his daughter, and finally with the new departure for Sicily, that opens up the serial at the end of last episode. *La Piovra* represents the exception to an extremely serialized formula that almost has no followers in Italy, except, partially, for very isolated and experimental cases like *Romanzo criminale*, *La squadra*, *Squadra antimafia – Palermo oggi*.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, it is not a coincidence that this type of serial is mainly broadcast on Italian Public Broadcasting System. Police drama is by far central on Italian Public System, while it has very few achievements in the commercial network,<sup>25</sup> since its closed structure seems to mark it hardly, offering an in-depth real world view, which mainly coincides with the reassuring one of Public TV. *Il giovane Montalbano*, prequel to the popular series and aired in 2012,<sup>26</sup> did not challenge in any way the prototype, always offering a rigid episodic scan, not only for what concerns the criminal matter to be investigated, but also for the private life of the young protagonist, whose twists, including new lovers and quarrels with his father, always resolve within a single episode. The model of State Television, also in such a recent example, imposes an investigation with the geometric features, British rational deduction-style, that solves everything in the celebration of *whodunit* and that avoids opening at any set of problems, putting all the pieces in place.

It is no coincidence that Mafia is the background to most of the series, from Montalbano to *Distretto di polizia*: the doubt, the real duality are inherent in the environment, and in its ambiguous connotation at least criminal events find an answer. In recent television history, there are few examples of series trying to open up to a more serialized formula and to create a greater connection between episodes. And they seem doomed to failure. *Il segreto dell'acqua* has recently ditched the share of RaiUno to only 10%, even in the face of the attraction usually hold on the audience by the Mafia background as much as by the interpreter Riccardo Scamarcio.<sup>27</sup> The failure of the series is perhaps linked to the RAI public resistance to the thrust of suspense and the apparent lack of independence of the episodes, forced to a rapid initial summary of the previous installments. On

the other hand, especially in commercial television, the abnormal serialization, for Italian habits, seems to be the only compensation to renewed difficulties in maintaining open end. This is the case of *Distretto di polizia*, a TV series with different production and narrative characteristics, not feeding on large elements of call as the derivation from literature or the presence of stars beloved by the audience, but on “the idea of genre and of invention of worlds” such as that of a police station, the X Tuscolano, and the reconstruction of the community that revolves around it. Therefore, the serialization plays an important role and the trajectories of the characters are developed in depth so as to retain the audience with the characters, from the original starring Giovanna Scalise (Isabella Ferrari), a commissioner persecuted by Mafia that killed her husband in the South Italy and who then takes refuge in Rome, waiting to testify at the trial. *Distretto di polizia* is definitely the emblem of a mode of production typical of the already industrialized series. This starts with the centrality of the so-called bible – absent from the previous series – that tracks accurately the profile of each character and their interactions with the others and around which revolves a pool of twelve screenwriters, led by Giacomo Scarpelli and Massimo Lugli, and story editors that collect in police stations and newspapers the chronicle of real cases, to ensure verisimilitude and realism to the narrated events. The production itself is never-ending, because scripts are delivered in blocks, and neither the actors nor the director have the full picture of what will be next. However, the centrality of detection and of the crime solving, as well as that of the return to the order given by the investigation that ended the episode, show that the compressed serialization and the tendency towards closure is evident even in the highly industrialized continuous serial, in which the degree of autonomy of the individual episodes still remains very high, and the personal life of the protagonists, as the hardest element of inter-episodic continuity, seems nevertheless to be constantly frozen and stuck in reverse.

These observations lead to a final consideration about the forms of representation and Italian detective drama. In September 2010, welcoming the tenth season of *Distretto di polizia* and the return of the protagonist Claudia Pandolfi, Aldo Grasso regretted that the direction of Alberto Ferrari was not “able to restore a representation of the city as a threatening space, as a clash of urban, social and narrative disorder.”<sup>28</sup> Nothing could be further not only from the mood of the series, as told by the production, but also from the Italian intellectual climate, distant from that dichotomy and alien to its visual translation, in particular in the urban fabric. The great distance of the fiction of the last twenty years from traditional TV is right in not drawing more on the *noir* mood, even though filtered through the French culture of *polar*, which was the conceptual and iconographic core of Sheridan, Maigret or Nero Wolfe. A deep bond is instead defined by the genre re-establishment operated by Italian *giallo*, an inevitable connection given the cinematographic vocation of these series, that starts with an intensive use of the made-for TV movie formula and the unprecedented stability of direction by Alberto Sironi, Giorgio Capitani or Renato De Maria, both within the series and even from season to season. In fact, the claustrophobic closing of the serial requires to recall the centrality of the crime scene and crime rituals in the Italian *giallo* from Mario Bava to Dario Argento, from Lucio Fulci to Riccardo Freda, that create a parataxis, an accumulation of criminal performances which closes continuously narrative development around the circle of the crime. Also due to evident TV requirements, the iconography of the crime does not always find the effectiveness of the catalogs of murders by Bava or of the vivid covers designed by Carlo Jacono for Giallo Mondadori pocketbooks. Nevertheless, there are some cases, especially in female mur-

ders solved by Montalbano, such as the naked body lying on the sofa in the bluish light of the villa in the episode *La voce del violino* (1999), the mummified in the chest in *La vampa d'agosto* (2008) or even the horse collapsed on the beach in *La pista di sabbia* (2008).

The visual and cultural link to *giallo* heritage is strengthened by setting and by the game between background and characters, landscape and human beings, that continues to characterize Italian series. Perhaps the importance of urban and landscape component in these serial formulas is ignored a little too easily, again with a myopic eye focused only on production methods, for which of course the performance and promotion of the Italian territory offers important opportunities for co-production and sales abroad. However, it is a bit simplistic – thanks once again to a unique productive perspective – to liquidate a central aspect of the television series as a pure act of national marketing and pure ostentation of landscape, not more interesting than a postcard. If the issues of national mafia and corruption sometimes make it possible to superficially invoke the tradition of Italian *cinema civile* (that of Francesco Rosi or Elio Petri – bond validated when Damiano Damiani signed the first season of *La Piovra*), why not to consider that Viterbo of *Maresciallo Rocca*, Rome in *Distretto* or Sicilian districts in *Montalbano* participate in some ways in the particularity with which the eternal city is dotted by Mario Bava in *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* (*The Evil Eye*, 1963). Or sights of Milan is kaleidoscopically fragmented by Fernando Di Leo (*Milano calibro 9* or *La mala ordina*, both 1972). Or why not to rethink of several analyzed urban visions shot by Dario Argento?

Quoting Franco Moretti, who compares novel to movie, “the novel accustoms us to ‘see’ the city by throwing a glance, not really distracted but discontinuous.”<sup>29</sup> This discontinuity also characterizes the Italian series, both for the *cento* of unstuck views that built the place of the events (the recognizable Agrigento district in Camilleri’s novels that flakes between Ragusa-Modica, Porto Empedocle and many other locations in the TV movies), or for the fixity of a space that does not seem practicable and is resistant against any path except that of the gaze, as Salvo Montalbano often does. This kind of landscape really evokes an inconvenience and a disconnection between the man and his surroundings distilled in the Italian culture much more authentically than many sociological or psychological drifts. It is not urban context of film noir, twisted and heartbreaking, constantly at odds with the man to mark his temporary nature,<sup>30</sup> it is a distant and indifferent background, a sunny space, flat or disconnected, not less impossible to live than the one culturally tied to the *giallo*.

- 1 Eleonora Andreatta, Francesco Nardella, “Una fiction di lungo periodo,” in *Il Mulino*, no. 2, March-April 2003, p. 343. Translation from Italian to English always by the author.
- 2 Almost unique exception – which, however, dedicates a really small space to Italian production and adopt a dominant semiotic approach – is the edited collection Maria Pia Pozzato, Giorgio Grignaffini (eds.), *Mondi seriali. Percorsi semiotici nella fiction*, RTI, Milano 2008.
- 3 Maurizio Costanzo, Flaminia Morandi, *Facciamo finta che. L'industria televisione: produrre fiction seriale*, Carocci, Roma 2003, p. 36.
- 4 Idem, p. 38; see also Pino Salerno (ed.), *La fiction in Italia. Parlano autori, broadcaster, produttori*, Dino Audino, Roma 1999, and Enrico Menduni, Antonio Catolfi, *Produrre TV. Dallo studio televisivo a Internet*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2009.

- 5 Of course, there are also the formats – as *Médico de familia* format by Spanish Globomedia arrived in Italy as *Un medico in famiglia*, or *Un posto al sole* based on the Australian *Neighbours*. However, these are exceptions, as contents – the only part truly free in format adaptation – is obviously dominant in fiction and not easily transferable in a different culture. About continuous serial in Italian TV see Daniela Cardini, *La lunga serialità televisiva. Origini e modelli*, Carocci, Roma 2004.
- 6 Milly Buonanno, “Storie di mafia tra cronaca e immaginario,” in Milly Buonanno, *La fiction italiana. Narrazioni televisive e identità nazionale*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2012. This book had an influence in the approach adopted on some case studies presented in this article. However, Buonanno is mainly oriented to a vision of television as a great “storyteller” and to the “bardic” nature – on the account of Fiske and Hartley – of its narratives. For a quick overview of the main approaches to television narratives in Italy see Francesco Casetti, Federico Di Chio, *L’analisi della televisione. Strumenti, metodi e pratiche di ricerca*, Bompiani, Milano 1998; Milly Buonanno, *L’età della televisione. Esperienze e teorie*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2006; Veronica Innocenti, Guglielmo Pescatore, *Le nuove forme della serialità televisiva. Storia, linguaggio e temi*, Archetipo, Bologna 2008.
- 7 Certainly of great relevance, also from the point of view of its innovative production dynamics, is the case of *Romanzo criminale* which, however, is outside detective drama genre, focus of this article. See Aldo Grasso, Massimo Scaglioni (eds.), *La televisione convergente. La tv oltre il piccolo schermo*, RTI, Milano 2010.
- 8 Emiliana De Blasio, Michele Sorice, *Cantastorie mediali. La fiction come story teller della società italiana*, Dino Audino Editore, Roma 2004.
- 9 The reasons for this explosive first step in the Italian television production are more complex, at least as much as the decade of the Eighties, in which it is located. For example, this is the time when in Italy, for the first time, the film confronts television and its “parasitical disposition,” found in the US already thirty years earlier by Raymond Williams: the crowding in the schedules of film puts in crisis the national film industry and its audience causing a profound change in structures and strategies of production film and television which are then reversed again in the Nineties, with the new regulations on movies broadcasted whose gradual decrements increases TV production. These reflections emerged several times in conferences during Mostra del Nuovo Cinema di Pesaro, then published by Marsilio; see studies and data published in Lino Micciché (ed.), *Schermi opachi. Il cinema italiano degli anni ’80*, Marsilio, Venezia 1998; among most recent contributions see “Dossier. Cinema e TV,” in *Link*, vol. 3, 2004.
- 10 About EEC Directive 89/552/CEE, than 97/36/CE, also known as TVSF (now re-elaborated by European Parliament inside SMAV Directive 2010/12/UE) see Roberto Mastroianni, *La direttiva sui servizi di media audiovisivi e la sua attuazione nell’ordinamento italiano*, Giappichelli Editore, Torino 2011.
- 11 See Federico Battocchio, *La produzione televisiva*, Carocci, Roma 2003.
- 12 *La cittadella* is organized around the story of his life that the protagonist Andrew Manson (Alberto Lupo), now an old man, tells to a young doctor. His reconstruction opens and closes each episode, framing the flashbacks. TV serial was aired on the national TV from 9 February to 22 March 1964.
- 13 TV serial script is always by the author of the novels, Andrea Camilleri, assisted by Francesco Bruni and Salvatore De Mola. Episodes are always directed by Alberto Sironi.
- 14 It is clear that the industrialized manufacturing with its initial offer limited to the pilot and the creation of no more than two episodes, is ontologically dominated by the opening in the narrative development, not surprisingly sometimes these germs of the serial do not survive (even J.J. Abrams failed to achieve in 2005 a bounty hunter serial *The Catch*), sometimes turn into something else (*Mulholland Drive* by David Lynch, as the pilot ordered by ABC to double the success of *Twin Peaks* was converted in 2001 in movie by Studio Canal), sometimes generate potentially infinite serial that only an act of force can close (*Lost* always by Abrams).
- 15 Ten-episodes series, produced by Miso Tv, was aired by Danish TV2 between 13 March and 15 May 2011 (plus a feature film, *Fortidens skygge*, a two-episode final conceived as a theatrical movie) has been sold to broadcasters in more than 25 countries, reaching for example in German ZDF 3,8 millions viewers watching the final episode. In Italy it was aired as *Loro uccidono* on satellite channel FoxCrime

- on Friday prime time, from 7 October till 11 November 2011, with not striking audience results, but in line with the objectives of the network.
- 16 Produced by network Denmark's Radio, *Forbrydelsen* was aired on 7 January till 26 November 2007 (20 episodes scheduled with a break in March and September) and was followed by two more seasons of 10 episodes each (unreleased in Italy), in Autumn 2009 and 2012. In 2011, US Fox Television has produced a remake by Veena Sud (two seasons, 13 episodes each), aired by the American cable network AMC and by Fox Crime in Italy.
  - 17 Season one (8 episodes) was aired on French Canal+ from 12 October till 2 November 2009, followed by a new season in 2011; in Italy it was scheduled by satellite channels FX and FoxCrime from 2011.
  - 18 The eight episodes of season one – still ongoing – almost entirely located in London and created by the father of *The X-Files* for Kudos production, were broadcasted on BBC One from 12 October 2012 and almost two weeks later on US Cinemax. In Italy the series was aired by FoxCrime from 15 January 2013.
  - 19 Created by Fanny Robert and Sophie Lebarbier, this 6-episode serial was broadcasted by French TF1 starting from 23 April 2009, followed by three 12-episode seasons in 2010, 2012 and ongoing 2013. In Italy it was broadcasted by FoxCrime from 2010 and on Cielo.
  - 20 Produced by BBC itself, *Luther*'s first season was aired on BBC One from 4 May to 8 June 2010; second season aired in 2011 and a third is forthcoming in 2013; in Italy FoxCrime aired reputedly British serial starting from 6 January 2011.
  - 21 Federico Di Chio, *L'illusione difficile. Cinema e serie tv nell'età della disillusione*, Bompiani, Milano 2011, p. 205.
  - 22 *Il maresciallo Rocca*, produced by RAI and Solaris cinematografica, was aired first on RaiDue from 16 January 1996 in 8 episodes; then the show moved to RaiUno for the next 4 episodes of second and third season (1998, 2001) and the 6 episodes of fourth and fifth season (2003 and 2005) and the last, for now, two episodes of miniserial *Il maresciallo Rocca e l'amico d'infanzia* (2008).
  - 23 *La Piovra* was aired by RaiUno from 1984, for ten seasons till 2001 (44 episodes), including two *prequels* which led story back to Fifties and Sixties to origins of Mafia.
  - 24 One partial exception is the show *Romanzo criminale* (2008-2009), perhaps the only true heir, in this interpretative key, of the modes of production of *La Piovra*; partially, however, considering the exceptional productive situation (a series created by a satellite theme channel of Sky Italia together with Cattleya Film, followed by a second season in 2010) and the particular genesis of the TV series, derived not only from a novel, but also from a successful movie, both considering its unusual narrative construction, wrapped up even more on the group of characters and their actions, rather than on an almost impossible real development. The proof of its exception is that another experiment, conducted a few months before, *Quo vadis, baby?* (Sky Italia and Colorado Film, directed by Guido Chiesa) also based on a novel and a movie (by Gabriele Salvatores), adopted a closing framework and focused on completeness, derived by the closure of the episode around the solved criminal case. The case of *La squadra* (RaiTre, seven seasons from 2000 to 2007) is different. This was the first Italian serial using a *Hill Street Blues* strategy, that is to say to focusing on characters, on their personal cases and relational dynamics, rejecting the episode title, but however giving importance to the solution of crimes within the single episodes. Even more significant is the case of *Squadra antimafia – Palermo oggi* (Canale 5, 2009 and 2010, ten two-hour episodes each season), which is almost unique, both for its hybrid nature which crosses several genres and for its production history; see Aldo Grasso, Massimo Scaglioni, *Televisione convergente*, cit.
  - 25 There are a lot of example in RAI production, only referring to the last decade, from *Don Matteo* to *Ho sposato uno sbirro*, from *Il Maresciallo Rocca* to *L'ispettore Coliandro* and again with Commissioners Montalbano, Manara, Nardone or De Luca. To this long list Mediaset responds with a few examples, including *Distretto di polizia* and *Ris* (this one in fact contaminated with the medical drama that leads to other nature).
  - 26 The television series is always produced by RAI with Palomar; the first season is organized into six episodes and producers have already announced a second one. Again the subject comes from some stories by Camilleri, who has worked on this script as well, with Francesco Bruni; director here is Gianluca Maria Tavarelli.

PAOLA VALENTINI

- 27 Directed by Renato De Maria, TV series, produced by RAI and Magnolia, was aired on RaiUno from 11 September till 2 October 2011.
- 28 Aldo Grasso, "La Pandolfi salva il Distretto di polizia," in *Corriere della Sera*, 8 September 2010.
- 29 Franco Moretti, *Segni e stili del moderno*, Einaudi, Torino 1987, p. 158.
- 30 Vivian Sobchak, "Lounge Time:" *Post-War Crises and the Chronotope of Film Noir*, in Nick Browne (ed.), *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1998, pp. 129-170.

## NORDIC NOIR ON TELEVISION: *THE KILLING I-III*

Gunhild Agger, University of Aalborg

### *Abstract*

The Nordic Noir has been applied by many countries as a slightly distorting mirror of tendencies in their own societies. On the background of its international appeal, the article analyses the prevalent genre of *The Killing* – the thriller – and relates it to the genres of crime fiction, political drama and melodrama. The elements of the noir design in the introductory sequences – their common traits and the differences that match prevalent plots in each season – are highlighted. The developments taking place in the dominant points of view are traced, from the combination between the local politics and the domestic levels in the first season of the series, to the focus on foreign politics with domestic dimensions in the second season, and the reversion to domestic politics, this time combined to a global dimension, in the last season. Similarities and differences in the plots, and their relationship to (and interpretation of) events and phenomena in the modern Danish welfare state and in the Western sphere, are also investigated.

---

### Introduction

Danish *The Killing I-III* (*Forbrydelsen*, 2007-2012) is interesting in an international context. The first two seasons have been screened not only in the Scandinavian countries, but also in Germany (ZDF, 2008; ARTE, 2010), Austria (ORF, 2009), Australia (SBS 1, 2010), Belgium and France (ARTE, 2010) and the UK (BBC 4, 2011). Moreover, *The Killing* was remade in the USA by Fox for the cable network AMC in 2010 and screened in 2011. The third season was screened in Denmark during the autumn 2012 and hit screens in other countries later. Especially in Britain, a public debate accompanied the screening of *The Killing*, investigating the reasons for the appeal of “Nordic Noir” to a British audience, enhancing the production model and the production values. Later in 2012, this was followed by a similar debate around the political drama serial *Borgen* (2010-), which has also been widely exported.

Thus, in 2011 and 2012 Danish TV drama has been the object of an international reception of broad dimensions; however, the recognition, in the shape of international TV festival awards, started earlier. In 2002 *Unit One* (*Rejseholdet*, 2000-2004) received an Emmy in the category of Best International Drama Series. The dramedy *Nikolaj and Julie* (*Nikolaj og Julie*, 2002-2003)

GUNHILD AGGER

continued the streak in 2003, while the crime series *The Eagle* (*Ørnen*, 2004-06) received an Emmy in 2005 and *The Protectors* (*Livvagterne*, 2009-2010) in 2009. *The Killing* received the British BAFTA award in 2012. All these TV series were produced by Radio Denmark (DR), the leading public service broadcaster in Denmark.

In connection with the international breakthrough of *The Killing*, interest has been focused on the Danish production model and the phenomenon that has been dubbed “Nordic Noir.” In this article, I will review some of the questions to which this international reception gives rise. I will focus on *The Killing* and include all three seasons (1-20, 2007; 1-10, 2009; and 1-10, 2012) highlighting the production model and its overall purpose, the genres and style of the series.

Three of the concepts from DR Drama’s strategy “Dogmer for DR-fiktion” (Dogmas for DR Drama’s productions)<sup>1</sup> deserve emphasising. Firstly, through the concept “one vision,” DR Drama focuses on original productions rather than adaptations; this concept gives the scriptwriter and producer an artistic license which allows their particular line with its distinctive features to shine through. Secondly, DR Drama’s strategy includes the concept that any drama must contain a double story comprising 1) “the good story” and 2) “an overall plot with ethical/social connotations.”<sup>2</sup> Thirdly, DR Drama encourages crossover between their production staff and those from the film industry, which has a great impact on the production design and quality of DR Drama series. These efforts are evident in *The Killing*, as I will illustrate in this article.

The art of genre mixing within the noir style is something that all seasons of *The Killing* have mastered. The question is: which genres have been mixed, in which proportion and with which perspective? I will make a characterisation of the basic genre, the thriller, and the other genres in the mixing (police procedural, political drama, melodrama) and discuss how the introductory sequences play up to the concept of the thriller. After this, I will illustrate the development in the way the genre is handled from the first to the last series – in harmony with the dramaturgy – and how genre mixing, dramaturgy and style are connected to DR’s overall strategy.

In the analysis, I will draw on some of the insights that I presented in shorter forms in three reviews published on a Danish website<sup>3</sup> and in my article “Emotion, Gender and Genre: Investigating *The Killing*.”<sup>4</sup>

## Nordic Noir

The attention from the media started in Great Britain during the winter and spring of 2011-2012, *The Killing I* and *II* received extensive media coverage considering the fact that it was just a subtitled foreign crime fiction series. This fact made the headlines in its own right, as it is illustrated in the Internet version of *The Guardian*.<sup>5</sup> The attention spread to the US, where *The Killing* was remade in an American version. In both countries, the political drama series *Borgen* received predominantly positive media coverage.

Several British and American journalists visited Copenhagen to discover the “recipe” behind the international success of Danish television drama. Maggie Brown from *The Guardian* flatteringly described DR Drama as “the classiest, most efficient drama factory in world television.”<sup>6</sup> She emphasised the key concept: “original drama dealing with issues in contemporary society: no remakes, no adaptations.”<sup>7</sup> *The Guardian* covered Danish television drama intensively, but other



newspapers and magazines followed their lead, for example the *Financial Times* and *Newsweek*.<sup>8</sup> To briefly sum up, the subtitled version of *The Killing* brought into focus the relation between original language and subtitling versus dubbing, the value of remakes, which are popular in the US, and the impact of the Danish public service concept compared to a commercial system.

On a more general level, Barry Forshaw accentuates the connection to the socially created reality as one of the main attractions in his guide to Scandinavian crime fiction. In its current form, the genre contains socio-political insights including “the cracks that have appeared in the social democratic ideal.”<sup>9</sup> Those cracks and crevices illustrate that the harmony and the ideals which formerly characterised the Nordic image are dismantling.

Forshaw’s main argument is that in this way, the Scandinavian welfare states can serve as foil for the UK today through a mix of recognition and distortion: “But the appeal remains the same: we are shown a country which is different from Britain – but not too different. The lure of the (slightly) exotic, plus a vague sense of *schadenfreude* that the wheels are coming off the utopian welfare-state bus.”<sup>10</sup> This interpretation is repeated in several other characterisations, also in Lloyd’s: “Certainly we can read the darkness, violence and anarchy that erupt in these crime novels as forming part of the subsoil of life in Scandinavian countries.”<sup>11</sup> On a more well-researched level, this convergence of the social and the criminal aspects is also at the basis of Andrew Nestingen’s interest in Scandinavian crime fiction. Nestingen suggests that the trends of popular culture are a barometer for the state of society: “If we want to understand contemporary Scandinavia and its struggles over transformation, we need to study and discuss popular fictions.”<sup>12</sup>

Besides pointing out the strong societal connection, two other features are predominant in the international critics’ reception of *The Killing*; firstly, the focus on the combination of genre and style that the Brits and Americans have branded “Nordic Noir;” secondly, the intensive preoccupation with Sarah Lund as the main character and pivotal point of the investigation.

## The thriller genre

The same genre description was given of all three seasons of *The Killing* in the release and in the introductory credits: “A thriller by Søren Sveistrup.” A thriller can basically be defined as a loosely constituted genre which aims at causing a thrill in the audience, an exhilarated thrill. Lars Ole Sauerberg points out that the concept “thriller” is used differently in British English and American English. In British English the concept is used in a more restrictive manner than in American English, where it is a broad concept for stories charged with suspense within detective, spy, mystery and other types of fiction. It is this broad American understanding of the genre that is predominant in Denmark. To add to the confusion, “thriller” is sometimes translated to Danish with the term “gyser” which actually is closer to the horror genre.

A horror film moves within the realms of terror – a thriller does not. A horror film does not need to be driven by suspense. However, one of the most important plot devices of a thriller is suspense.

*Suspend means to hang up or to put out of action for a while, and this is the way suspense works in narrative fiction. [...] the principle of suspense may be defined as the prevention of immediate satisfaction of curiosity about plot issues through structural obstruction of the logic of temporal progression.*<sup>13</sup>

Suspense is central to the manner in which the plot in a thriller can twist and turn in ways that surprise the audience causing an exhilarated thrill. Other plot devices of the thriller includes the cliff-hanger ending, the protagonist's recurrent pursuit of an escaping or hidden antagonist, their dialectical relationship and the contrast between the calm and collected exterior and the underlying abyss of calculation and instinct. All these elements can be applied in the confrontation between the different sets of moral values that is at the core of the thriller.

Because the thriller is so loosely defined, it is ideal as an element in the mixing of genres. The thriller is commonly used in alliance with the crime genre (be it police procedurals or detective fiction), spy fiction and other action genres. Not least in the alliance with political drama, a number of subgenres have crystallised in Great Britain and in the US. Examples of this tendency are the psychological thriller, the Secret Service thriller or the legal or military thriller that questions the power apparatus and the execution of power, and, in the last resort, the state of contemporary society and the sense of justice and jurisdiction. The filmic examples are legion.<sup>14</sup> The use of the thriller as main genre might have been a contributing factor for *The Killing's* breakthrough in an international context. The series draws on a well-established genre while simultaneously unfolding the genre in a new geographical and social context.

## Introductory and signature sequences

In all three seasons of *The Killing*, the combination between thriller, crime fiction and political drama is the pivotal element, which is expressed from the very beginning in a noir design underlined by introductory and signature sequences, release material and the official website. All of the series take place in November, and this month provides the necessary rain, mud and bleak atmosphere. The daylight is fading, which perfectly suits the demands of the noir style. The introductory and signature sequences are in all episodes after the first linked with a résumé making the narration dynamic from the onset. The lead-in is brief; the storyline is recapped with relatively few clips and the story quickly moves forward. At the same time, the viewer receives hints of contexts and key metaphors to ponder about – important features of a thriller.

In *The Killing I*, the noir design is spectacularly presented in the introductory sequences through the background motif of a fingerprint, magnified to indicate the intricate passages through which this story must pass. The design visualises how the plot will twist and turn in the labyrinth of this crime. The fingerprint points to the unique and lonely killer whose actual fingerprint matches the killing of the teenage student Nanna Birk Larsen and simultaneously indicates that only good old-fashioned police work will solve this riddle.

In *The Killing II*, an identification tag is the leitmotif in the signature sequences. But there is no name engraved on the badge; it merely says "Denmark." The dog tag is associated with soldiers, and reminds us of their mortality. Besides the lawyer Anne Dragsholm, who is the legal advisor for the Ministry of Defence, the story concerns the professional soldier Allan Myg Poulsen, who is considering reposting, the former soldiers David Grüner, Lisbeth Thomsen and Præst (literally "Preacher") – men and women who are all connected to a certain "incident" in Afghanistan. From the very beginning, the dog tag is connected to powerlessness – we see a glimpse of a Lady Justice

statuette blindfolded by the chain of a dog tag. Those who exercise power are powerless, and they take up the roles of executioner, middleman and victim at different times in the story.

The function of the signature sequence in *The Killing III* is more vague. We see an undefined section of a hull of a ship or some other kind of rusty metal. The metal matches the resonant sound in the lead-in of the first episode of *The Killing III*. The sound design is extremely important to a series that is so visually blackened, and in this sequence there is plenty of reverberation. The sound of emptiness is later followed up in the harbour warehouse. The metallic sound is a recurrent theme, also in the abandoned boatyard in Western Jutland, where the recurrent investigator Sarah Lund (Sofie Gråbøl) and her new partner Matthias Borch from the Danish Security and Intelligence Service “PET” (Nikolaj Lie Kaas) are incarcerated. The emptiness also resonates in the Department of Forensic Medicine (episode 3) and at the haunt of the homeless in Copenhagen (episodes 6 and 7). Emilie and Carl have made a sanctuary in the loft which the adults do not know about. In keeping with the theme of transport and transit, the children have named their sanctuary the “Interspace.” This is the place they withdraw to when the adults fight.

From *The Wire* (HBO, 2002-2008) we already know that harbours, freighters and containers are well suited as a hotbed for crime, and this knowledge is effectively applied in *The Killing III*, which from the very onset focuses on the space of transit. The first location – the deserted, freight emptied and scrapped freighter – was scarily well-suited to the mode of the killing and set the tone for the series. The naked body indicated the elementariness of the storyline, while the freighter’s name, Medea, heralded the mystic dimensions of the set of actions surrounding the killings on the freighter.

Across the three seasons, the introductory, résumé and signature sequences are dark, establishing a tone in line with the style and effects of the noir tradition. These sequences emphasise the essential features the viewer must pay attention to: the fingerprint implying a labyrinth, the identification tag implying the link and clue, and the resonating sound in the transit space signalling emptiness.

### *The Killing I: The local and the domestic*

Throughout all three seasons of *The Killing*, the thriller is connected to crime and political drama but accentuating different features. The melodrama is also applied in varying degrees against the backdrop of the story. The interlacing of the thriller and crime genre with the political drama started with the local mayoral elections in Copenhagen in *The Killing I*. As in *The Killing III*, campaign cars and spin doctors are involved as well as the politicians’ personal crises and skeletons in the wardrobe. And naturally, the mapping of the individual politicians’ activities during the incriminating times also proved difficult this time, which served to enhance the thriller element: the plot could twist and turn in unanticipated directions. Considerations and misguided considerations, small and big lies, evasive explanations, trust and betrayals all intertwined the plot. Even though the probability of it all did not always bear closer examination, the plot was well thought out and the British-American thriller tradition was well applied. The combination, which was introduced in Denmark in Nikolaj Arcel’s *King’s Game* (*Kongekabale*, 2004), was innovative in a Danish TV series.

As it turned out, the many devious courses represented as many dead ends – Nanna Birk Larsen’s killer was to be found in her near surroundings. It was the naïve, mentally unbalanced yet cunning criminal. This storyline effectively demonstrated how a series of apparently independent

events can nevertheless be connected, and how the inclination of a family friend to overprotect his friend and benefactor in many cases had threads to what happened at the political level.

*The Killing I* was unique in its extensive pursuit of one single killing – the murder of the teenage student Nanna Birk Larsen – through twenty episodes. The most obvious international predecessor is David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* (ABC, 1990-91) which also unfolded its story around one single killing – the murder of Laura Palmer. However, where *Twin Peaks* ended up in cascades of mystery and metaphysics that brought Agent Cooper's world-view to collapse, *The Killing I* is told in a way that, although it changes between different tracks that are introduced by the criminal and political threads, understands the art of limitation. Thus, the dramaturgy counterbalances the devious courses of the labyrinth.

On the visual side, the action in *The Killing I* is set in three different locations: the Copenhagen Police Headquarters, the Copenhagen City Hall and Vesterbro, a district in Copenhagen. The Copenhagen Police Headquarters is the place where the threads of the investigation are gathered, but also where it is disrupted. The Police Headquarters is presented as a monolith from the outside, but a labyrinth from the inside – it is difficult to get in and out, and once in, the many levels and dead ends confuse. The City Hall is mainly the setting of the local mayoral elections, but through these elections it is connected to crime. Investigation and election; in both cases, the countdown has started. Vesterbro is the place where the Birk Larsen family removals firm is located. Here, the countdown has also started to the scheduled move to the new house. Nightly helicopter shootings over Copenhagen interconnect these locations in an overall pattern. The labyrinths, roads and lost roads of the big city down there are well-known from British and American TV series and have been used as an ingredient in Danish TV drama since the drama series *TAXA* (1997-1999).

In spite of the obvious differences in the environment and characterisation of the three places, the distinctive features of colouring, camera movement and the diffuse, disturbing underscore (by Frans Bak) first used in *Twin Peaks* (by Angelo Badalamenti), are the same. The dominating colours are shades of grey, black and blue. In all cases, the camera seeks out the rooms in a manner intending to expose the clues of what has happened. The camera pans across living rooms, bedrooms, corridors, offices and storage rooms, over floors, panels and doorways in an exquisitely disturbing manner. The similarity of colours and optics indicates the shared theme: everybody has secrets, everybody is hiding something, and their hiding places are alike, after all. Nature is only included in the shape of the naked November wood by the lake where the dead body of Nanna Birk Larsen is found in one of Troels Hartmann's (Lars Mikkelsen) campaign cars. Thus, the connection between the places and the crimes are pointed out through the style of the series.

Even though the political level is not directly involved in the essential crime, clear parallels can be drawn between politics and crime. At his sickbed, former Mayor Bremer passes on advice on the mechanisms of power to Hartmann, the Mayor to be: "Remember you have to live with it." Advice that he himself forgot in his function as Mayor – and advice Hartmann also needs to forget if he wants to be elected. It is only possible to become Mayor by becoming a Bremer clone, which is lethal in the long run as Bremer's heart attack demonstrates. The lesson from City Hall is that the road to power is not without political "killings:" the destruction of character and parts of oneself, i.e. one's morality.

Rather than City Hall, the origin of the crime is Pernille and Theis Birk Larsen's (Ann Eleonora Jørgensen and Bjarne Henriksen) combined workplace and apartment in Vesterbro: the home. The

sinister feeling is glaringly exposed at Anton's birthday party in episode 20. Everybody, even the family "shadow uncle" Vagn (Nikolaj Kopernikus), is gathered around the table singing birthday songs. This scene illustrates the well-known cliché that the killer is among us; it is someone we know without knowing the depths of character.

Vagn's mixed position as insider/outsider in the family makes him the perfect suspect. Theis and Vagn have a shared criminal past twenty years back. This old criminal bond between Theis and Vagn makes it easy for Vagn to appeal to Theis' instinct of taking the law into his own hands. We already saw this instinct unfolded in episode 8 in his confrontation with the teacher Kemal. The suspicion against Vagn is intensified in episode 17 where a connection is made to the murder of Mette Hauge fifteen years before and a removals firm Vagn used to work in. And the suspicion is enhanced when Sarah Lund connects Meyer's last words: "Sara 84" with the shirt Vagn is – still – wearing. The shared suppressions of the past make it a logical course of events for Vagn to drag Theis into his situation, making him a killer, and Theis accepts the role of the executioner like a lamb.

In continuation with the introductory sequences, the long serial places itself within the film noir tradition and its love of grey and dark shades, rain-soaked locations where streetlights are reflected in the tarmac and oblique angles. The genre knowledge is also marked by the intertextual references. The ending thus quotes the end situation in David Fincher's thriller *Seven* (1995) in a parallel set-up where the morality and organisation of the crime leads to the law being taken into one's own hands, turning the victim into a perpetrator.

### *The Killing II*: Foreign politics with domestic dimensions

Genre mixing, production design and noir style are recurrent ingredients in *The Killing II*, as I have illustrated previously. However, the plot and thereby the dramaturgy is different. Dramatic turnovers in actors have occurred and only the dubious Detective Chief Inspector Brix (Morten Suurballe) is still working at the Police Headquarters. The disavowed detective inspector Sarah Lund has become a passport officer in the port town of Gedser and has to be brought back to Copenhagen. The rest of the gallery of characters have been changed. This effectively signals a new beginning – and thereby also a different type of serial from the usual model, e.g. Scandinavian crime serials such as *Wallander* (2005-) and *Beck* (1997-) where the recurrent ingredient is the constant gallery of characters, also in terms of familiar subsidiary characters and the unique constellation of characters within the department. In this way, *The Killing* instigates a certain type of innovation, which cannot be replicated in an adaptation or character based serial.

The parallel between politics and crime is maintained, but the focus has shifted. The municipal environment surrounding the Copenhagen City Hall has been swapped for national politics at Christiansborg Palace, home of the Danish Parliament. Where the focus in *The Killing I* was on solving the original killing of Nanna Birk Larsen, the main concept in *The Killing II* is not just the aforementioned parallel, but the direct connection between politics and crime – another example of innovation.

The relation to reality has also shifted, in that *The Killing II* takes a number of events from the real life and places them in the story in a way that suits the thriller dramaturgy. The Danish

involvement in the war in Afghanistan has provided ample material to choose from. Many controversial issues were brought to the public at the time of the screening of the production, increasing the sense of a frightening (and from the point of the producers unforeseen) topicality. For example, civilian killings during the operation in Afghanistan and the subsequent compensation from the Danish state (mentioned in the Danish newspaper *Politiken*, 17 October 2009). The former elite soldier Thomas Rathsack's book *Jæger. I krig med eliten* [*Hunter. At War with the Elite*], which shows the fluid boundaries between what is legal and what is accepted during military operations, was made public by *Politiken* in September 2009 at a time when the Defence Command had banned it.<sup>15</sup> This resulted in an extensive public debate about the then Minister of Defence Søren Gade's administration of his office and initiated a set of events that led to the resignation of the Minister.

These examples emphasise the topicality of the plot in *The Killing II*. On the political level, the newly appointed Minister for Justice, Thomas Buch (Nicolas Bro), is looking to reach a broad settlement on a terror bill across the political parties and thus become everyone's friend instead of only of the aptly named "Folkepartiet" (People's Party) – a name that in real life can reflect either the right-wing anti-immigration party, The Danish People's Party, The Conservative People's Party or the left-wing EU-sceptical party, the Socialist People's Party. However, the settlement is obstructed by a series of lies, concealments and misrepresentations of the truth, all connected to a certain case kept secret for two years. The crux of this case is that civilians were killed by Danish soldiers during the operation in Afghanistan. The exposures happening at the political level have their firm counterpart in the killings consequently committed on Danish soldiers connected to the dark event in Afghanistan. These killings lend to the dramaturgy another pace, resembling Agatha Christie's classic set-up: a group of people of a certain number stay together to conceal a certain crime, but are picked apart one by one. Many thrillers are based on this model, often in combination with a race against the clock.

All the emotions portrayed in the Birk Larsen family in *The Killing I* in connection with the killing and the potential suspects have effectively been peeled off this plot. The emotions and thereby the melodramatic moments are relegated to the storyline about Jens Peter Raben (Ken Vedsegaard) and his family. In this storyline, the melodramatic moments function in a classic manner: in a case of injustice a man is subsequently incarcerated and cannot escape no matter what he does. He is therefore forced to take the law into his own hands and break out of his incarceration at the psychiatric hospital in order to make an attempt to solve the case himself in direct competition with the police and under the scrutiny of the actual perpetrator.

Here, the naïve killer from *The Killing I* has been replaced by the refined, plotting and highly intelligent type – the mastermind – personified by Lund's colleague and closest partner, Ulrik Strange (Mikael Birkkjær), married with two children and the perfect family man. As killer type and serial killer he is – like the plot – close to the mainstream traditions. This approximation is underlined by the place where *The Killing II* started and ended: the Memorial Park Ryvangen, where the three poles for executions from the period of occupation during WWII are found, and where the graves serve as backdrop of the killings in the present. The topicality made *The Killing II* a unique experience in Danish television history.

*The Killing III*: Domestic politics with global dimensions

In *The Killing III*, the Prime Minister himself and his office are in the line of fire on the political level, almost as in *Borgen*. Similarly, the tragedy that unfolded in an ordinary removal man's family in the centre of Copenhagen has moved out into the torn shipping magnate and doctor's family in the wealthy suburbs. The crime that the title is referring to is the abduction and hostage taking of Robert and Maja Zeuthen's daughter Emilie, however, it is actually rooted in a completely different crime – the assault and killing of Louise two years previously. Louise's fate is gradually pinpointed: she was a girl no one wanted to care for; a girl who had been in contact with Zeeland's children's home; a girl who presumably was meant to be a role model for children in foster families in the Centre Party's planned advertising material, but instead she ended up on the bottom of a harbour in Western Jutland. Louise thus represents a victim of society.

The first episode refers to Medea, as mentioned. In Greek mythology, Medea is the granddaughter of the sun god Helios, a woman of incredible strength and magic powers. In Euripides' tragedy *Medea* (431 BC), she changes her status to the betrayed, avenging woman: she inflicts a cruel revenge on her husband, Jason, who betrayed her, by killing their two children. In *The Killing III*, the crimes are first and foremost connected to abandoned children. The Medea reference can, on a basic level, be understood as a symbolic expression of the victimisation of the children in the conflict and failings of their parents, be it Emilie, Carl or Louise. In any case, killings follow in the wake of Medea: the killings of the sailors on board, followed by the killings of assistant public prosecutor Schultz, and the police pathologist who performed a post-mortem on Louise and kept the correct result quiet. Whether the officer who covered up the inadequate investigation of the killing of Louise was killed or committed suicide is unsure, but the incident has nonetheless resulted in his death.

In contrast to the case in *The Killing I* from 2007 and *The Killing II* from 2009, Denmark is a society in crisis in 2012. Prime Minister Christian Kamper, the leader of the party named The New Liberal (Olav Johannesen), has called a general election. "We must all contribute" is the slogan of the campaign and it is featured on the campaign bus we see in episode 3. The slogan echoes the actual campaign led by the liberal parties in the Danish elections in 2011. All alliances have started to dislocate and the political options are in turn opened and closed. The salient fact is that this coincides with the Prime Minister's handling of the case, which does not have anything to do with the elections and the abduction of Emilie.

The connection between the two is Robert Zeuthen (Anders W. Berthelsen), the man who is to save the Danish economy and is the guarantor for the government's economic crisis management. If the outsourcing process that the board of directors believe to be the most profitable strategy for the firm is carried through, it is not only the old firm's successor Robert Zeuthen who is finished; Prime Minister Christian Kamper and his crisis plan will also go down the drain. This is why it becomes paramount for the PM to demonstrate his ability of crisis management and leadership in connection with the concrete abduction case. On the perpetrator's computer, an indictment against the state and Big Business is also found. Where the storyline in *The Killing II* was unfolded around the foreign politics and its domestic implications, it is the domestic politics and its global implications that serve as glue in *The Killing III*.

The perpetrator, as is often the case in the thriller genre, is known to the viewer. We have seen

him in action and we have heard his voice. In episode 3, he appears as GM, presumably short for “GerningsMand” (meaning “perpetrator”), and in the credits the actor Thomas W. Gabriëlsson is listed as GM. Among the homeless, he is apparently known as the “Cat man”. It is revealed that he used kittens, which Emilie adores but is allergic to, as an allurements. In the introduction to episode 8, we see him once again attaching a shabby photograph of Louise to the rear-view mirror; we see his arm which is scribbled with the infamous license plate numbers of cars that were nearby when Louise disappeared – and we experience the reflection showing Z as S<sup>16</sup> that we have been waiting for. He is not short of resources; it is impressive how many different vehicles he has had access to: a lorry, a van, passenger cars of various kinds and a four-by-four vehicle. The transport and transit area is his element.

Apparently, the perpetrator is driven by the urge for revenge on that or those persons responsible for the abuse and murder of Louise, and the reason is that he is her father. Allegedly, his motive is to subject another father, Robert Zeuthen, to the same experience of loss he himself experienced. He asks what the value of a human life is and Zeuthen’s answer is DKK 100 million (equivalent to about 13.5 million Euro). However, the question is rhetorical; it is not a classic hostage situation and the money is never the ultimate objective. Even though he is skilled in logistics and stage-managing the events, he has not done his homework properly before venturing on his rampage of revenge. This is the reason why Sarah Lund, who is better skilled at police work, can reach him by mobile phone from time to time. He is irrational and a mastermind at the same time; and another perpetrator with close relations to the Zeeland Corporation is lurking behind him – a much more cunning and resource-rich perpetrator, who is the cause of the original crime.

Sarah Lund is once again the opponent. Just as in the previous season, she must be brought in from a pre-retirement job. In the beginning she seems tired and fatigued – not prepared to show her former energy and inveterate strength. At the same rate as she changes sweaters, she makes one mistake after another. In the first episode, she chose not to examine the suspicious ship in the harbour. Later she was distracted by the sight of her son and his pregnant girlfriend and missed her train connection in the process, which – possibly – could have prevented the death of the public prosecutor.

Quite a few pieces from the puzzle of her past emerge and this disturbs her and keeps her from being fully functional and attentive to the crimes she is meant to solve. She seeks out her son, Mark, who rejects her. He does not know what he wants and he blames her for him being too much like her. His girlfriend’s pregnancy both pleases and torments her. Matthias Borch, an old flame of hers, expresses it in a crystal clear manner: “You know that when there is something emotional that you have trouble relating to, you have a tendency to walk out.” Detective Chief Inspector Brix has let go of his dubiousness and seems more mellow and involved. He is now giving the investigators his backing. Eventually Sarah Lund is in gear and from episode 6 to 7 her old characteristics start shining through – the one-eyed and individual effort, guided by an indispensable intuition, coupled with a certain empathy for GM, who also carries the traumas of abandoned children. And a strong opposition to the wirepuller in hiding who she wants to catch as much as GM does. She succeeds in the end, however with fatal consequences. As opposed to the shipping magnate and the Prime Minister, Sarah Lund is as usual unable to compromise. This fact places her in a situation which once again quotes Fincher’s *Seven* in the final confrontation and thus connects with *The Killing I*.



## Conclusion

In its entirety *The Killing* illustrates that original productions rather than adaptations have great advantages as regards innovation. As the extensive turnover of actors between the first and second series and similarly between the second and the third seasons showed, it has been possible to vary and renew the serial within the overall concept of “one vision,” that is the vision of Søren Sveistrup, the manuscript writer. During all three seasons Sveistrup carefully scrutinises the complicated structure of modern Danish society as it is reflected in fictitious crimes and investigations, dysfunctional gender roles and absent role models and in necessary but hideous compromises at the level of both politics and investigation.

In spite of the interchange between several genre tracks, the entire series of *The Killing* inscribes itself into the noir thriller genre, and it is important to the dramaturgy, which in all series is labyrinthine and characterised by cliff-hangers, perpetual pursuits through rain soaked streets, dark basements and store rooms of a perpetrator who narrowly escapes until the final episode. However, the differences between the series are also important to the production value of *The Killing*. These differences range from the circular movements in the local, domestic environment in the first series, through the fluctuation between events in Denmark and Afghanistan in the second series to the third series’ refocus on human nature at the top and bottom of society – and of a Denmark in economic and moral crisis. The different levels in the story allow ethical and socio-political issues to be at the core of the build-up of suspense and offer that extra dimension – completely in line with DR Drama’s articulated strategy on the double story.

Vis-à-vis genres, the use of political drama alternates while the different levels of crime within local, national and corporate politics are being investigated. Within the police procedural, the various levels in the police force and the special branch play their parts in the creation of conflict, and on the private level melodrama enhances emotional conflicts within the families. The continuity of the entire series does depend on character – Sarah Lund’s intense, persistent and yet human role as investigator. But it also depends on the concept of “one vision” and the concept of the double story.

- 1 Eva Novrup Redvall, “Dogmer for tv-drama,” in *Kosmorama*, no. 248, 2011, pp. 180-198.
- 2 *Idem*, p. 185; see also Gunhild Agger, “Adaptioner, spinoffs og selvstændige produktioner. Strategier i svensk og dansk tv-krimi,” in *Kosmorama*, no. 248, 2011, pp. 161-179.
- 3 Gunhild Agger, “Er der gået for meget *Borgen* i *Forbrydelsen*?” 7 November 2012, <http://www.kommunikationsforum.dk/artikler/anmeldelse-af-forbrydelsen-iii>, last visit 30 November 2012; *Idem*, “Pres- sen, plottet og den sure pasbetjent,” 3 November 2009, <http://www.kommunikationsforum.dk/artikler/pres- sen-plottet-og-pasbetjenten>, last visit 30 November 2012; *Idem*, “Forbrydelsens forbrydelse,” 6 March 2007, <http://www.kommunikationsforum.dk/artikler/forbrydelsens-forbrydelse>, last visit 30 November 2012. See also, *Idem*, “Inside Danish TV’s Thriller Factory,” 15 August 2012, <http://www.kommunikationsforum.dk/artikler/dansk-tv-dramas-internationale-succes>, last visit 30 November 2012.
- 4 Gunhild Agger, “Emotion, Gender and Genre: Investigating *The Killing*,” in *Northern Lights*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2011, pp. 111-125.
- 5 Vicky Frost, “*The Killing* puts torchlight on subtitled drama,” *The Guardian*, 18 November 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/tv-and-radio/2011/nov/18/the-killing-torchlight-subtitled-drama>, last visit 30 November 2012.
- 6 Maggie Brown, “*Borgen*: Inside Danish TV’s thriller factory,” *The Guardian*, 14 January 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/tv-and-radio/2012/jan/14/borgen-danish-tv-thrillers>, last visit 30 November 2012.

GUNHILD AGGER

7 *Ibidem*.

8 John Lloyd, "The Art of Darkness," *FT.com*, 25 March 2011, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/6d092842-5664-11e0-84e9-00144feab49a.html#axzz2E4gvp8JA>, last visit 30 November 2012; Andrew Romano, "Borgen: The Best TV Show You've Never Seen," *Newsweek*, 29 July 2012, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2012/07/29/borgen-the-best-tv-show-you-ve-never-seen.html>, last visit 30 November 2012.

9 Barry Forshaw, *Death in a Cold Climate. A Guide to Scandinavian Crime Fiction*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2012, p. 2.

10 *Idem*, p. 8.

11 John Lloyd, "The Art of Darkness," cit.

12 Andrew Nestingen, *Crime and Fantasy in Scandinavia. Fiction, Film and Social Change*, University of Washington Press/Museum Tusulanum Press, Seattle-Copenhagen 2008, p. 9.

13 Lars Ole Sauerberg, *Secret Agents in Fiction*, Macmillan, London 1984, p. 81.

14 See for example <http://www.filmsite.org/thrillerfilms.html>, last visit 30 November 2012.

15 Thomas Rathsack, "I krig med eliten," in *Politiken*, 16 September 2009, section 3, pp. 1-16.

16 Lars Borberg, "Hævneren fra havnen," *Nordjyske*, 12 November 2012, <http://nordjyske.dk/nyheder/haevneren-fra-havnen/765b4e84-fe23-4934-92cf-ee27f298af1c/4/1513#/0>, last visit 15 June 15.

## LA NOTION DE QUALITÉ TÉLÉVISUELLE DANS LA PRODUCTION FICTIONNELLE BRITANNIQUE

Stéfany Boisvert, Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM)

### *Abstract*

This essay explores the notion of Quality TV, as it has been applied to British TV fiction. The quality of British TV fiction has often been associated with teleplays, adaptations and the movement of social realism. Through a study of TV productions, of the discourses of scholars and critics, and a comparison with the concept of American Quality TV, this article highlights some of the relevant criteria of Quality TV in the UK, most notably the educational, ethical or realist dimension of the programs and their visual sobriety. This particular definition of quality can be explained in part by the original public service mandate of the TV industry in the UK, similar to most European countries. The article ends with a study of contemporary discourses about Quality TV in the UK. Nowadays, there seems to be an important tension between a traditional conception of Quality TV and a newer one, which is more in line with the American model and is usually associated to cinematic and expensive TV series. This short study of fictional Quality TV underlines the evolutionary nature of the concept of quality and raises questions about the future of TV production in the United Kingdom.

---

La notion de qualité télévisuelle (*Quality TV*) est loin de faire consensus. Toutefois, même si cette notion est toujours contestée, la télévision, comme tout autre médium, n'échappe pas aux tentatives de hiérarchisation de ses productions culturelles. Le caractère subjectif et controversé de la notion de qualité ne doit donc pas nous rendre aveugle au fait que plusieurs discours sont véhiculés dans toute société à propos de la qualité télévisuelle et de ce qui *doit* être regardé. Comme le rappelle Charlotte Brunsdon : « Judgements about the quality of television are made in a great many ways all the time – in speech, in newspapers, in practice – and on television itself »<sup>1</sup>. De tels discours permettent en effet de constituer des canons, de déterminer des productions qui seront jugées *de qualité*, « haut de gamme »<sup>2</sup> et *exemplaires* de la production télévisuelle d'un pays.

Le présent article aura pour objectif d'étudier ces grands discours et définitions de la qualité télévisuelle, tels que développés et théorisés à propos des fictions télé *britanniques* par plusieurs chercheurs et journalistes critiques. Le cas du Royaume-Uni est tout particulièrement intéressant pour une étude de la notion de qualité télévisuelle. Puisque les travaux portant sur la notion de *Quality TV* ont grandement été consacrés à la production américaine<sup>3</sup>, une étude des discours à

propos de la qualité télévisuelle britannique permet d'offrir un regard différent sur la question et de mettre en lumière les similitudes et différences importantes d'un pays à l'autre. Une telle étude permet aussi de constater l'incidence que la vocation première de service public du système télévisuel britannique – et plus largement du système européen dans sa quasi-totalité – a eue sur le développement d'une conception quelque peu différente de la qualité des fictions du petit écran.

## Les séries d'anthologie : un repère de la qualité télévisuelle

Au sein des discours concernant la qualité télévisuelle britannique, la grande tradition des téléfilms<sup>4</sup> (*single plays* ou *teleplays*) occupe une place de choix<sup>5</sup>. Diffusées depuis l'après-Seconde guerre mondiale, ces fictions télé étaient regroupées au sein de grandes séries d'anthologie comme *Armchair Theatre* (ITV, 1956-1974), *The Wednesday Play* (BBC, 1964-1970) et *Play for Today* (BBC, 1970-1984). Ces séries proposaient aux téléspectateurs des adaptations d'œuvres théâtrales ou littéraires ainsi que des créations originales conçues pour le petit écran. Les téléfilms avaient aussi pour particularité d'être des dramatiques autonomes, des récits fermés : chaque épisode proposait une œuvre fictionnelle singulière, écrite et réalisée par une équipe d'artisans différente.

Une grande tradition de discours a ainsi consisté à associer la qualité télévisuelle à ces dramatiques que sont les *téléfilms* britanniques, considérés comme un terreau fertile pour le développement de visions artistiques riches et originales. En effet, puisque le concept des séries d'anthologie avait pour objectif de produire, sous une même bannière, plusieurs dramatiques différentes, la formule permettait *de facto* à de nombreux artistes de s'impliquer dans leur conception. De ce fait, les *téléfilms* ont été considérés par plusieurs comme le lieu privilégié pour le développement à la télévision de la liberté créatrice, de l'innovation<sup>6</sup> et donc, à travers elles, de la qualité télévisuelle<sup>7</sup>.

Au-delà de leur réputation générale, les séries d'anthologie ont surtout favorisé le développement de deux types de fictions considérées comme deux des plus grandes tendances de la qualité télévisuelle britannique : les *adaptations télévisuelles* et les fictions associées au mouvement du *réalisme social*.

## La qualité des adaptations

Très importante dans la culture britannique, la tradition de l'adaptation d'œuvres théâtrales et littéraires a été considérée comme un gage de qualité à la télévision. Selon une telle vision, c'est en adaptant des classiques de la culture britannique que la télévision peut être considérée de qualité. Implicitement, une telle définition de la qualité renvoie à une conception de la télévision comme étant *dépendante* des autres arts : la valorisation des adaptations repose en effet sur la prémisse que la télévision doit servir à la promotion et à la diffusion de la culture qui lui est indépendante. Par conséquent, la qualité de la télévision relève surtout de sa capacité d'accroître la culture générale des téléspectateurs et de servir d'espace de médiation pour les productions artistiques qui l'ont précédée.

Comme le font remarquer Gardner et Wyver, la qualité du médium télévisuel a ainsi souvent été associée à la dimension éducative et formative de ses productions fictionnelles :

*In social terms the principal obstacles to the infinite dissemination of « high culture » to the masses were seen as inadequate communication and lack of access and opportunity, both of which short-comings could now be overcome by transmission into millions of homes through the window of the television screen. Cultural privilege was supposedly in the process of being abolished – education and enlightenment for all<sup>8</sup>.*

Selon une telle tradition de discours, le médium télévisuel produirait des fictions de qualité lorsqu'il se mettrait au service d'autres formes d'art révérees et légitimées<sup>9</sup> telles que la littérature ou le théâtre. Paradoxalement, la qualité télévisuelle britannique a donc souvent été associée à ce qui est *non-télévisuel*.

Loin d'être restreinte aux séries d'anthologie, lesquelles ont grandement disparu des ondes depuis les années 80-90, cette tradition des adaptations télévisuelles s'est poursuivie jusqu'à aujourd'hui : l'histoire plus récente de la télévision britannique regorge en effet de séries télévisées adaptées d'une œuvre littéraire. Dans son célèbre article concernant la question de la qualité télévisuelle, Brunsdon affirme que les adaptations littéraires représentent sans conteste une des « composantes de la qualité »<sup>10</sup> les plus consensuelles concernant la production télévisuelle britannique. En témoignent d'ailleurs le fait que deux des fictions les plus fréquemment associées à la notion de qualité télévisuelle sont *Brideshead Revisited* (ITV, 1981) et *The Jewel in the Crown* (ITV, 1984), toutes deux des adaptations d'œuvres littéraires. Le succès international et la réputation enviable de l'adaptation par Andrew Davies de *Pride and Prejudice* (BBC One, 1995) semble encore une fois attester du marqueur de qualité associé aux adaptations de fictions littéraires à la télévision britannique<sup>11</sup>.

Il est important de souligner qu'une telle valorisation des adaptations n'est pas un phénomène uniquement télévisuel, et renvoie à une stratégie beaucoup plus ancienne de promotion de la culture nationale. Comme l'explique John Caughie, le cinéma britannique a lui aussi accordé une place de choix aux adaptations, par souci de se distinguer radicalement de la production hollywoodienne<sup>12</sup> et de la culture américaine dans son ensemble. L'adaptation audiovisuelle d'œuvres théâtrales ou littéraires représente donc, depuis longtemps, une stratégie de distinction et de légitimation importante de la production culturelle britannique.

Quoiqu'une telle valorisation des adaptations ait été maintes fois critiquée compte tenu de la vision élitiste<sup>13</sup> qu'elle semble colporter, il importe néanmoins d'y voir une conception importante et récurrente de ce que peut être une fiction télévisuelle britannique *de qualité*. Selon nous, il y a également lieu de voir dans une telle tendance à l'adaptation une influence de la vocation de service public, à l'origine de la télévision britannique. En effet, une telle valorisation des adaptations laisse transparaître une volonté d'associer la qualité des fictions télé à leur potentiel *éducatif*, et de définir la qualité télévisuelle comme le résultat d'une habile négociation entre les vocations divertissante et éducative du programme<sup>14</sup>. Les fictions télévisuelles de qualité auraient ainsi le mérite de contribuer à l'enrichissement de la culture artistique de la masse des téléspectateurs. La qualité du médium télévisuel et de ses fictions est, par conséquent, directement associée à leur rôle de *transmetteurs* de la culture : à leur potentiel de formation culturelle des citoyens britanniques.

## Réalisme et éthique des fictions télévisuelles

La qualité de la télévision britannique a également été associée à la notion de *réalisme*<sup>15</sup>. La qualité de ce médium résiderait ainsi dans sa capacité à mettre les téléspectateurs en contact avec la réalité, à les informer adéquatement sur le monde dans lequel ils vivent. Ce critère d'évaluation, loin d'être restreint à la programmation non fictionnelle, est aussi souvent mentionné afin d'évaluer la qualité d'une fiction télévisuelle<sup>16</sup>. Par définition, une fiction ne prétend pas être une histoire *réelle*, mais celle-ci serait néanmoins jugée en fonction de sa capacité à avoir l'air objective et *réaliste*, c'est-à-dire à proposer un récit qui semble en adéquation avec la réalité et le vécu des citoyens. Pour ces raisons, plusieurs discours concernant la qualité télévisuelle britannique l'ont associée au mouvement important, en fiction, du *réalisme social*. Selon Robin Nelson<sup>17</sup>, le réalisme social britannique serait d'ailleurs une des quatre grandes conceptions de la qualité télévisuelle qui ont été massivement véhiculées.

Les dramatiques associées au mouvement du réalisme social (*social realist dramas*) représentaient, sur un mode fictionnel souvent inspiré de certaines techniques documentaires – d'où leur appellation fréquente de drames-documentaires –, des aspects de la réalité et des problématiques sociales des Britanniques de l'époque, particulièrement ceux de la classe ouvrière. Ces dramatiques étaient ainsi reconnues pour leur capacité « to show things as they really are »<sup>18</sup>. Le téléfilm *Cathy Come Home* (BBC, 1966), écrit par Jeremy Sandford et réalisé par Ken Loach, représente une des fictions les plus marquantes de la télévision britannique<sup>19</sup> et de ce mouvement du réalisme social. Cette fiction à propos de la crise du logement et du problème de l'itinérance endossait clairement une mission d'éducation citoyenne face à une problématique sociale contemporaine. Des informations et des statistiques étaient même communiquées à quelques reprises durant ce téléfilm, sous la forme de commentaires en *voix-off*. Comme en témoigne ce précédent exemple, la qualité présumée d'une fiction télévisuelle était souvent attribuable à sa capacité de représenter le monde de manière réaliste, d'informer les citoyens par la voie singulière de la fiction et de contribuer, par le fait même, à de possibles réformes sociales.

Une telle valorisation du mouvement du *réalisme social* laisse transparaître une définition de la qualité télévisuelle en termes éthiques. La dimension *éthique* d'une fiction télévisuelle de qualité a d'ailleurs été maintes fois mise en valeur<sup>20</sup>. Dans une réflexion importante sur la notion de qualité télévisuelle, John Mepham défend clairement cette primauté de la qualité *éthique* d'une fiction télévisuelle, ce qui se traduirait notamment par la capacité d'une fiction à proposer des récits favorisant les réflexions existentielles et identitaires des individus<sup>21</sup>. Autrement dit, une fiction pourrait être jugée de qualité si elle offre des récits permettant l'évolution positive des mentalités en s'inscrivant dans un projet global d'éducation et de formation sociales.

Encore une fois, il est possible de voir dans une telle valorisation du caractère éthique et éducatif des fictions britanniques une influence du mandat premier de cette télévision en tant que service public. Le mandat de divertissement, à la base même des fictions télévisuelles, se double implicitement d'une vocation d'éducation et de conscientisation sociale et politique de la population britannique :

*What then is quality ? [...] Drama as a mirror of life [...] ; as a reflection of real human concerns [...] ; able to relate individual experiences to an implicit moral structure and scale of values ; able to broaden*

*the viewers' sympathies beyond their normal confines, to lead them to a greater insight into interpersonal and social relationships, to educate their feelings (at all levels) through laughter, suspense, empathy or whatever, by means of images as well as words, and to do this in a form with a palpable beginning, middle and end [...]*<sup>22</sup>.

## Qualité télévisuelle britannique vs qualité télévisuelle américaine

La définition de la qualité télévisuelle aux Etats-Unis a jadis partagé de grandes similitudes avec celle de la télévision britannique. Le premier âge d'or de la télévision américaine a été lui aussi associé à des adaptations et dramatiques originales diffusées, entre 1947 et 1960, dans de grandes séries d'anthologie telles que *The Pulitzer Prize Playhouse*<sup>23</sup>. Aux débuts de la télévision américaine, la qualité des fictions a donc, elle aussi, été associée à une tradition proprement théâtrale<sup>24</sup>, c'est-à-dire aux séries d'anthologie, aux adaptations de grandes œuvres du passé, ainsi qu'aux téléfilms.

PBS s'est également associé, dès ses tout débuts, à la notion de qualité télévisuelle. En tant qu'unique réseau public de la télévision américaine, PBS s'est en effet promu comme une alternative au contenu des chaînes télévisuelles commerciales et comme un diffuseur de contenu de qualité, à haute valeur éducative et culturelle. Encore aujourd'hui, le réseau PBS jouit d'une bonne réputation au sein de l'opinion publique et est fréquemment associé à la notion de qualité télévisuelle<sup>25</sup>. Toutefois, dans le domaine circonscrit des fictions télévisuelles, PBS s'est précisément acquis une réputation enviable en diffusant des productions télé britanniques au sein de sa série d'anthologie *Masterpiece Theatre*<sup>26</sup>. De ce fait, PBS a davantage contribué à la promotion outre-Atlantique de la qualité des fictions télé britanniques, plutôt qu'au développement d'une conception locale, *américaine*, de la qualité télévisuelle fictionnelle.

Une autre conception de la qualité télévisuelle américaine s'est toutefois développée avec le temps et apparaît aujourd'hui prédominante : ce que nous nommons communément *American Quality TV* est aujourd'hui associé à des fictions télévisuelles proprement américaines, populaires et principalement diffusées sur des chaînes commerciales<sup>27</sup>. Plus précisément, cette conception de la qualité est associée aux séries télé de grande écoute qui ont été produites, particulièrement depuis les années 1980 suite à la diversification de l'offre télévisuelle et l'avènement de chaînes câblées influentes comme HBO.

De manière générale, la qualité télévisuelle américaine est aujourd'hui définie par plusieurs critères, notamment une complexité narrative, la présence de nombreux personnages (*ensemble cast*) et surtout, de hautes valeurs de production (*high production values*) et une esthétique visuelle plus soignée<sup>28</sup>. La notion d'*American Quality TV* est ainsi fréquemment associée à des productions très coûteuses, ayant un aspect visuel beaucoup plus travaillé, voire même – comme l'affirment plusieurs chercheurs et critiques – un *look cinématographique* : les techniques de réalisation, de filmage et de montage plus complexes et diversifiées, l'utilisation de décors plus réalistes et imposants, l'octroi de budgets de production de plus en plus colossaux seraient notamment à l'origine de cette facture « cinématographique » de plusieurs séries américaines contemporaines jugées de qualité<sup>29</sup>. Un critère important de définition de la qualité, aux Etats-Unis, est donc sans conteste l'importance accordée à l'aspect visuel et formel de la série : « To make a broad generalisation,

‘American Quality TV’ might nevertheless be characterised by an expensive, cinematic look, shiny in comparison with the British tradition of gritty realism »<sup>30</sup>.

Traditionnellement, la production britannique de qualité a été associée à une plus grande sobriété visuelle et ce même si son budget de production est important. Alors que la qualité télévisuelle américaine est souvent associée à un visuel spectaculaire ou cinématographique, la qualité télévisuelle britannique est traditionnellement associée à une certaine retenue, une modestie dans le traitement de l’image et dans la réalisation<sup>31</sup> et une moins grande utilisation des effets spéciaux<sup>32</sup>, lesquels pourraient trahir un excès de formalisme. Selon Jonathan Bignell, à la télévision britannique, la qualité est effectivement associée à une absence de stylisation de l’image, ce que ce dernier nomme le « zero-degree style »<sup>33</sup>.

À l’aune des précédentes observations, nous pouvons conclure que la définition de la qualité télévisuelle américaine valorise, entre autres critères, l’aspect formel des fictions télé, c’est-à-dire leurs qualités esthétiques, leur visuel spectaculaire, ou leurs similitudes évidentes avec la production cinématographique. Au contraire, la qualité télévisuelle britannique est fréquemment définie par une absence de formalisme et une valorisation accrue du caractère culturellement formateur de la production. Plus important encore, la notion d’*American Quality TV* est intimement associée à des séries télé populaires, massivement exportées et jouissant de bonnes cotes d’écoute, localement et internationalement. De ce fait, la qualité y est plus spontanément associée – et non pas considérée comme *antinomique* – à ce qui est populaire, commercial et apprécié des téléspectateurs<sup>34</sup>. En somme, bien que les deux télévisions anglophones se soient toujours mutuellement influencées, la tradition de discours de ces deux pays concernant la production télévisuelle témoigne néanmoins de visions quelque peu divergentes de ce que représente la *qualité* d’une fiction.

## La qualité télévisuelle britannique aujourd’hui

Les définitions précédentes du concept de *qualité* ont grandement marqué l’histoire de la télévision au Royaume-Uni. Toutefois, selon nous, ces visions de la qualité télévisuelle tendent aujourd’hui à être davantage remises en question. Plusieurs critiques et membres de l’industrie télévisuelle valorisent désormais une conception surtout américaine de ce que devrait être la qualité télévisuelle britannique au XXI<sup>ème</sup> siècle. Autrement dit, la vision plus traditionnelle de la qualité y est aujourd’hui concurrencée par une autre, laquelle est davantage calquée sur les discours de qualité associés à la télévision américaine.

Depuis quelques années, certains critiques et artisans dénoncent le manque de liberté d’expression accordée aux créateurs télé britanniques. Cette perte de liberté créatrice serait notamment due aux mutations de l’industrie télévisuelle britannique depuis les années 80-90, laquelle est de plus en plus régie par une logique économique, soumise à des pressions commerciales et aux effets de la déréglementation. Ce phénomène important de déréglementation aurait ainsi pour effet de favoriser, selon certains observateurs, la production de fictions télé moins risquées et plus conventionnelles. Dans un récent article rendant compte de cette tension actuelle, au Royaume-Uni, entre deux conceptions différentes de la qualité<sup>35</sup>, le critique de *The Observer* défend clairement cette idée que la qualité télévisuelle se trouve aujourd’hui du côté des Etats-Unis, compte tenu



de la liberté d'expression et de la vision créatrice singulière davantage permises dans les fictions télévisuelles américaines<sup>36</sup>.

Selon certains commentateurs, les fictions télévisuelles américaines aborderaient aussi plus souvent des thématiques contemporaines, et seraient donc de qualité supérieure à la production britannique actuelle. À ce sujet, dans une entrevue sur les ondes de BBC Radio 4, l'acteur Dominic West a émis l'opinion que la télévision britannique actuelle ne produit pas de fictions de qualité, haut de gamme, comme le font les États-Unis. Selon West, la télévision britannique produirait trop de « costume dramas », et pas assez de fictions contemporaines<sup>37</sup>. La controverse entourant cette entrevue de Dominic West – certains endossant ses propos et d'autres les condamnant<sup>38</sup> – témoigne clairement, selon nous, de cette tension actuelle entre deux visions de la qualité télévisuelle britannique, et surtout de l'influence décisive de la production américaine sur les réflexions actuelles à ce sujet.

Finalement, le look cinématographique de bon nombre de séries américaines – un *look* attribuable entre autres à de gros moyens de production et à une esthétique visuelle très soignée – semble avoir une influence de plus en plus grande sur la conception de la qualité télévisuelle au Royaume-Uni. Les moyens de production impressionnants des nouvelles séries américaines – surtout sur les grandes chaînes câblées – permettent en effet à ces dernières de ressembler de plus en plus à des longs métrages de fiction. Les grands moyens de production, la facture cinématographique et le visuel souvent très soigné de ces séries les rendent ainsi très attrayantes sur le marché international. Cette conception singulière de l'*American Quality TV* a clairement eu une influence sur la production télévisuelle britannique plus récente. Comme le rappelle Robin Nelson, la chaîne BBC a produit durant les dernières années des séries très coûteuses, au *look* cinématographique, afin de proposer une programmation pouvant rivaliser avec les grandes fictions télé américaines<sup>39</sup>. Dans un contexte accru de compétition entre les réseaux, la conception américaine de la qualité télévisuelle semble donc inspirer de plus en plus les chaînes britanniques et la nature des séries aujourd'hui produites.

À ce sujet, la série *Sherlock* (BBC One, 2010-) nous semble tout à fait représentative de cette tension actuelle entre une conception davantage américaine, très cinématographique, de la qualité télévisuelle et une conception plus traditionnelle de la production britannique. La série *Sherlock* a été qualifiée par plusieurs critiques de série de qualité. Directement inspirée des œuvres de Conan Doyle, la série *Sherlock* s'inscrit clairement dans la grande tradition des adaptations télévisuelles britanniques. D'un autre côté, cette fiction propose une adaptation des plus modernisées : campée au XXI<sup>ème</sup> siècle, la série propose une réalisation très stylisée, un montage frénétique, plusieurs effets spéciaux et une facture visuelle extrêmement léchée. Loin de prôner cette grande retenue autrefois associée aux adaptations britanniques, *Sherlock* adhère sans conteste à cette nouvelle conception américaine de la qualité télévisuelle où l'aspect cinématographique est des plus importants. Steven Moffat, co-créateur et scénariste de la série, souligne d'ailleurs clairement l'ambition cinématographique de *Sherlock* : « We don't think of these as episodes, we think of them as films, we think of them as movies 'cause they're 90 minutes long and if you just do them as episodes of a TV series they'll seem very slow and very long. They have to have the size and weight of a movie »<sup>40</sup>. Ainsi, il nous semble possible de percevoir, à travers le précédent exemple, une influence plus tangible de la production américaine sur les conceptions actuelles de la qualité télévisuelle britannique.

## Conclusion

La notion de qualité télévisuelle, loin d'être dépassée, demeure centrale pour comprendre les enjeux structurants qui redéfinissent le contexte de la création télévisuelle. En mettant en lumière certaines grandes conceptions de la qualité télévisuelle au Royaume-Uni<sup>41</sup>, il nous a été possible de constater que celles-ci aident à mieux comprendre le rôle attribué à la télévision dans ce pays et surtout, à reconnaître les « forces institutionnelles » qui ont amené à valoriser certains types de fictions télévisuelles au détriment d'autres<sup>42</sup>. Notre étude a aussi mis en lumière le caractère *évolutif* du concept de qualité télévisuelle : ce que nous nommons *Quality TV* n'est jamais fixe, mais appelé à se modifier constamment.

Nous avons finalement avancé que les discours concernant la qualité télévisuelle britannique sont peut-être appelés à valoriser aujourd'hui davantage l'aspect cinématographique des fictions produites. Cette voie peut s'avérer intéressante, mais il importe de mettre en garde contre une dérive possible : la production de séries de prestige ou plus « cinématographiques » nécessite souvent des investissements monétaires considérables, ce qui explique cette tendance de plus en plus importante à la coproduction au Royaume-Uni, et plus généralement en Europe. Par exemple la série *Rome*, reconnue pour sa grande qualité, a dû être coproduite par la BBC, HBO et la RAI, compte tenu de ses coûts de production astronomiques. La coproduction permet de pallier aux problèmes de financement et de produire ces fictions télé plus coûteuses que les téléspectateurs recherchent tant. Toutefois, la coproduction entraîne aussi un risque de diminution de la représentation des spécificités culturelles, par souci de s'adresser à un public plus international.

Loi d'être alarmante en soi, cette tendance à la coproduction représente à coup sûr une avenue de plus en plus profitable dans notre contexte médiatique actuel. Celle-ci permet notamment à la production télévisuelle européenne de demeurer compétitive. L'important est toutefois de ne pas valoriser *uniquement* la voie de la coproduction ou de la production de fictions télé très onéreuses, ce qui pourrait amener à qualifier spontanément les grosses productions de *Quality TV*, comme si qualités télévisuelle et budgétaire allaient nécessairement de pair !

Le concept de qualité télévisuelle doit être envisagé comme un terme *générique*<sup>43</sup> qui n'a pas pour fonction de déterminer la valeur objective et supérieure de certaines productions, et encore moins de se faire l'écho des réelles préférences des téléspectateurs. Ce concept sert davantage à identifier clairement un type particulier de fictions télévisuelles, conçues comme répondant à certaines attentes formulées face au médium dans un pays ou comme étant représentatives de certaines spécificités culturelles. Pour cette raison, une diversité de définitions de la qualité télévisuelle sera toujours préférable selon nous à une seule vision universellement partagée de ce que peut être une fiction de qualité. Espérons donc que la production de fictions télévisuelles au Royaume-Uni – peu importe la vision future de la qualité qui prédominera – restera diversifiée et saura témoigner de ce désir de singularité qui a toujours animé la télévision britannique.

La qualité – à la télévision comme partout ailleurs – ne devrait jamais se conjuguer au singulier.

1 Charlotte Brunson, « Problems with quality », dans *Screen*, vol. 31, n° 1, printemps 1990, p. 89.

2 Robin Nelson, *State of Play : Contemporary « High-End » TV Drama*, Manchester University Press, New York 2007.

- 3 Voir entre autres : Janet McCabe, Kim Akass (sous la direction de), *Quality TV : Contemporary American Television and Beyond*, I.B. Tauris, London 2007 ; Mark Jancovich, James Lyons (sous la direction de), *Quality Popular Television*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2003, et Jane Feuer, Paul Kerr, Tise Vahimagi (sous la direction de), *MTM « Quality Television »*, BFI Publishing, London 1984.
- 4 La notion de téléfilm (*teleplay* ou *single play*), employée ici, fait autant référence à des créations originales filmées pour la télévision qu'à des productions théâtrales filmées pour le petit écran (*televised stage plays*), que ces dernières aient été directement filmées sur scène ou reproduites en studio.
- 5 Pour un aperçu de cette association des notions de qualité ou de prestige aux *single plays*, voir : Charlotte Brunson, « Problems with quality », cit., p. 84 ; Carl Gardner, John Wyver, « The Single Play : From Reithian Reverence to Cost-Accounting and Censorship », dans *Screen*, vol. 24, n° 4-5, 1983, pp. 114-124 ; Sue Thornham, Tony Purvis, *Television Drama : Theories and Identities*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2005.
- 6 Cf. Carl Gardner, John Wyver, « The Single Play », cit. ; Richard Paterson, *Drama and Entertainment*, dans Anthony Smith (sous la direction de), *Television : An International History*, Oxford University Press, New York 1998, p. 59.
- 7 Cette conception de la qualité est également partagée par plusieurs artisans de l'industrie télévisuelle britannique. Pour plusieurs scénaristes, réalisateurs et producteurs, l'ère des grandes séries d'anthologie est associée à une plus grande autonomie et liberté créatrice, gages d'une plus grande qualité télévisuelle.
- 8 Carl Gardner, John Wyver, « The Single Play », cit., p. 115.
- 9 Cf. Charlotte Brunson, *Screen Tastes*, Routledge, New York 1997, p. 112 ; Paul Kerr, *Never Mind the Quality...*, dans Geoff Mulgan (sous la direction de), *The Question of Quality*, BFI Publishing, London 1990, p. 51.
- 10 Charlotte Brunson, « Problems with quality », cit., p. 85.
- 11 John Caughie, *Television Drama : Realism, Modernism, and British Culture*, Oxford University Press, New York 2000, p. 210.
- 12 *Idem*, p. 209.
- 13 Cf. Geoff Mulgan, *Television's Holy Grail : Seven Types of Quality*, dans Geoff Mulgan (sous la direction de), *The Question of Quality*, cit., pp. 4-32; Sue Thornham, Tony Purvis, *Television Drama : Theories and Identities*, cit., p. 22.
- 14 Rappelons la mission de la BBC, édictée par John Reith et encore en vigueur aujourd'hui : « informer, éduquer et divertir ».
- 15 Cf. Charlotte Brunson, *Aesthetics and audiences*, dans *Screen Tastes*, cit., pp. 112-114; Sue Thornham, Tony Purvis, *Television Drama : Theories and Identities*, cit.
- 16 Cf. Charlotte Brunson, « Problems with quality », cit., p. 78.
- 17 Robin Nelson, *State of Play*, cit.
- 18 *Idem*, p. 170.
- 19 En 2000, le British Film Institute a placé *Cathy Come Home* en deuxième position de son palmarès des 100 émissions de télévision les plus importantes.
- 20 Cf. John Mepham, *The Ethics of Quality in Television*, dans Geoff Mulgan (sous la direction de), *The Question of Quality*, cit., pp. 56-72 ; Sue Thornham, Tony Purvis, *Television Drama : Theories and Identities*, cit.; John Caughie, *Television Drama : Realism, Modernism, and British Culture*, cit.
- 21 John Mepham, *The Ethics of Quality in Television*, cit.
- 22 George W. Brandt (sous la direction de), *British Drama Television in the 1980s*, Cambridge University Press, New York 1993, p. 5.
- 23 Robert J. Thompson, *Television's Second Golden Age*, Continuum, New York 1996, p. 11.
- 24 Cf. Dana Polan, *Qualifying « Quality TV »*, dans Id., *The Sopranos*, Duke University Press, Durham 2009, p. 100.
- 25 Chan-Olmsted, Kim ont proposé une étude très intéressante de l'image de marque « de qualité » du réseau public PBS : Sylvia M. Chan-Olmsted, Yungwook Kim, « The PBS Brand Versus Cable Brands : Assessing the Brand Image of Public Television in a Multichannel Environment », dans *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, vol. 46, n° 2, 2002, pp. 300-320.
- 26 Série d'anthologie toujours en ondes sous le titre écourté de *Masterpiece*.

- 27 Lorsque les chercheurs et les journalistes parlent aujourd'hui d'*American Quality TV*, ils font habituellement référence aux séries télé américaines des chaînes câblées et des *networks*. De son côté, PBS est certes encore associé à la notion de qualité télévisuelle, mais davantage en ce qui concerne les émissions à caractère scientifique ou artistique (concerts, spectacles, etc.), ainsi que les émissions pour enfants. Voir Sylvia M. Chan-Olmsted, Yungwook Kim, « The PBS Brand Versus Cable Brands », cit.
- 28 Sarah Cardwell a proposé une définition très détaillée de l'*American Quality TV* : Sarah Cardwell, *Is Quality Television Any Good ?*, dans Janet McCabe et Kim Akass (sous la direction de), *Quality TV*, cit., p. 26.
- 29 En général, en parlant du « look cinématographique » d'une série télé, les théoriciens et critiques veulent mettre l'accent sur les nombreuses similitudes entre la facture visuelle de cette production et celle d'un film (tournage à une seule caméra (souvent en 35mm), haute résolution de l'image, travail plus important de mise en scène, direction-photo plus soignée, plans plus variés, décors réalistes et imposants, effets spéciaux, etc.). Robin Nelson a d'ailleurs clairement associé la qualité télévisuelle américaine à des techniques de production et des budgets semblables à ceux du cinéma : « The quality TV product is typically shot on 35mm film or HDTV and, whilst it may not have Hollywood cinema budgets, it is much more highly funded than its television precursors ». Robin Nelson, *Quality TV Drama : Estimations and Influences Through Time and Space*, dans Janet McCabe et Kim Akass (sous la direction de), *Quality TV*, cit., p. 43.
- 30 Robin Nelson, *State of Play*, cit., p. 183.
- 31 Cf. Charlotte Brunson, « Problems with quality », cit., p. 85.
- 32 Mulgan résume cette spécificité de la qualité télévisuelle britannique : « expensive-looking productions (but without vulgar special effects) » : Geoff Mulgan, *Television's Holy Grail*, cit., p. 8.
- 33 Jonathan Bignell, *Seeing and Knowing : Reflexivity and Quality*, dans Janet McCabe, Kim Akass (sous la direction de), *Quality TV*, cit., p. 159.
- 34 « [...] the more widespread practice when scholars deal with American quality television rather than British quality television : there is greater acceptance of the commercial and cultural association between quality and value ». Sarah Cardwell, *Is Quality Television Any Good ?*, cit., p. 24.
- 35 Boyd Hilton, Euan Ferguson, « Can British TV produce drama as good as *Mad Men* ? », *The Observer*, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jul/25/british-tv-versus-mad-men>, dernier accès 11 septembre 2012.
- 36 *Ibidem*.
- 37 Voir la réponse de Kathryn Flett dans *The Guardian* : « *The Wire* star Dominic West is right about UK TV drama », <http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/tvandradioblog/2009/mar/31/dominic-west-wire>, dernier accès 11 septembre 2012.
- 38 Voir les propos de Ben Stephenson de BBC Drama en réponse à la critique de Dominic West : « British television 'lacks high end drama', says *The Wire* star Dominic West », *The Telegraph*, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/5077818/British-television-lacks-high-end-drama-says-The-Wire-star-Dominic-West.html>, dernier accès 11 septembre 2012.
- 39 Robin Nelson, *State of Play*, cit., p. 56. Nelson donne l'exemple du docudrame *Egypt* (2005) et de la série *Rome* (2005-2007), toutes deux coproduites par la BBC : « Both series tap more into cinematic legacies (*Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Ben-Hur*) than televisual traditions ».
- 40 Commentaires issus du vidéo promotionnel « Sherlock Uncovered » disponible sur le DVD de la saison 2 de la série : *Sherlock : Season Two*, BBC Worldwide Ltd. 2012.
- 41 Notre article avait pour but de mettre en lumière certaines grandes tendances de définition de la qualité télévisuelle britannique. Pour une présentation plus générale de diverses conceptions de la qualité, voir Geoff Mulgan, *Television's Holy Grail : Seven Types of Quality*, cit., pp. 4-32. Mentionnons également que l'ouvrage entier *The Question of Quality* (sous la direction de Geoff Mulgan, cit.) s'inscrit dans ce débat important au Royaume-Uni, dans les années 90, autour du concept de qualité télévisuelle, suite à de nouvelles législations dans le secteur de l'audiovisuel et surtout, la publication par le gouvernement britannique en 1988 d'un *White Paper (Broadcasting in the 90s. Competition, Choice and Quality)* où la notion de qualité télévisuelle était centrale.
- 42 Robin Nelson, *State of Play*, cit. p. 4.
- 43 Cf. Sarah Cardwell, *Is Quality Television Any Good ?*, cit.

*THERE'S NOTHING LIKE AN ENGLISH SUMMER, IS THERE? EXCEPT AN ENGLISH WINTER. DOWNTON ABBEY, A BRITISH CULT TV SERIES AND ITS FANDOM*

Lucia Tralli, Università di Bologna

*Abstract*

The British TV show *Downton Abbey* is a significant case – with its unprecedented and unexpected worldwide success – in a more general evaluation of the contemporary media environment, and of European TV productions in particular. This article explores the *Downton Abbey* “phenomenon” through a survey of its fans’ online activities. The first introductory part of this essay focuses on the concept of Cult TV Show and its possible application to this peculiar product. The second part extensively discusses *Downton Abbey* fans’ online activities, monitored from August to September 2012. This part is focused on five different factors of the series identified as those that mainly raised the interest and approval of the fans. Finally, the last part of this article draws some conclusions about the global nature of *Downton Abbey* fandom and about the series status as “mainstream cult.”

---

The award-winning, critically acclaimed period drama *Downton Abbey*, created and written by Academy-Award winner Julian Fellowes, tells the story of the aristocratic Crawley family and their many servants, all living in the beautiful countryside estate, Downton Abbey. Set over a time period that extends from the sinking of the Titanic – which opens the first episode – through the First World War – encompassing the second season – to the Roaring Twenties in the third season, the show revolves around upstairs-downstairs dynamics, telling the compelling stories of characters that face a world that is rapidly and permanently changing. With the third season’s premiere in the UK collecting an average of 9 million viewers,<sup>1</sup> the astonishingly high ratings in the US giving the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) its highest ratings in years,<sup>2</sup> the series’ enormous success in over 100 countries and its listing in the Guinness World Records as the most critically acclaimed show on television of 2010, *Downton Abbey* can easily claim its inclusion in the realm of cult TV. But what is so compelling about the lives and tragedies of the Crawley family and their estate? Producers, writers and even media commentators were apparently surprised by *Downton*’s enormous success which exceeded all expectations.<sup>3</sup> We have decided to explore this series from the fans’ point of view, trying to map their online activities and focusing on features of the series they seem to appraise as valuable of their time and attention. As a result of this survey, we have identified some factors of interest among *Downton* fandom and we will describe in detail the main

ones: the Romance factor, the Dowager factor, the Writing factor, the Historical/Retro Fashion factor and the Silliness mode.

## A British cult TV show

Before starting to dig into *Downton*'s fandom, we want to give some words on the definition of the cult TV show and how it could be relevant to the aims of our investigation.

Cult media, its very definition and its fandom have been the core of a longstanding branch of studies<sup>4</sup> devoted to understanding what defines cult media and what differentiates them from “normal” media. We are exploring a scenario in which *Downton Abbey* has been claimed to be “part of our culture” and “one of the TV shows that our generation will remember,”<sup>5</sup> thus some parameters specified by cult media studies could be very useful for guiding our survey.

Much research on cult television series tries to determine the “cultness” of a show or film by starting from its inner characteristics as a text, following the path traced by Umberto Eco's famous definition:

*[A cult work] must provide a completely furnished world so that its fans can quote characters and episodes as if they were aspects of the fan's private sectarian world, a world about which one can make up quizzes and play trivia games so that the adepts of the sect recognize through each other a shared expertise. Naturally all these elements [...] must have some archetypical appeal.*<sup>6</sup>

As we will see, the factors that captivate fandom's interest in *Downton Abbey* can be connected to inner aspects of the show as a text, such as characters and plot, or setting and costumes: *Downton* proves to be a very furnished world indeed, one in which fans can stroll around and pick up what they like.

Roberta Pearson and Sarah Gwenllian-Jones, in their recent co-edited volume, *Cult Television*,<sup>7</sup> point out that: “an understanding and definition of cult television must be predicated on the full circuit of communication, that is, texts, production/distribution, and audiences.”<sup>8</sup> In their opinion the visibility of cult programs: “arises from the distinctive practices of cult television fans, which include the formation of loose interpretative communities and the production of tertiary texts.”<sup>9</sup>

As for audience visibility, *Downton Abbey* has surely engendered quite a vast active fandom. Although the show gained some attention in the media for “eccentric” fan activities, like the costume dinners organized by *Downtonians* for communal viewings of the show,<sup>10</sup> the majority of fan communities are mostly “invisible” and “common” – those will be the core of our focus.

As for the general context, in the last two years the media hype around *Downton* has been massive – in spite of a meager promotional campaign from networks<sup>11</sup> – and has attracted more and more viewers to the show, encouraging a collective experience that brought back “the sense of anticipation we felt about watching television again.”<sup>12</sup> The term “cult” has been widely applied to this show in newspapers, magazines and public discourse: many articles define it as a “phenomenon,”<sup>13</sup> a “must-see TV show”<sup>14</sup> and it has been listed on the British *CultBox* website alongside other longstanding fan favorites like *Doctor Who*.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, we cannot neglect that part of the series' success outside the United Kingdom is due

to its “Britishness.” The “British media frenzy,” as Francesca Coppa defines this concept in describing the origins of American fans (of British television?),<sup>16</sup> started long before *Downton* and has roots in more than just television, as the enormous success of every Jane Austen film adaptation has confirmed. Undoubtedly, *Downton* benefits from a sort of “British thrill” that has caught television audiences, although it is certainly not the only successful English TV show now being praised all over the world. Both longstanding cult show *Doctor Who*, in its latest “re-incarnation” (2005-), and the latest reboot of a mythic figure of English literature, Sherlock Holmes (*Sherlock*, 2011-), are at the moment included among the “must-see” TV shows. However, while the majority of these shows pertain to the sci-fi or mystery genre, *Downton Abbey*, as a “classic” period drama, is indeed a very unusual series to become cult TV.

PBS has been the American provider of British media from the mid-1970s. Its long running series *Masterpiece*, which hosts *Downton*, has been transmitted on the network for 40 years and features mostly “heritage” films and TV shows. With its highbrow quality of script, acting, and costumes, *Downton* appears to be not so distant from the miniseries and TV films that *Masterpiece* has been airing in the US to mixed results. However, not only was *Downton*’s success unprecedented in the history of the network, but its global appeal seems confirmed by outstanding ratings in almost every country in which it airs.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the series managed to engage a young audience, a first for this kind of genre.<sup>18</sup>

The enormous success of this series brings us to a crucial element regarding the definition of cult media: the “niche vs. mainstream issue,”<sup>19</sup> with cult TV usually diverging from the latter. As Matt Hills argues in *Mainstream Cult*, an essay dedicated to *Doctor Who*,<sup>20</sup> the “mainstream vs. niche” audience is indeed a factor considered by many to be of vital importance in defining what a cult (TV show) is given the term’s origin in the milieu of the fantasy and sci-fi genre, always deemed to be the realm of a geek and subcultural audience.

Therefore, it is difficult to understand how a product can be “cult” and at the same time attract millions of viewers, which is the case for both *Doctor Who* and *Downton Abbey*.

It is in regards to such a contradiction that it has become challenging to simply address series such as *Doctor Who* and *Downton Abbey* – which attract millions of viewers – as cult TV, for their “cultness” does not always fit into what we have seen as cult media parameters.

## Fandom under the lens

Our survey took place from the last week of August till early September 2012, a very busy period for *Downton* fandom awaiting – and then commenting about – the third season, which premiered in the UK on 16 September 2012.

In the matter of fandom research, we believe, paraphrasing Tisha Turk words,<sup>21</sup> that while the special cases of fan activity are often poignant and understandable outside fandom, it is the more typical and ordinary fan activities, and their numbers, that can really give us meaningful insights to and help us trace significant patterns and trends within fandom.

Methodologically speaking, we chose to adopt a mixed strategy of quantitative and qualitative analysis in order to effectively map the field of the English-speaking fandom. In some cases, we could use tools for data scraping and collecting that provided us with samples and measurable

LUCIA TRALLI

data.<sup>22</sup> In other cases, this kind of analysis was impossible – especially for Tumblr blogs and posts.<sup>23</sup>

In our survey we have not made, and in many cases could not make, any geographical distinction regarding *Downton* fans: with the notable exception of the live-tweet feed that was mostly composed of UK Twitter fans following the third season's premiere on TV, most activities could have been pursued from any place in the world, hence confirming the transnational nature of *Downton* fandom.

We tried to map a large range of activities: from the well-established, such as fansites, to the most recent, such as Tumblr; from the most immediate, such as live-tweet comments during the airing of an episode, to the most time consuming, such as fanfictions and fanvideos. While some results are strictly connected to the moment under observation, such as Twitter feed and blog posts, results from fanfictions and fanvideos are ascribable to a longer lapse of time. Through this intricate scenario of fan reactions and responses to the show we hoped to provide a veritable image of the multilayered framework implemented by our convergent mediascape, one that seizes on “the new eases of opportunity brought about by digital technologies, broadband internet and the wider set of technologies and internet uses clustered under the ‘Web 2.0’ umbrella.”<sup>24</sup>

Given the daily traffic on Tumblr (around 300 posts per day tagged #DowntonAbbey plus dozens for other tags referencing the show) and backlinks by other websites and blogs, we estimated Tumblr to be pivotal for *Downton* fandom's activities and decided, during the period mentioned above, to daily observe the website for collecting data for our survey.

As for fansites, once one of the most common fan activities on the web, we have retrieved very few (only 20) and those lacking a very high visit rating. In the matter of fanfiction, we considered two different portals, fanfiction.net and archiveofourown.org, selected for their longevity and importance among the fans. Using tags and descriptions to identify and classify the texts, we sampled 2108 stories (about *Downton Abbey*). We collected a sample of 837 fanvideos on the videosharing portal *YouTube*, sorted by using tags and keywords. As for Twitter, we considered two different kinds of activities: on one hand we observed the fanmade profiles of characters of the show and, on the other hand, we monitored the live twitter feed during the UK third season's premiere, collecting and analyzing a sample of about 22,000 tweets.<sup>25</sup>

### *Everyone goes down the aisle with half the story hidden. The Romance factor*

One of the main factors of fan interest in any film or show is frequently the romance, the love stories between two or more characters. If these love stories are written in the actual text, they are defined “canon;” if the joining of characters into a couple is only a fantasy of the fans, it represents a “non-canon” pairing. In the world of *Downton* there are three main canon couples for whom the audience roots: Lady Mary Crawley, the eldest daughter of Earl Grantham, and Matthew Crawley, the designated heir of the estate; Lady Sybil Crawley, the youngest and rebellious sister, and Tom Branson, the chauffeur for the family, the interclass and scandalous couple; and Anna Smith, head housemaid, and John Bates, Lord Grantham's valet, the downstairs couple.

The main concern of fanvideos is without a doubt Mary and Matthew, the most beloved – and *vidded*<sup>26</sup> – couple, with their classic “will they, won't they” plot, complicated by patrimonial is-



### THERE'S NOTHING LIKE AN ENGLISH SUMMER, IS THERE?

sues, severe war injuries and other unfortunate love interests getting in the way. 365 out of 837 videos created by *Downton Abbey* fans focus on this couple, with an overall counting view of about 3,000,000 visualizations, followed by Sybil and Branson with 136 videos and Anna and Bates with 44. Moreover, 40 videos are dedicated to all the three couples together, in montages that also show scenes of other “minor” pairings. With an overall of 585 videos about couples, romance is the most addressed topic in *Downton*'s fanvids.

In both fanfiction portals the majority of stories are classified as “romance:” 163 out of 374 on archiveofourown.org (95 about Mary and Matthew), and 1437 out of 1734 on fanfiction.net (414 about Mary and Matthew, 252 about Sybil and Branson and 164 about Anna and Bates). In the context of fanfiction, which more easily permits fans to speculate and indulge in non-canon stories, we have also a considerable group of stories about non-canon couples such as Mr. Carson, the butler, and Mrs. Hughes, the head housekeeper. On fanfiction.net there are 220 stories dedicated to this non-canonical pair, almost as many as those dedicated to Sybil and Branson.

On Twitter, via fanmade accounts, we can witness some (fan-made) romantic interactions. Usually the majority of posting activity occurs between episodes: fans love to recount the parts of the story that happen off screen through these Twitter profiles. For example, the fanmade @Lady\_M\_Crawley and @CaptainCrawley exchanged tweets regarding Mary and Matthew's honeymoon in France, which happened entirely offscreen between the first and second episode of the third season.<sup>27</sup> Their long awaited wedding was one of the main storylines of the premiere and one of the main topics during the live-tweet (3000 tweets). The high excitement of fandom for this event can be summarized by user @sophie\_gadd: “This is like the royal wedding all over again.”<sup>28</sup>

### *I'm a woman, I can be as contrary as I choose.* The Dowager factor

One of the most important, and most beloved, assets of *Downton Abbey*, in the eyes of its fandom, is Lady Violet Crawley, Dowager Countess of Grantham, portrayed by the legendary Dame Maggie Smith. Mother of the Earl of Grantham and *grandmama* of the three Crawley sisters, her character is a true fan favorite. Her caustic and abrasive spirit, her unsinkable respect for English traditions and old-fashion aristocratic life style, but, most of all, her fulminating one-liners that spare nobody (nor our titles for this essay and its paragraphs) outline a complex character that apparently everyone in the fandom loves to the core. It's not by chance that the most seen fanvideo posted on *YouTube*, with more than 500,000 views, is a montage of her most memorable quotes from season 1, *Downton Abbey: Top 10 Maggie Moments*.<sup>29</sup> Only five videos, among the 837 we have gathered, are dedicated to this character, but they alone collect over 1 million of views.

In the fanfiction area, there aren't many stories written exclusively about her. Still her character is listed in almost every fanfiction as a side character. This can confirm her status as one of *Downton*'s most beloved inhabitants, one that *must* be present in the stories told about this world.

There are multiple fanmade Twitter accounts about the Countess<sup>30</sup> and during live-tweets many users simply re-tweet her lines. During the premiere about 1000 tweets referred directly to her character, mostly cherishing her return on the screen.

*You'll find there's never a dull moment in this house.* The Writing factor

*I love it because it's a posh soap-opera written by a poet.  
It brings together my love for plausible-but-unlikely sentimental scenarios,  
huge ensembles and great writing.<sup>31</sup>*

The series' writing, the storylines, and their portrayal by the actors appear to be an important element of interest for fans. As Mark Jankovich and Nathan Hunt argue, fans' "persistent interest in scripts and the ways in which they develop characters and story lines shows the insistence on literary values, as does the concern with the devices and techniques of storytelling."<sup>32</sup> These values are an instrument in the eternal struggle of "real" fans to position themselves against "despicable" inauthentic commercial media and anti-fans.

This interest can be located, on one hand, in the story arch of every character, and, on the other, in the ensemble of events. Much attention is given, for example, to the events of the First World War that absorb every episode of the second season and affect almost every character. In the general commentary about the series, both on Tumblr posts and on Twitter, the series' "great writing" is usually stressed and endlessly cited by fans. During live-tweets many users praised the quality of the show and its writing: "*Downton Abbey* is quality TV!,"<sup>33</sup> "Julian Fellows, you are a genius. Episode one of *Downton Abbey* was divine from the first scene to the last #ScreenwritingGenius."<sup>34</sup> In the days after an episode aired, half of the Tumblr posts discussed the faults and credits of the plots and the authors' development of the story, criticizing quite harshly any unwanted element.

In our sample, 144 fanvideos, having almost a million views overall, can be linked to this kind of interest. Some are recaps of entire episodes or seasons.<sup>35</sup> Others focus on general themes of the series, usually on an emotional level, like "regret" or "forgiveness."<sup>36</sup> Many are tributes to the ensemble of the cast, but there are also 36 character vids, videos that focus on a single character story.

Besides the couples and Lady Violet, *Downtonians* usually show a very broad interest for each character: although the series has a large cast, all the minor characters have enough screen time to make the audience feel attached to them. The one most discussed is probably Thomas Barrow, the scheming footman. Aided by his accomplice, O'Brien, Thomas is the only evil character in the show. The fact that he is portrayed as a closeted homosexual and a "troubled soul" enhance his appeal. The interest in his figure is clearly demonstrated by the fact that one<sup>37</sup> of the only two videos dedicated to his character has collected about 350,000 views, "classifying" it as the second most viewed video of all *Downton Abbey*'s videos. Thomas is quite popular also in fanfictions, especially in the *slash* categories.

*What is a week-end?* The Historical/Retro Fashion factor

*It feels like such a different period drama to any others that have been before,  
kind of more updated. The characters are brilliant,  
such amazing storylines. The setting of the house is gorgeous!!!  
The costumes, the hair!<sup>38</sup>  
I wish I was born around the time of Downton Abbey I love all the dresses, houses and cars.<sup>39</sup>*

## THERE'S NOTHING LIKE AN ENGLISH SUMMER, IS THERE?

We can easily apply to *Downton* what Andrew Higson asserts are the pleasures of so-called British heritage films:

*These films are set in the past, telling stories of the manner and proprieties, [...] in carefully detailed and visually splendid period reconstructions. The luxurious country-house settings, the picturesque rolling green landscapes of southern England, the pleasures of period costume [...] are among the more frequently noted attractions of such films.*<sup>40</sup>

A pivotal part in fan fascination in *Downton Abbey* is without a doubt its historical setting, the first two decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Through the series, the contemporary audience can witness a period of disruptive changes and innovations in history, a far away world transforming into something more similar to the contemporary world, an occurrence audiences can easily empathize with. As Claire Monk states in her longstanding research on both off and online<sup>41</sup> heritage film audiences, there are recurring pleasures and interests that people display regarding these products. One is the “value of authenticity,” the accuracy of the historical aspects of the story. In *Downton*, fans are clearly fascinated by these aspects, from the First World War, to the rules, manners and etiquette of the Edwardian society that have such a huge impact on the development of the storylines. Alongside posts and discussions about these features of the series,<sup>42</sup> there are also websites dedicated to the series’ historical period.<sup>43</sup>

On the other hand, Monk insists on the “quality value,” which can be epitomized by fans’ engagement with the visual aspects of the films. In *Downton* elements such as settings, decor, period furniture and objects and, mostly, fashion, are invaluable assets that arrest the nitpicking attention of fans. We could even affirm that the continuous exchange of images and GIFs on Tumblr can be entirely considered a general appraisal for *Downton*’s visual pleasures, especially the costumes. Fans are quite obsessed with the female cast’s outfits and frocks: they daily post sets of pictures of a specific dress or the costumes of a character during an episode. Sometimes, they engage in background research the vintage pieces used by the costume department. There is even a blog dedicated solely to the lamps used in the show with references to actual antiques.<sup>44</sup>

There are specific Tumblr blogs dedicated to the show’s fashion, such as [downton-is-life.tumblr.com](http://downton-is-life.tumblr.com) and [styleatdownton.tumblr.com](http://styleatdownton.tumblr.com). On *YouTube*, there are 44 tutorials made by fans on how to reproduce the look, makeup and hairstyles of the Crawley sisters. During the live-tweet of the premiere many tweets were dedicated to Lady Mary’s wedding dress and about 1000 tweets referred directly to fashion: “I just love the period clothing on Downton Abbey. Makes me feel under-dressed just watching it!”<sup>45</sup>

### *Life is a game where one must look ridiculous.* The Silliness mode

Lastly, we want to point out an aspect that is not linked to a specific factor of interest but is more a “modality” of fan behavior. During the last twenty years of the fan studies debate, presented as a semiotic resistance to the top-down content imposed by “The Powers That Be”, the other modes by which fans interact with their object of affection have often tended to be neglected. One is what we have called the Silliness mode. Fans’ appraised encyclopedic knowledge and expertise about

their favorite show, and their ability to handle its intra-textual and meta-textual elements, can also be found in more whimsical and spirited activities made just for fun.

In the case of *Downton* we have blogs that feature the adventures of puppet-versions of characters as Mr. Bates ([everyonelovesavalet.tumblr.com](http://everyonelovesavalet.tumblr.com)) and Mrs. Hughes ([mrshughesadventures.tumblr.com](http://mrshughesadventures.tumblr.com)) pictured “on tour” in different locations.

There are any kind of mash-up blogs, from *Telegrams from Downton*, that combine pictures of *Downton* characters and sexually explicit text messages, to a long list of blogs that mash-up *Downton* with other television series such as *Abbey of Thrones*, *Downton Greendale*, *Arrested Downton*, and so on.<sup>46</sup> The same principle of playfully combining elements can be seen in fan-videos that mix content from the series with other media text or that play with genre conventions and codes. Among the most viewed fanvids we can find a *Downton Abbey-Mean Girls Trailer*,<sup>47</sup> and several *Downton Abbey* horror/suspense videos<sup>48</sup> that build alternate narratives for the show.

Maybe the most peculiarly bizarre activity of all is the “Free Bates” movement.<sup>49</sup> It started at the end of season 2 when Mr. Bates was convicted for a murder he did not commit. Fans built and promoted the liberation campaign first with graphic manipulations and GIFs, then with actual merchandise such as signs to be used during marches, mugs and t-shirts with “Free Bates” printed on them. The campaign rapidly went viral as members of the cast started to wear the “Free Bates” pins and t-shirts in public events.

*Don't be defeatist, dear, it's terribly middle class. My fandom is better than yours*

We have conducted this survey trying to find what – from a fan’s perspective – differentiates *Downton* from other shows and what peculiar features attract so many viewers to this “normal classic period drama.” Still, our research did not stumble upon any activity or fan behavior that might be considered exclusively pertinent to this show and its fandom. *Downton*’s fans engage in many kinds of fanworks and make extensive use of every digital tool they might have access to. In opposition to other viewers or the so-called “anti-fans,” *Downtonians* defend the qualities of their beloved *show*, its script, its author and its actors with passionate arguments and engage in playful and quirky activities that are signals of their familiarity with the text. But, as stated above, such enhanced interest is not limited to *Downton*’s fandom and is noticeable in most contemporary TV-series fandoms, especially those that can benefit from an “historical setting.” Doubtless *Downton*’s creators and show runners have managed to build a truly solid product, which has both a fortunate and carefully crafted intersection of features and pleasures largely due to its “heritage status.”

So, how can *Downton*, a superb production yet hardly different than many series airing nowadays, be significant in a more general evaluation of the contemporary television environment and, specifically, of European productions? Could its situation throw some light on the current condition of a globally growing media environment and fandom?

In the *Downton* case we have different national broadcasting conditions and timing worldwide. For example, in the US, season 3 aired in January 2013, more than three months after the UK premiere. However, if we observe Tumblr blogs and posts, this delay did not seem to bother US fandom which obviously watched the third season by other means (peer-to-peer downloading as well as live-stream and streaming links online). Every Sunday, UK’s “Downton Day,” during the

### THERE'S NOTHING LIKE AN ENGLISH SUMMER, IS THERE?

hours preceding the show, the flow of posts on Tumblr is filled of live-stream links posted by users for the behalf of non-UK viewers. In Italy, the first season was broadcasted after a considerable delay in the spring of 2012, almost a year and a half later, on a minor channel, and virtually not advertised. The episodes aired together two per evening and in some cases were even shortened. The ratings were extremely low and the second season has not aired yet. However, even if viewers should be one season and a half behind, and so far exposed to a censored and mutilated version of the series, Italy has a particularly active Italian online-fandom. A young Italian woman runs some of the most viewed and important websites for *Downton* fandom, such as [downtonline.com](http://downtonline.com) and [michelle-dockery.com](http://michelle-dockery.com). There are Italian blogs and a website ([downtonabbeyfansite.net](http://downtonabbeyfansite.net)) dedicated to the series, and many widely viewed fanvideos have been made by Italian vidders.

This situation is, again, by no means different from other acclaimed series and is a symptom of a paradigm of TV watching that has already changed forever: fandom is no longer linked to its country's regular broadcasting network as the only provider of the object of its affection. And, especially for young audiences, the series geographical origin does not make any difference when it comes to the consumption and appreciation of the product, nor does it affect these viewers' involvement within the fandom.

Some last remarks about *Downton* as cult TV-series.

Our findings regarding *Downton* fandom proves the series to be a “commercially driven TV drama which self-consciously draws on discourses of authorship, sophistication, and quirkiness which have been more traditionally linked to cult TV in its telefantasy mode.”<sup>50</sup> Hills argues that:

*concepts of “cult” and “mainstream” have started to break down and coalesce into new patterns of cultural meaning. Fan activities such as online posting and speculation, fiction-writing based on the originating TV show's characters, and textual interpretations revolving around specific characters and relationships, have all now begun to revolve around what might otherwise be thought of as “mainstream” TV shows.*<sup>51</sup>

While “elements of ‘cult’ and ‘mainstream’ TV are increasingly being re-articulated,” we can draw from this a new “way of thinking about the new-media-driven rise in fan activities surrounding shows that would not conventionally have been thought of as ‘cult’.”<sup>52</sup> Through this perspective, we might be able to clarify *Downton Abbey's* peculiar positioning in the cult media context and consider it a good example not only of the progressive fading of boundaries between niche fan activities and mainstream media consumption, but also of the emergence of a new kind of “Mainstream Cult Television,” one that benefits from increasingly fewer geographic limitations.

- 1 Georg Szalai, “Downton Abbey’ Season Three Debut on U.K.’s ITV,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, 17 September 2012, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/downton-abbey-itv-uk-third-season-debut-ratings-399908>. All the internet links cited throughout this paper have been last visited on 8 October 2012.
- 2 Tim Kennealy, “Ratings: ‘Downton Abbey’ Season 2 Finale Gives PBS Best Numbers Since 2009,” *The Wrap*, 23 February 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/23/idUS106622438720120223>.
- 3 “What’s wrong with everyone in Britain? [...] How did ITV manage it? It is ITV, after all, home of *The X Factor* [...]. ITV does not do period dramas.” See Matt Rudd, “Why Are So Many People Watching *Downton Abbey*?”, in *Sunday Times*, 17 October 2010, p. 6.

- 4 To cite some of the most recent contributions to the field: Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures*, Routledge, London-New York 2002; Sara Gwenllian-Jones, Roberta E. Pearson (eds.), *Cult Television*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2004; Mark Jancovich, James Lyons (eds.), *Quality Popular Television: Cult TV, the Industry and Fans*, BFI Publishing, London 2003; Stacey Abbott (ed.), *The Cult TV Book. Investigating Cult TV Series*, I.B.Tauris, London 2010; David Lavery (ed.), *The Essential Cult TV Reader*, The University Press of Kentucky, Lexington 2010.
- 5 Craig Glenday, Guinness World Records' editor-in-chief, assigning the award for the Most Critically Acclaimed Series of 2010, see <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/8762842/Guinness-Book-of-Records-Downton-Abbey-is-most-critically-acclaimed-show-on-television.html>.
- 6 Umberto Eco, *Casablanca: Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage*, in Id., *Travels in Hyperreality*, Picador, London 1987, p. 198.
- 7 Sara Gwenllian-Jones, Roberta E. Pearson (eds.), *Cult Television*, cit.
- 8 *Idem*, p. x.
- 9 *Idem*, p. xiv.
- 10 Aimee Lee Ball, "Pass the Tea and the Remote and Put on Your Tiaras," in *New York Times*, 18 January 2012, p. E1.
- 11 Its numbers were so unexpected that, for example, PBS had to arrange last-minute marketing strategies to promote it. "'Masterpiece' has stepped up promotions on Facebook and Twitter. [...] 'Masterpiece,' based at Boston's WGBH, can't afford to buy ads, but PBS is doing some advertising for 'Downton,' the only 'Masterpiece' show it is now promoting in that way. Still, come January, growth in the show's US audience will depend on word of mouth from passionate fans." See John Jurgensen, "Can a Costume Drama Keep its Cool?," *Wall Street Journal*, 2 December 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204012004577070653368266084.html>.
- 12 Jill Vejnaska, "'Downton Abbey' Captivates Again: Atlanta Fans Flock to GPB for Peek at Series, Maggie Smith," in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 8 January 2012, p. E1.
- 13 Sarah Jane Griffiths, "The *Downton Abbey* 'Phenomenon'," *BBC*, 9 September 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-19468993>.
- 14 Brian Moylan, "Why everyone in the world would watch *Downton Abbey*," *Gawker*, 9 January 2012, <http://gawker.com/5874387/why-everyone-in-the-universe-should-watch-downton-abbey>.
- 15 See <http://www.cultbox.co.uk/component/tag/Downton-Abbey>.
- 16 Francesca Coppa, *A Brief History of Media Fandom*, in Karen Hellekson, Kristina Busse (eds.), *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, McFarland, Jefferson 2006, pp. 41-59.
- 17 See Neil Midgley, "*Downton Abbey*: The Underdog Bites Back," in *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 September 2011, p. 25.
- 18 "'Downton Abbey' is drawing a considerably younger audience than the 2010-2011 Masterpiece season average. By midway through the second season [...] the teen audience has grown 88 percent," PBS Announces MASTERPIECE CLASSIC *Downton Abbey*, Season 2 Finale Ratings End on a High Note, *PBS press release*, 23 February 2012, <http://www.pbs.org/about/news/archive/2012/downton-finale-ratings/>.
- 19 See Mark Jancovich, Nathan Hunt, *The Mainstream, Distinction, and Cult TV*, in Sara Gwenllian-Jones, Roberta E. Pearson (eds.), *Cult Television*, cit., p. 27.
- 20 Matt Hills, *Mainstream Cult*, in Stacey Abbott (ed.), *The Cult TV Book*, cit., pp. 67-73.
- 21 Tisha Turk, "Some thoughts about typical vs. unusual vids", *Talking with TV*, 16 March 2012, <http://tishaturk.dreamwidth.org/10902.html>.
- 22 YouTube videos and Twitter live-streaming were scraped using an open source network analysis tool for Excel, NodeXL, using specific keywords and tags to obtain relevant search results: <http://nodexl.codeplex.com/>.
- 23 The portal allows to search only by tags and it's not possible to quantify the number of results nor to search blogs by name or topics of interest.
- 24 Claire Monk, "Heritage Film Audiences 2.0: Period Film Audiences and Online Fan Cultures," in *Participation*, vol. 8, no. 2, November 2011, p. 455.
- 25 We have monitored the discussion from two hours before the airing of the show to the end of the episode.

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE AN ENGLISH SUMMER, IS THERE?

- 26 That is to say object of fan-made videos.
- 27 "I must say the south of France is beautiful at this time of year. At least... the view has certainly improved since I was last in the country." Cpt. Matthew Crawley, 18 September 2012, <https://twitter.com/Captain-Crawley/status/248005678021611520>. "Many apologies for the twittergram silence on our honeymoon. The south of France is so beautiful – @CaptainCrawley & I've hardly had the time!" Lady Mary Crawley, 23 September 2012, [https://twitter.com/Lady\\_M\\_Crawley/status/249840104879841281](https://twitter.com/Lady_M_Crawley/status/249840104879841281).
- 28 sophie gadd, 16 September 2012, [https://twitter.com/sophie\\_gadd/status/247446402081361920](https://twitter.com/sophie_gadd/status/247446402081361920).
- 29 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVMtffzbAwk>.
- 30 <https://twitter.com/LadyVGrantham>; <https://twitter.com/DowagerHeardIt>; <https://twitter.com/theladygrantham>.
- 31 Excerpt of a statement made by Tumblr user catchingbananas1, answering the question: "Why do you like *Downton Abbey*?" during the "20 Day Downton Abbey Challenge," 3 September 2012, <http://catchingbananas1.tumblr.com/post/30809884335/downton-abbey-challenge-day-7>.
- 32 Mark Jankovich, Nathan Hunt, *The Mainstream, Distinction and Cult TV*, cit., p. 30.
- 33 Khizzy Guevara, 16 September 2012, <https://twitter.com/KyleKhizzGrayxo/status/247450207942479872>.
- 34 Adam Paylor, 16 September 2012, <https://twitter.com/AdPaylor/status/247451776301797377>.
- 35 stylomatisch, *Downton Abbey (Series 2) – The Perfect Wave*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7Y-CeFVBCpc>.
- 36 DarkAngelVampireOx, *Downton Abbey – Beyond Redemption x*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=id4XMCE-y5E>.
- 37 AmnotMexiCannot, *Thomas ~ Downton Abbey*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wuokxZps5pk>
- 38 amyvs7, 12 September 2012, <http://amyvs7.tumblr.com/post/31414364521/downton-abbey-challenge>
- 39 Danielle, 16 September 2012, <https://twitter.com/poisonouslies/status/247441238758932481>.
- 40 Andrew Higson, *English Heritage, English Cinema: Costume Drama Since 1980*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2003, p. 1.
- 41 See Claire Monk, "Heritage Film Audiences 2.0", cit.; Claire Monk, *Heritage Film Audiences: Period Films and Contemporary Audiences in the UK*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2011.
- 42 Tumblr users frequently reblog and discuss *Huffington Post*'s explanations of the etiquette involved in each episodes, e.g. <http://you-had-me-at-downton.tumblr.com/tagged/Etiquette>.
- 43 E.g. <http://edwardianpromenade.com/downton-abbey-portal/>.
- 44 <http://downtonabbeylamps.tumblr.com/>.
- 45 Hannah Spowart, 16 September 2012, <https://twitter.com/HannahSpowart/status/247426682900869120>.
- 46 <http://telegramsfromdownton.tumblr.com>; <http://abbeyofthrones.tumblr.com>; <http://downtongreendale.tumblr.com>; <http://arresteddownton.tumblr.com>.
- 47 Dawnofthedusk, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pruPAzYPmu0&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pruPAzYPmu0&feature=youtube_gdata_player).
- 48 E.g. Sparallex, *Downton Abbey Horror/Suspense Trailer (Evil!Matthew)*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ODI7n9Icgps>.
- 49 There are several blogs that keep up with the "Free Bates" movement; the most relevant one is <http://mrbateslegal.tumblr.com>.
- 50 Matt Hills, *Mainstream Cult*, cit., p.73.
- 51 *Idem*, pp. 69-70.
- 52 *Idem*, p. 73.





## IMITATION, BORROWING, RECYCLING. AMERICAN MODELS AND POLISH DOMESTIC DRAMA

Sylvia Szostak, University of Nottingham

### *Abstract*

The history of post-1989 Polish serialized fiction falls into two periods. The first, from the 1990s to the mid-2000s, was characterized by heavy American imports. The second, from the mid-2000s up to 2012, is characterized by the gradual disappearance of American productions from the prime time schedules of Polish terrestrial broadcasters, as they turned to domestic products. Despite an increasing self-sufficiency in generating original television fiction content and the erosion of the hegemony of American imports on Poland's TV screens, American programming still plays an important role in shaping Poland's television industry and the fiction programming it produces. This article explores the impact of American programming on the Polish television market in terms of genres of domestic fiction, their narrative conventions and aesthetic qualities. American television, however, is not just mechanically transplanted, as Polish producers adjust foreign ideas to local structures of feeling. The genres that Polish broadcasters produce, as well as the narrative strategies and aesthetic canons of the domestic shows, become a site of negotiation between the American influence and the domestic Polish televisual culture. This article not only explores the myriad ways in which Poland's television professionals borrow iconic elements of American television culture and its programming ideas, but it also illuminates how those foreign elements are transformed into the Polish context.

---

*Imitation is the sincerest form of television.*

Fred Allen

In 2009, one of Poland's internet sites devoted to TV shows created a playful slideshow, which demonstrates how Polish TV series borrow heavily from foreign productions.<sup>1</sup> This is illustrated by 16 examples, each accompanied with a short description, where American TV series are contrasted with their supposed Polish equivalents. According to the site, American shows such as *Ally McBeal* (Fox, 1997-2002), *Fringe* (Fox, 2008-2013), *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-2007) and *The West Wing* (NBC, 1999-2006) each inspired a Polish copycat show. This playful game of associations points to the similarities between Polish and American shows. I invoke it here as it reveals

an important characteristic of the Polish television sector and a recent trend in the construction of televisual imagery in Poland: namely the heavy borrowing of foreign, particularly American, ideas and television formulas.

In the pre-1989 era, the influence of foreign television on the Polish television market was limited, though this changed in the post-Soviet period. Since the 1990s, Poland's TV market has been involved in international audiovisual exchanges – including the importation of foreign, mainly American programming – and thus part of the highly interconnected global television industry. As a result of this internationalisation, the Polish television market opened up to not only foreign programming but to foreign influences as well. After a decade-long reliance on American imports throughout the 1990s, television fiction programming in Poland is increasingly produced for the Polish market by Poland's own television industry. This is revealed by comparison of data from the broadcast schedules of sample weeks between 1998 and 2011 (figs. 1-3).

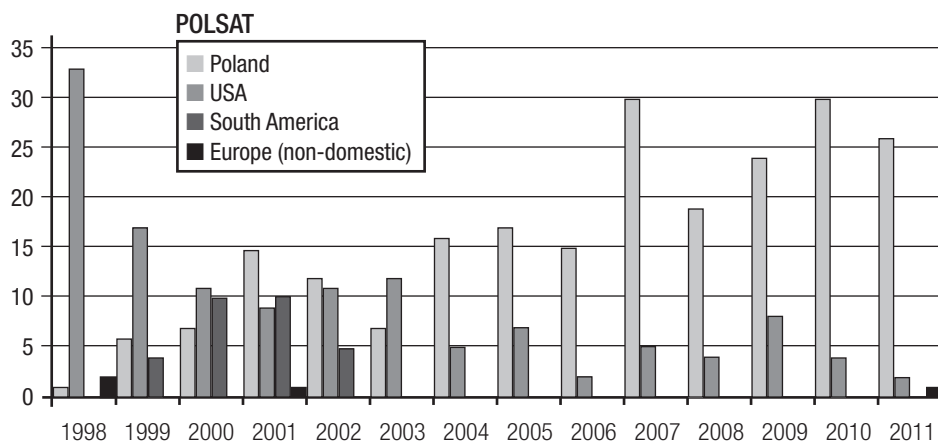


Fig. 1 – Number of fiction series episodes by origin on Polsat, sample weeks 1998-2011, 4pm-11pm (*Tele Tydzień*, 1998-2011)

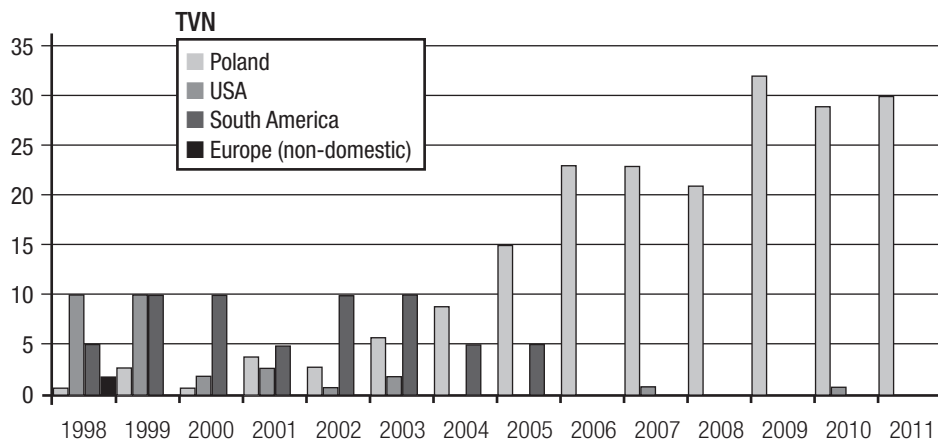


Fig. 2 – Number of fiction series episodes by origin on TVN, sample weeks 1998-2011, 4pm-11pm (*Tele Tydzień*, 1998-2011)

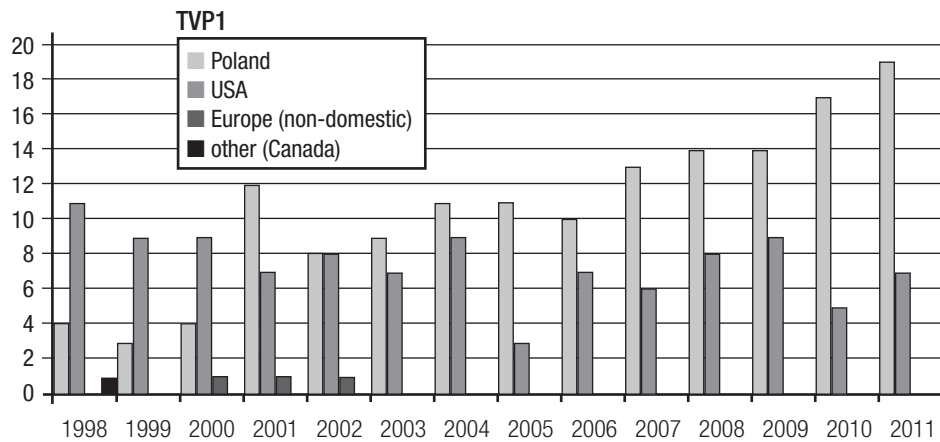


Fig. 3 – Number of fiction series episodes by origin on TVP, sample weeks 1998-2011, 4pm-11pm (*Tele Tydzień*, 1998-2011)

For Poland's three terrestrial free-to-air broadcasters – public service one TVP1 and its two commercial counterparts, TVN and Polsat, the 2011 sample week from the September schedule, representing high season for television in Poland, demonstrates an overwhelming dominance of local fiction over American product. TVP1 significantly increased its domestic fiction output from 4 episodes of domestic fiction in the sample week of 1998 to 19 in 2011. A similar shift occurred in both of Poland's commercial terrestrial broadcasters. In the sample broadcast week of 2011, out of 29 serialized scripted episodes broadcasted by Polsat, as many as 26 were of domestic origin, and only two were American imports. A similar trend is pronounced on TVN, Poland's second commercial broadcaster, whose entire scripted fiction output in the 2011 sample week (30 episodes) was of domestic origin.

Poland's broadcasters are not unique in their move from importation towards domestic production: it is a successive stage of development and business strategy for the growth of a channel. In their early years, channels turn to importation as there was insufficient domestic production, but in time they generate new audiences and profits enabling them to produce in-house. The case of Poland's commercial broadcasters supports observations by Jeanette Steemers, made with Western Europe in mind, that "American imports have often been important for the introduction of commercial television, but as markets mature and produce more domestic content, American programming is not always necessary to continue the commercial model."<sup>22</sup> It remains true for Poland also, as elsewhere in Europe, that as the broadcasting market matures, it will rely less on imports and more on domestic product.

Poland in this instance reflects the same trends that occurred in Western European countries in late 1990s. This trend holds for all imports, including American fiction series, which "although still plentiful increasingly occupy a more marginalised position in the schedule."<sup>23</sup> Steemers continues that "US series are now often restricted to daytime or late-night slots on the main free-to-air channels in Germany, Spain, France and Italy."<sup>24</sup> Similarly in Poland, American fiction series have not completely disappeared from the broadcast schedules of Poland's terrestrial broadcasters. American shows continue to be imported but they are migrating to daytime or late-night slots

and from the Polish high season in the autumn and spring months to less competitive winter and summer periods.

The move towards domestic programming and the decline of imported programming is usually associated with the position that local content has greater resonance with local audiences. Joseph D. Straubhaar claims that local viewers prefer domestic programming over imported fare because they prefer narratives that incorporate familiar elements, and thus choose “their own cultural products when they can.”<sup>5</sup> Cultural proximity theory assumes “a preference, first, for local, provincial, or national material when available.”<sup>6</sup> Bogdan Czaja, Deputy Programming director at TVN, recognizes the importance of cultural proximity:

*This is how markets work, not only here but elsewhere as well – local content always works better. Viewers prefer shows featuring characters that speak Polish and deal with problems and issues they can relate to. The general truth is that people want to watch Polish series more than the imported content.<sup>7</sup>*

This preference of the Polish audience for local content and the market’s ability to cater to the local viewers’ taste could lead us to believe that TV fiction on Polish TV screens gradually becomes exclusively *Polish*. Tapio Varis reminds us however that “the real social and political impact of imported programs may be greater than might be inferred from the volume of imported material.”<sup>8</sup> Despite the maturation of the production capacity and an increasing self-sufficiency in generating original TV fiction content, it would be naive to speak of Poland’s TV market as being culturally self-sufficient. Foreign programming still plays an important role in shaping Poland’s industry and the fiction programming it produces. But now this impact is pronounced in ways other than the presence of imported content, namely licensed formatting and emulation.

When Polish terrestrial broadcasters began producing domestic fiction programming in the late 1990s and the 2000s they had little experience of producing varied fiction programming. Narrative formulas characteristic for serialized storytelling and associated production modes were completely alien to Polish commercial broadcasters as those only began functioning in the 1990s (Polsat in 1992 and TVN in 1997). It was difficult to find inspiration within national boundaries as TVP (the former state broadcaster, after 1989 transformed into the public service broadcaster) had little experience with series production either, as during its pre-1989 history television fiction was not a priority. In the first instance, Polish broadcasters turned to international scripted formats as those supported the development of the domestic market and helped to boost domestic production. However, fiction formats were attractive to Polish broadcasters for a variety of reasons other than merely being a fast track to local content or a hit show. Formats helped Polish broadcasters introduce new types of fiction programming, and thus learn how to be innovative and eventually create their own local programming content.

This was the case with TVN’s treatment of the telenovela genre. In the late 1990s, the broadcaster was importing South American productions, such as *Esmeralda* (Televisa, 1997), *Rosalinda* (Canal de las Estrellas, 1999), *Ricos y famosos* (Canal 9, 1997-1998), *Por tu amor* (Canal de las Estrellas, 1999), *La intrusa* (Televisa, 2001), *Yo soy Betty, la fea* (RCN TV, 1999-2001) and many others. The network abandoned the telenovela importation in the mid-2000s and decided to produce telenovelas domestically. In order to minimise the risk involved in producing a new genre, TVN decided to go with programming ideas that had proved successful in different markets. And

so TVN commissioned local adaptations of the Columbian series *Yo soy Betty, la fea* in 2008 and 2009, the Argentinean production *Sos mi vida* (Canal 13, 2006-2007) in 2010 and the Venezuelan *Juana la virgen* (RCTV, 2002) in 2011. After these three telenovela adaptations, the time came for TVN's first original production in 2012: *Julia*, which can be considered a crowning achievement after a long period of training, during which the broadcaster learned through adapting the production mode of this particular genre.

Format adaptation was also a way to deal with particular weaknesses that local broadcasters struggled with, which is demonstrated by the numerous sitcom adaptations that have been made in Poland. Sitcoms were first introduced to the Polish mediascape in the 1990s when Polish broadcasters began to rely heavily on this programming type, importing shows such as *Caroline in the City* (NBC, 1995-1999), *Married with Children* (Fox, 1987-1997), *Wings* (NBC, 1990-1997), *The Nanny* (CBS, 1993-1999), *Everybody Loves Raymond* (CBS, 1996-2005), *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* (NBC, 1990-1996) and many others. The reliance on American sitcoms declined towards the end of 1990s, as was the case with American programming more generally. Almost immediately, American sitcoms began to be replaced by those of domestic origin. Polish broadcasters, however, have not succeeded in producing commercially viable original sitcoms, and therefore sitcom adaptation became a long-term solution to fill a programming gap caused by the broadcaster's failure at sourcing original concepts. In 2005 TVN produced a Polish adaptation of the American format *The Nanny*. A year later TVN adapted *Grace Under Fire* (ABC, 1993-1998) and most recently *Everybody Loves Raymond* in 2011. In this instance, scripted formats helped to substitute imported programming with domestic fare that would continue the aesthetic strategies of the imports, marginalizing especially American content in the primetime slots. However, adapting foreign scripted formats is both a difficult and an expensive venture; this has caused Poland's broadcasters to turn towards sourcing more programmes domestically. The Executive Producer in TV Drama and Feature Film Production Department at TVN Dorota Chamczyk explains:

*After our experiences with formatting we now know that adapting can be such hard work, involving so many profound changes to the script that sometimes it does not really make sense to be paying for a format. That is why we started investing more time and effort into our own originally scripted drama.<sup>9</sup>*

This shift toward domestic original production does not mean that foreign television has ceased to impact on Polish television production. Currently, this reliance on international fiction television is not evident through the number of imported series but rather through the impact of foreign television on originally scripted Polish drama. Licensed formatting, where the owners of ideas are acknowledged and the copyright respected, is not the only way in which a network or producer can borrow and recycle programming ideas. In addition to a number of internationally successful formats, which are bought and adapted legally, television executives can appropriate programme ideas without acknowledging their origins or paying royalties. Media critics have argued that this copycat phenomenon, which includes borrowing and modifying other cultural texts to augment local production, is common in the media industries. In fact, Albert Moran claims that "copying and customizing program production knowledge has been ongoing, widespread and persistent over the past 80 years."<sup>10</sup> Michael Keane, Anthony Y.H. Fung and Albert Moran similarly claim that "the reality of today's international mediascape is that television con-

cepts and ideas are swiftly copied, modified and exploited by stations desperate to put together successful programs to keep ratings elevated.”<sup>11</sup> Jeremy Tunstall and David Machin argue that in seeking inspiration “other countries tend to look towards the USA where they see both more channels and also more production.”<sup>12</sup>

The inter-European programme trade is weak as the European countries rely heavily on their own programming and American imports, Therefore, it is especially American programming that has had considerable impact and power in the audio-visual industry in Europe.<sup>13</sup> Today, copying and borrowing are practices that are endemic and even essential to the TV industry in Poland, where American television has become a major source of inspiration for the local television professionals. However, the informal copying practices have derived from the structural conditions of the Polish television industry rather than from any individual misconduct. Interviews with a variety of TV professionals reveal that practices of emulation are not isolated instances but an essential part of work in the Polish TV industry. The television screenwriter Karol Klementewicz understands that the recycling of ideas is an inherent part of the creative industries:

*Everything has already been written in the Bible, and then Shakespeare repeated it. So if you were to write stories that do not resemble anything that had come before it, you would soon realise that you cannot write anything because, when you come to think of it, everything has already been thought of. I think that copying is a natural part of the industry and creative work more generally. Writing my own scripts, I feel that I am inspired by programmes I have watched. This is exactly one of the reasons why I watch so many TV shows – to be able to benefit from it in my own work. I personally think that if something is good, there is no shame in being inspired by it.*<sup>14</sup>

As a direct result of the creation of the commercial sector in the late 1990s, the competition for viewers became crucial to securing the existence of commercial broadcasters and equally important for the partially advertising-funded public broadcaster TVP. As the private sector matured during the 2000s, the three main terrestrial broadcasters (the public TVP and its two commercial competitors – TVN and Polsat) began competing not only with each other, but increasingly also with the newly established thematic cable and satellite channels: AXN, FOX, Universal Channel and others. The cable and satellite sector, including American TV fiction-oriented channels, has been gradually directing the Polish audience away from the terrestrial broadcasters. In 2007 the combined share of the pay TV channels accounted for 20% of the audience share among adults aged 16-49 and the percentage has been increasing ever since: to 24% in 2008, 29% in 2009 and 32% in 2010. In 2010, out of 38 million Poles who had access to television services, 26.6 million had access to pay-TV offerings.<sup>15</sup> As the Polish industry plunged into this heightened competition for ratings, the domestic soap operas produced by TVP since the 1990s and into the 2000s continued to be extremely successful and able to generate impressive ratings.

*Klan* (TVP1, 1997-), the longest running Polish soap opera, averaged 7.3 million total viewers in 2000. Despite a declining viewership, the show still managed to attract a weekly average of 3.1 million viewers in 2011.<sup>16</sup> *Plebania* (TVP1, 2000-2012), another long-running domestic soap, demonstrated a similar tendency of declining viewership from 5.3 million in 2000 to a still remarkable 2.9 million in 2011. Finally, *M jak Miłość* (TVP2, 2000-), Poland’s most well-known soap opera, went from 4 million viewers in 2000 to 7.5 million in 2011.<sup>17</sup> The viewership for

domestic soaps is very impressive, especially when we consider that – in Poland’s TV market – generating an audience of 3 million viewers constitutes a considerable success.

Polish soaps tend to fare better with ratings than other fiction series in Poland and have carved out a loyal audience, but what this type of programming fails to do is to attract the commercial audiences – the advertiser-coveted adult 16-49 demographic. Domestic soaps produced by the public service broadcaster TVP attract mainly female audiences above the age of 50, from rural areas of Poland and urban areas whose population is below 100,000 residents.<sup>18</sup> Recently, the commercial terrestrial broadcasters – Polsat and TVN – have begun to appeal to an audience segment that is both unsatisfied with TVP’s fiction programming and attractive to advertisers, by providing a different viewing experience to that supplied by the studio-based soap operas produced by the public service broadcaster TVP. TVN’s Programming Deputy-Director Bogdan Czaja explains that:

*Local drama allows us to attract an audience that is otherwise difficult to reach. Reaching that audience is a very difficult task [...]. When we make a TV series for the type of audience that we want to reach [16-49 demographics], we need to compete with those really well-made American shows. For those people the point of reference is not domestic soaps, because soaps do not exist for them: when soaps are broadcast they are at work and even if they are not they would not want to watch that type of show anyway. That type of audience has to have content that can endure comparisons with shows like Friends for example, The Sopranos or Desperate Housewives. Those people know those American shows, they like them and they think “now give me a domestic drama, I am willing to watch it but make sure it is better or at least as good as the American shows I know.” Competing with American shows is not an easy thing to do.<sup>19</sup>*

The commercial terrestrial broadcasters, in order to reach the commercial viewers, and prevent the audience from tuning to cable channels, began to emulate American exports by producing more American-style drama. The Polish industry needed an efficient recipe for ratings success and American television programmes and their genres were considered to be excellent models for the production of more competitive programmes.

This article describes the manner in which American television practices are creatively appropriated, thus demonstrating a mode through which American programmes play an important developmental role in the construction of the Polish TV market. The following sections account for the influence of American programming on original Polish prime time drama and investigate the myriad ways in which Poland’s TV professionals emulate iconic attributes of American television, such as aesthetically ambitious *mise-en-scène* and the cultivation of style, as well as American programming ideas, such as genres and storytelling modes. Yet this article examines not only the impact of American texts but also the role of Polish practitioners in negotiating this influence. Building on interviews with the creators of two original Polish prime time dramas, *Lekarze* (2012-) and *Prawo Agaty* (2012-), produced by the commercial broadcaster TVN, this article explores how Polish television practitioners take the elements of American television culture and rework them to fit the local context. This article thus uncovers the strategies of dynamic change operating within the Polish television industry as manifested through the practice of appropriation of attributes of American television.

## American textual models and original Polish drama

Ien Ang claims that the American influence on TV markets nearly everywhere is pronounced as the dissemination of a set of specialised practices, which in television “takes the form of a continuous rehashing of relatively constant formats and genres (e.g. the cop show, the sitcom, the soap opera).”<sup>20</sup> Ang’s observation fits the Polish broadcasting context, where American genres have an increasing impact on the kind of domestic prime time drama produced in Poland. A good example of the generic impact of American television is *Prawo Agaty* (English title: *True Law*) – the first Polish legal procedural drama that premiered on TVN in March 2012 (fig. 4).



Fig. 4 – TVN’s legal prime time drama *Prawo Agaty*. Courtesy of TVN

The series focuses on Agata Przybysz, a successful lawyer, who suddenly loses her prestigious job. As the titular character is forced to abandon her old habits, the series depicts how Agata tries to build her life and career from scratch, while struggling with various legal cases. Bogumil Lipski, the show’s producer, describes the preparation for producing Poland’s first legal procedural drama:

*In working on this project we took other legal dramas as a point of reference, as a point of departure. I first did field research; I looked at the shows our competitors were making. Then I looked at the shows of the genre. I watched several of those. I wanted to rely on Ally McBeal the least actually, to avoid obvious comparisons. I watched The Good Wife because it was the most recent legal drama. I also watched Harry’s Law, and Drop Dead Diva. I watched a couple of episodes of Boston Legal, and classic American movies that centre around legal issues, such as Erin Brockovich, for example. All those shows inspired me and helped me to spot what is important for a legal drama. But it’s not that I methodologically analysed every episode of American drama I watched. Watching it just helped me negotiate my own ideas through watching different things.<sup>21</sup>*

This account highlights how watching American programming can support local producers in the creation of domestic programming. This approach is not an isolated case. In September 2012, the commercial broadcaster TVN premiered its most recent original prime time drama *Lekarze*



(English title: *Medics*) – and thus expanded its programming repertoire with yet another new genre; in this instance the first Polish originally scripted medical drama.<sup>22</sup> The show focuses on Alicja Szymańska, a young and ambitious surgeon, who joins the medical staff of a fictional hospital, Copernicus, in Toruń, northeast of Poland. Dorota Chamczyk – the show’s executive producer – prepared for the task of producing a new genre in a similar way:

*We had different ideas about how to approach that project. One of them was actually to buy the format of Grey’s Anatomy. But neither the public broadcaster nor we [TVN] managed to buy that expensive format. It is a great show, I would love to have writers that could produce such a great script and create a Polish Grey’s Anatomy. Once we decided to produce an original medical drama, instead of adapting a format, I first monitored what type of drama our competitors were producing. Then I have watched all the medical drama out there. Particularly, the American shows such as E.R, Grey’s Anatomy, House M.D., Private Practice, and Nurse Jackie. But I also watched some British ones, but there are not as many British medical dramas as American ones. I watched them but it was not what I was after. I feel that my biggest inspiration was Grey’s Anatomy. I told the people involved in the project, writers included, to watch Grey’s Anatomy as a type of homework. My intention was never to copy and imitate the show, but it was a huge inspiration certainly.<sup>23</sup>*

These examples support the argument that the Polish industry produces fiction programming whose existence is indebted to the generic impact of American prime time dramas. American genres inform the understanding of Polish TV professionals, who learn the new cultural language through watching American television. Gradually Polish producers are able to develop their own versions of textual models from the American television culture. Polish producers thus become active agents in the on-going process of strengthening the existing repertoire of Polish broadcasters with new genres, which are modeled on the American genre traditions (fig. 5).



Fig. 5 – TVN’s medical prime time drama *Lekarze*. Courtesy of TVN/Piotr Litwic

The influence of American programmes on Polish original TV production is not constructed through a straightforward homogenisation, in which cultural difference and diversity are eradicated.

ed. Polish TV professionals recognise that directly copying American elements into Polish reality would not work. Chamczyk observes that what works in an American show would not necessarily work in a Polish one:

*If we were to make a Polish The Bold and the Beautiful without changing the context, this series would surely fail. Polish viewers are willing to accept certain programmes as foreign imports made in the English language, shows like The Bold and The Beautiful, but also more sophisticated American drama. But if you were to copy those directly one to one in the Polish language set in small town Poland, those would not work. You need to introduce profound changes to foreign programming ideas and adapt to the Polish context for them to work.<sup>24</sup>*

This account highlights the importance of the local Polish context in transplanting American television elements. The recognition that American TV forms and ideas need to be indigenized and made to fit the local context determines the degree to which Polish TV professionals can rely on American programming ideas. Despite the fact that Polish practitioners look up to American prime time drama and its genres, American programmes are not imitated, simply because such a direct imitation would not work in the Polish context. Polish practitioners carefully check what aspects of American genres, and American programmes more generally, are workable in the Polish context. This approach is pronounced in the account of Kaja Krawczyk – the head writer for *Prawo Agaty*:

*We all, writers and viewers alike, when we think of court cases we think of the American legal cases, which we got to know through watching American legal dramas and films. When I started writing the script for Prawo Agaty, I realised that what I thought happens in court is what can happen only in American courts. In Poland, the lawyers cannot approach the judge or move around the courtroom, there is no jury, legal cases in Poland drag over long periods of time. So at the beginning I felt a bit hopeless, asking myself “how will I ever write that show?” And then we made the decision to allow ourselves the creative freedom to break some of the basic rules that govern the Polish courtroom. One of the biggest obstacles was the issue of legal language, which in Poland is quite elaborate and complicated. So we knew that we would also need to simplify the language our characters spoke in the courtroom so as not to bore the viewers. In Poland you cannot say “objection,” like in America, but a longer more elaborate legal phrase. There is even a gossip that law students in Poland have watched too many American legal shows and tend to say “objection” which is frowned upon by the professors as this is not the correct legal terminology. There is an anecdote connected with this. I think while shooting the second episode of season 1, Leszek who plays the main lead was tired of repeating the same long Polish phrase over and over and he just burst out “objection,” which was not in the script. The scene did make the cut though. So we faced a lot of practical obstacles connected with what we could and could not do in writing the show and we had to try really hard to make the show work.<sup>25</sup>*

Krawczyk’s statement stresses the fact that the differences between the Polish and American legal systems created unforeseen difficulties for the writer, who initially expected to write scenes similar to those that she knew from the American shows she had watched. Only after beginning the writing process did she realise that that many events she envisioned could only take place in an

American courtroom. Lipski – the show’s producer – encountered similar obstacles and thus was convinced of the necessity to localise the American genre of legal procedural to the Polish context:

*I knew that we would not be able to tell interesting courts stories simply because law and legal proceedings in Poland are very boring, complicated, but more importantly extend over long periods of time. From the beginning, I knew that I would not be able to present the real court cases. I had to simplify the court stories and tell them less literally, putting emphasis on something else. I decided to concentrate on the drama aspect, emotionally resonant dilemmas of interesting people caught up in compelling situations. The American genre of legal drama had to be modified slightly to match the Polish context. For a legal drama to succeed in Poland it has to put more emphasis on the character development and their emotions, rather than the actual legal proceedings. In America they can produce legal dramas the way they do because they have a different legal system.<sup>26</sup>*

Because of the disparities between the Polish and American legal realities, the impact of *The Good Wife* (CBS, 2009-) on the Polish “incarnation” is smaller than one might expect from the accounts quoted earlier. The influence of the American show is in fact limited to the camera work and the structure of the show rather than character or plot imitation. Lipski reports:

*Despite my watching of The Good Wife, you are not going to find any direct references to this show in Prawo Agaty. We used The Good Wife to see how they write their legal cases into the episodes. But not what type of cases they are but rather how they are told. The biggest lesson I took from The Good Wife was how the legal cases were shot. Not who said what but rather how it was filmed. I also noticed while watching The Good Wife, what is important in those legal cases. Sometimes it is the small gestures the characters make. So it was attention to those little details and shooting them well that captured my attention.<sup>27</sup>*

But even emulating the cinematography proved to be a difficult task. Lipski recalls many practical problems he encountered when he began shooting the first episode of his original legal drama *Prawo Agaty* in a similar manner to the blocking patterns from *The Good Wife*:

*Americans have a different layout of their court rooms – only two sides: the judge and the witness sitting beside him, and the defendant and prosecutor on the other, sometimes three if you want to include the jury. The layout of Polish court is different. While shooting the first episode we realised that it simply takes too much time for us to shoot similarly to the way they do in The Good Wife, because we have to position the camera on four different sides. In Poland the defender and the prosecutor are sitting opposite one another, the judge in the middle and the witness opposing him – forming a square. In order to capture the exchanges and the interactions between the characters we had to position the camera in four different spots. It was taking us too much time to shoot like that. So we knew that we had to modify that and simplify the exchanges between the characters. This was very challenging. Americans have to do it from only two perspectives, sometimes three. This was a big lesson for me, as I did not realise that while watching The Good Wife.<sup>28</sup>*

The above accounts demonstrate that the local Polish context can in some instances render direct imitation impossible. However, cultural congruity is not the only factor determining the extent

and character of Polish TV's emulation of its American source material. Polish television professionals that I have interviewed report that another factor determining the limits of innovation in domestic fiction production is the Polish audience's preference for a particular type of storytelling. Chamczyk believes that the problem associated with writing innovative TV drama scripts has to do with the fact that:

*Polish viewers are used to telenovela narration symptomatic of Polish daily soaps produced in the 1990s, which forces us to be very cautious when creating our drama. We have to adjust the parameters of narration to what the Polish audience is used to. I think that we should try to challenge that a bit but we need to build acceptance for experimentation over time. The bottom-line is that our programming experiments should not be revolutionary but rather evolutionary. It should be a gradual process of preparing the Polish viewers for a new type of programme in their own language and context.<sup>29</sup>*

According to Chamczyk, Polish viewers are not ready for too much experimentation in televisual forms and structures of domestic drama and would not accept some American televisual storytelling characteristics. Years of exposure to domestic series such as *Klan* – the longest running Polish soap opera, *Plebania*, *M jak Miłość* and many other Polish programmes that are mixtures of soap opera and telenovela narrative models, have made the Polish audience accustomed to a particular, explicit way of storytelling. Particularly where the extended long-running series allow a lot of space for story development and detailed and elaborate dialogue. Polish producers and TV executives, while seeking to produce new genres, have to adjust the parameters of narration to match local sentiments. Krawczyk explains:

*The pilot of Prawo Agaty was particularly difficult for us. I think we created fifteen different versions before we got it right. It was difficult because in 45 minutes we had to introduce the main character, and pretty much her whole life story. We made the pilot this way because we had to think of the local viewers. In an American series you would not have a pilot episode with such an elaborate exposition and you would probably start with what we made as episode two. In an American series you would start with a legal case episode and you would communicate the background information from the character's life story through some signals and the viewer would accumulate information throughout the season. But the Polish viewer would not accept that. This had an impact on the way the show was scheduled: the first two episodes premiered back-to-back as a double bill.<sup>30</sup>*

Krawczyk's statement testifies to the importance of local tastes, which may define the extent to which Polish producers can use American storytelling models. With the Polish viewer in mind, the creators introduced extensive background information from Agata's life story in the pilot episode, more than one would find in a pilot of an American legal drama, before they could go on to telling law based stories of an episodic nature. The local sentiments had an impact throughout season 1. The viewer preference for telenovela storytelling made it challenging for the creators of *Prawo Agaty* to create the type of narration symptomatic of a legal drama, where plots of a legal nature are interwoven with those relating to the main character's personal life. Due to the nature of such stories, the personal and emotional plots cannot be developed in such detail as they usually are in an extended narrative universe of a soap opera or telenovela. Writing a show with limited personal

plots and striking the right balance between the legal and personal plots was quite difficult for the writers, as Kaja Krawczyk points out “mostly because this is something that the Polish viewer is not used to.” Krawczyk elaborates on that notion:

*When you watch American drama the writing craft is based on showing character relations in a simplified but not reductive way, by showing only the turning points and moments. In Poland it is about showing every moment. The viewer is therefore not used to simplified depictions of relationships. We as the writers of Prawo Agaty need to show only the essence of the drama aspect, because we do not have room to develop it in such detail. But this makes the writing process interesting and challenging for me – that we do not make characters repeat the same information over and over again.<sup>31</sup>*

Despite the awareness that viewers in Poland might expect a more detailed and elaborate depiction of the characters’ emotional universe, the creators of *Prawo Agaty* decided to develop the show’s narrative in a manner resembling the American storytelling model characteristic for a legal drama, namely the one that combines the self-enclosed episodic structure of different legal cases with personal plotlines that extend over the whole season. Following this narrative structure meant moving away from the domestic tradition of telenovela story writing with extended serialised characterisation and inclusion of excessive detail not directly relevant for the story development.

Robin Nelson calls the blending of the episodic and the serial a flexi-narrative.<sup>32</sup> This mode of storytelling rewards dedicated viewers by introducing larger arcs of narrative progression but also allows sporadic or new viewers to enjoy the standalone episodes. Jason Mittell believes “this model of television storytelling is distinct for its use of narrative complexity as an alternative to the conventional episodic and serial forms that have typified most American television since its inception.”<sup>33</sup> Recent original Polish TV series, such as *Prawo Agaty* and *Lekarze*, share the formal attributes of this storytelling mode of contemporary American television, where the episodic cases, legal and medical respectively, are complemented with the overarching plots of character accumulation. Lipski reports:

*I wanted Prawo Agaty to have a procedural structure, with new story in each episode. So my basic pre-occupation was how to combine the episodic, case-based structure with the narrative drama arc. And this is what will make people tune in, the drama arc. I do not think the case structure would be enough for viewers to tune in. So it is a hard job to combine the both narrative structures. There is certainly an art to it.<sup>34</sup>*

But *Prawo Agaty* and *Lekarze* are not isolated cases. Bogdan Czaja, TVN’s Deputy Programming Director, recognizes the increasing importance of the blending of the episodic and the serial in Poland’s television market more generally:

*For a mainstream broadcaster the type of fiction that seems to work best is the type that involves episodic form with a narrative arc, but not too serialised. The types of shows that do not seem to work too well are the ones that require continual watching. People’s habits differ, there definitely is a part of audience who are avid viewers but the majority are rather casual ones. So if the show is too demanding and requires watching episode by episode, it does not work. We lose viewers like that. Someone will miss*

SYLWIA SZOSTAK

*an episode or two and if they cannot follow on a casual basis we will lose the audience. So it is best to have a show that, even if it has the continuity across episodes is not too demanding. This is the best recipe for a show nowadays.*<sup>35</sup>

These accounts suggest that a new paradigm of television storytelling is emerging in Poland, with a reconceptualisation of the boundary between episodic and serial forms. New norms of storytelling practice emerge in Poland as Polish practitioners borrow the proven storytelling resources of American television's craft tradition.

As we have seen, American contributions do not erode the importance of the local context in Polish televisual culture. Instead, Polish producers negotiate and rework foreign elements to meet local expectations. Even though local Polish storytellers and producers turn to American cultural products, they always carefully conduct the inevitable modifications so that their programmes resonate with the Polish audience, and thus are more likely to succeed. Therefore the impact of American programmes and their genres on Polish original drama is not pronounced through imitation of particular stories, characters or plotlines – simply because those have to be modified and adjusted to the local context. Thus more often than not, the reliance on American programmes is pronounced in the practices of borrowing and reworking, as we have seen is the case with American genre traditions, rather than resulting in straightforward imitation.

## US Television as a model for visual aesthetics

Exposure to American televisual product has not only influenced the structural language of Polish television culture, namely the generic and storytelling standards, but has also raised awareness of the importance of the visual aesthetics in TV production. Lipski sees the influence of American drama and its standards on his work in ways other than only generic imitation:

*I think that the point is not really about making Polish drama, Polish stories, similar to those from American shows. I think it has more to do with how those American shows are made and to aim for that type of quality.*<sup>36</sup>

In a similar vein, Chamczyk points out that the American product raised expectations when it comes to the visual quality of television drama:

*The American shows that we all have watched made us hope for more. The cinema quality of the American productions, particularly those cable ones is very high. The Polish viewer no longer wants to watch the cheaper, rough-looking programmes but they expect a better quality viewing experience, one associated with American productions.*<sup>37</sup>

American product that dominated the Polish schedules in the 1990s introduced Polish viewers to TV programming of a certain aesthetic quality. As a result, judgments about style and quality among Polish viewers and television professionals alike have increasingly been formed by comparisons to American product, which, as John T. Caldwell argues, emphasises high production

values and the cultivation of style.<sup>38</sup> The dramatic growth of the Polish television market and production sector now allows Polish producers to engage with, and respond to, viewers' expectations by producing original Polish drama that emulates American visual style and its production value. American programming thus provides a model for not only generic conventions but also for visual style as well. What Polish producers learned from American programming is that producing top quality TV drama relies on attention to detail, careful planning and the distinctive use of visual resources; and not just characterisation, dramatic logic and thematic complexity. The visual quality of Polish drama productions now means aesthetically ambitious programming, where different aspects of *mise-en-scène*, such as costume, décor, and properties are prioritised, as well as their organisation and interplay.<sup>39</sup> Lipski provides a detailed account of the significance of *mise-en-scène*, and its potential for expression, during pre-production and shooting of *Prawo Agaty*:

*In a story you are telling in a TV show, everything matters: costumes, props, set design, shots, acting, screenplay. All those have to work well together because if any of those does not, it weakens the show. It was extremely important for me to make all those elements click. It requires a lot of effort to make everything flow nicely together. Making a TV show is a group effort so you have to manage different groups of people and co-ordinate. Every detail matters and so attention to detail is crucial. It makes a huge difference how the main character's flat looks. Everything in this flat should be congruent with who the character is. The Americans know about that, they pay attention to detail and this is what makes their shows special, this is what sets them apart. Take Desperate Housewives for example. If you watch the show, you can recognise where a given scene is taking place even if there are no characters present. The level of detail in each character's house allows you to know exactly who this house belongs to. Every detail is an important part of the show and how it matters. In Poland you do not yet really pay attention to those little things. So it is a matter of aesthetics. I was very sensitive to those visual matters and I wanted to make my creative team aware of all those aesthetic issues as well. First, you have to make things pretty but this is only the first step. Then you need to make sure it matters and means something, contributes to the story. So when you have three characters you need to personalise their workspace, make their houses, workspaces, match the characters and their personalities.<sup>40</sup>*

Chamczyk provides a very similar account of what in her opinion constitutes quality in terms of visual aesthetics when talking about the production of *Lekarze* and gives a sense of how *mise-en-scène*, in her opinion, contributes to the visual style:

*I personally divide shows between the sloppy ones and those that are made scrupulously. And I only want to make shows that are made in a way that is very thorough and meticulous. It is the combination of factors such as set design, photography, lighting but also editing. You cannot see quality as a single factor. The quality has to be built on many different levels, from the script, the cast, creative teams, and the technical aspects. I know that everything matters and I try to pay attention to every single detail as even the smallest element can send signals to the viewer. You can either make use of that opportunity to communicate with the viewer through aesthetic elements or waste it. This is something I work on with our designers and the creative team. It matters where a character lives, what his or her apartment looks like. How their mother looks, whether she cooks home-made Polish dumplings or they eat out. Elements like that have to be included on the level of the script, which I always monitor and then I also try to be*

SYLWIA SZOSTAK

*the person who sees it through on all levels of pre- and post-production as well. Only then does the show become a complete entity. A TV show is not a shipment of nails, but a work of art. Maybe TV art with a small "a" but still art.<sup>41</sup>*

Lipski and Chamczyk's accounts make it possible to believe that Polish TV drama is increasingly seen as a carefully planned product which is becoming increasingly uniform as a result of the growing emphasis on consistency and attention to detail. Polish producers stress the importance of the mediation of narrative by specific audio-visual forms and elements. This emphasis on semiotically rich production design and the foregrounding of the individual elements of what you can see on the small screen, as well as the way that those are organised, have become the markers of quality. This understanding of visual quality in Poland is a result of the influence of American programming, whose visual aesthetics became the new standard in TV series production.

The visual aspect of television production and the quality of what can be seen on the small screen is not only dependent on consistency, attention to detail and *mise-en-scène*. The issues of aesthetics and style are inevitably linked to technology. In order to deliver high production value to television and to produce images that have the organic look and feel of film, TVN recently switched from using the HD Betacam cameras for the Polish domestically produced show *Lekarze* to the state-of-the-art Arri Alexa digital camera, which is gradually becoming the standard in the American television industry. A small sample of American television productions that have chosen to use the Alexa camera system include the following: the HBO television productions *True Blood* (2008-), *Girls* (2012-), and *Game of Thrones* (2011-); Fox's *House M.D.* (2004-2012) and *Bones* (2005-); ABC's *Castle* (2009-), *Pan Am* (2011) and *Once Upon a Time* (2011-); NBC's *Grimm* (2011-), *Community* (2009-); CBS's *Person of Interest* (2011-); The CW's *Ringer* (2011-) and *Supernatural* (2005-); and Showtime's *Californication* (2007-) and *Homeland* (2011-); among many others.<sup>42</sup> TVN chose to work on the equipment that is becoming standard in the American industry to emulate the quality of image of contemporary high caliber American television productions. Chamczyk states that the switch to the new Arri Alexa camera was made to improve the visual quality of Polish TV drama:

*We now work on Arri Alexa cameras, the type of cameras with which the Americans are shooting their TV shows. We no longer use HD Betacam. So we have gone one step further. Why? We did it because we knew that we were making a show, the majority of which will be shot indoors. The set design, the lighting and the shooting equipment can all make a difference. I wanted the experience to be made as realistic as possible. I wanted the hospital we built in our studios to look as real as possible. The quality therefore is very much related to the quality of image.<sup>43</sup>*

US series have affected Polish television drama in relation to visual aesthetics on a number of levels: from the emphasis on aesthetically ambitious *mise-en-scène* and stylistic coherence to technical upgrades. By working on the equipment that is gradually becoming the standard in the American television industry, TVN has taken another step towards emulating the visual aesthetics of American programming. TVN is so far the only broadcaster using this equipment and *Lekarze* the first Polish production shot using the Alexa.



## Conclusion

The instances highlighted in this article identify the vital ways in which American television production practices have contributed to the development of domestic serialised production in Poland. The impact of US drama on local Polish TV culture is visible through the assimilation of American genres, narrative formulae, as well as in the matters of visual style and aesthetics. As a result, some Polish programmes now have content, style, form and cultural cache previously associated only with American imports. What needs to be emphasised, and it is an important point, is that this practice of borrowing and recycling is producing television fiction programmes that have become significant commercial successes for their broadcasters, as both *Lekarze* and *Prawo Agaty* have managed to attract audiences as well as advertisers. Each episode of season one of TVN's prime time medical drama, broadcast between 3 September and 26 November 2012, attracted on average a little above 3 million viewers, giving TVN 23.10% audience share in the 9.30 pm slot among 4+ demographics and more importantly almost 24% share among the 16-49 demographics, making TVN the most popular channel in the late prime time Monday slot. *Lekarze* in fact improved the viewership for the broadcaster in its slot compared with the corresponding period of 2011, when the viewing numbers were lower by nearly 800 000. Additionally, the series managed to attract advertisers, earning 29.3 million zlotych for the TVN network.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, each episode of season one of *Prawo Agaty*, broadcast between 4 March 2012 through to 3 June 2012 on Sunday nights at 9 pm, gave TVN a second place in the given slot.<sup>45</sup> Season two brought the network 26 million zlotych from advertising.<sup>46</sup> Given the success of these shows, both have been renewed for successive seasons. At the time of writing, season 3 of both *Lekarze* and *Prawo Agaty* were in production.<sup>47</sup>

The emulation of particular aspects of American fiction television is not a one-way process of cultural imposition on the *indigenous* Polish culture. Polish producers do not just mechanically transplant American television as the local cultural context is critical in dictating which elements of American television programming should be emulated. While Polish broadcasters refer to American television programmes, they always carefully conduct an inevitable modification to attune their material to the local context. This is certainly visible in the attitudes of Polish industry professionals, who speak of cultural obstacles in recycling American genres and programming ideas. Therefore, the cultural translation of American elements and practices are attractive concoctions of local production context and American templates blended with a unique Polish flavor.

This however opens up a complex question: does a distinctly *Polish* television industry actually exist? The discussion of originally scripted shows of Polish broadcasters and their production context in this article make it possible to believe that, even in the case of originally scripted Polish shows, the boundary between the *foreign* and the *indigenous* is to some extent blurred – as even the shows produced locally, that do not rely on international scripted formats, borrow heavily from American shows. The notion of the local is therefore complicated by the fact that global influences are actively transformed into domestic contexts and disguised as local. Poland's domestic fiction, as discussed in this chapter, supports Ien Ang's observation that "the global and the local should not be conceived as two distinct, separate and opposing realities, but as complexly articulated, mutually constitutive."<sup>48</sup>

This article contextualises Polish TV shows as culturally hybrid forms in which the global and

the local are inextricably intertwined. This leads to the emergence of aesthetics which are labeled and experienced as Polish, but are in fact indebted to American forms, genres and practices. Therefore the character of the local, Polish TV culture and its textual output is not fixed and autonomous. On the contrary, Polish TV drama is interdependent and interconnected: shaped by the domestication of imported cultural goods and audiovisual elements and responsive to international influences. This capacity of Polish television practitioners to successfully localise the American influences questions the basic dichotomies of global-local and imported-domestic, which traditionally anchor the debate on television flows.

Knowledge transfer between academia and media industries is still relatively rare, particularly in the Polish context. Considering the difficulties in accessing first-hand accounts from those working in the media industries, I would like to express my deep gratitude to Dorota Chamczyk, Bogdan Czaja, Kaja Krawczyk, Bogumił Lipski and Karol Klementewicz for their time, cooperation and willingness in contributing their knowledge to this article and my academic project more broadly.

- 1 "Które lepsze: polskie czy zagraniczne?," *aleSeriale*, <http://aleseriale.pl/gid,5281,img,206623,fototemat.html>, last visit 7 January 2013.
- 2 Jeanette Steemers, *Selling Television. British Television in the Global Marketplace*, BFI, London 2004, p. 14.
- 3 *Idem*, p. 150.
- 4 *Ibidem*.
- 5 Joseph D. Straubhaar, "Beyond Media Imperialism: Assymetrical Interdependence and Cultural Proximity," in *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, no. 8, 1991, p. 51.
- 6 Joseph D. Straubhaar, *World Television. From Global to Local*, Sage Publications Inc., Thousand Oaks 2007, p. 27.
- 7 Bogdan Czaja (Deputy Programming Director at TVN) in discussion with the author, December 2011 (my translation).
- 8 Tapio Varis, "Global Traffic in Television," in *Television Journal of Communication*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1974, p. 107.
- 9 Dorota Chamczyk (Executive Producer in TV Drama and Feature Film Production Department at TVN) in discussion with the author, January 2012 (my translation).
- 10 Albert Moran, *Introduction: "Descent and Modification"*, in Id. (ed.), *TV Formats Worldwide: Localising Global Programs*, Intellect Ltd., Bristol 2009, p. 15.
- 11 Michael Keane, Anthony Y.H. Fung, Albert Moran, *New Television, Globalisation, and The East Asian Cultural Imagination*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong 2007, p. 88.
- 12 Jeremy Tunstall, David Machin, *The Anglo-American Media Connection*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999, p. 4.
- 13 For the impact of American fiction television on the European industries see: Ib Bondebjerg et al., *American Television. Point of Reference or European Nightmare?*, in Jonathan Bignell, Andreas Fickers (eds.), *A European Television History*, Wiley-Blackwell, Malden-Oxford 2008; and Jérôme Bourdon, *Imperialism, Self-Inflicted? On the Americanizations of Television in Europe*, in William Uricchio (ed.), *We Europeans?*, University of Chicago Press/Intellect, Chicago-Bristol 2008.
- 14 Karol Klementewicz (Television Scriptwriter) in discussion with the author, December 2011 (my translation).
- 15 Łukasz Szewczyk, "Polska: 26,6 mln widzów płatnej TV," *Media2.pl*, <http://media2.pl/media/73956-Polska-26,6-mln-widzow-platnej-TV.html>, last visit 7 January 2013.

- 16 Daniel Jabłoński (Press Officer at TVP), e-mail message to author, 11 May 2012.
- 17 *Ibidem*.
- 18 *Ibidem*.
- 19 Bogdan Czaja in discussion with the author, cit.
- 20 Ien Ang, *Living Room Wars*, Routledge, London 1996, p. 154.
- 21 Bogumił Lipski (Television Producer and Director) in discussion with the author, March 2012 (my translation).
- 22 It is important to point out that the public service broadcaster TVP has been producing a medical series *Na Dobrze i Na Złe* since 1999. But this programme was initially produced as a format adaptation, only later became to be produced based on original scripts. Therefore, *Na Dobrze i Na Złe* cannot be treated as an original Polish medical drama.
- 23 Dorota Chamczyk in discussion with the author, cit.
- 24 *Ibidem*.
- 25 Kaja Krawczyk (Headwriter for *Prawo Agaty*) in discussion with the author, July 2012 (my translation).
- 26 Bogumił Lipski in discussion with the author, cit.
- 27 *Ibidem*.
- 28 *Ibidem*.
- 29 Dorota Chamczyk in discussion with the author, cit.
- 30 Kaja Krawczyk in discussion with the author, cit.
- 31 *Ibidem*.
- 32 Robin Nelson, *TV Drama in Transition. Forms, Values and Cultural Change*, Macmillan Press, Basingstoke 1997, pp. 30-49. Michael Z. Newman, on the other hand, calls this type of narration a “contemporary scripted prime time serial.” See Michael Z. Newman, “From Beats to Arcs: Toward A Poetics of Television Narrative,” in *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 58, 2006, p. 16.
- 33 Jason Mittell, “Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television,” in *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 58, 2006, p. 29.
- 34 Bogumił Lipski in discussion with the author, cit.
- 35 Bogdan Czaja in discussion with the author, cit.
- 36 Bogumił Lipski in discussion with the author, cit.
- 37 Dorota Chamczyk in discussion with the author, cit.
- 38 John T. Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority In American Television*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick 1995.
- 39 For a detailed discussion of *mise-en-scène* see John Gibbs, *Mise-en-scène. Film Style and Interpretation*, Wallflower, London 2002.
- 40 Bogumił Lipski in discussion with the author, cit.
- 41 Dorota Chamczyk in discussion with the author, cit.
- 42 For a comprehensive list of productions that have used the ALEXA camera system see the manufacturer’s website at “Credits,” *Arri. Digital Cameras*, [http://www.arri.com/camera/digital\\_cameras/credits.html](http://www.arri.com/camera/digital_cameras/credits.html), last visit 7 January 2013.
- 43 Dorota Chamczyk in discussion with the author, cit.
- 44 Michał Kurdupski, “Lekarze hitem telewizji TVN, 29 mln zł z reklam,” *Wirtualne Media*, <http://www.wirtualnemedia.pl/artykul/lekarze-hitem-telewizji-tvn-29-mln-zl-z-reklam>, last visit 7 January 2013.
- 45 Michał Kurdupski, “3 mln widzów ‘Prawa Agaty’, jesienią druga seria,” *Wirtualne Media*, <http://www.wirtualnemedia.pl/artykul/3-mln-widzow-prawa-agaty-jesienia-druga-seria>, last visit 7 January 2013.
- 46 Michał Kurdupski, “‘Prawo Agaty’ straciło widzów. 26 mln zł z reklam,” *Wirtualne Media*, <http://www.wirtualnemedia.pl/artykul/prawo-agaty-stracilo-widzow-26-mln-zl-z-reklam>, last visit 7 January 2013.
- 47 “Telewizja TVN kręci Prawo Agaty 3,” *Wirtualne Media*, <http://www.wirtualnemedia.pl/artykul/telewizja-tvn-kréci-prawo-agaty-3>, last visit 7 January 2013.
- 48 Ien Ang, *Living Room Wars*, cit., p. 153.



## TURKISH TELEVISION DRAMAS: THE ECONOMY AND BEYOND

Cem Pekman, Kocaeli Üniversitesi

Selin Tüzün, Marmara Üniversitesi

### *Abstract*

Following the break-up of the state monopoly on audiovisual media in Turkey in 1990, the commercial television industry quickly became aware of the audience's demand for domestic productions and home-made dramas. Throughout the 2000s, a television drama sector emerged, supplying a substantial amount of dramas not only to the domestic market, but also to a regional audience in the Middle East, Central Asia and Balkan countries. Although the lively market fosters an expanding "drama economy," it still has some structural problems and weaknesses. Yet, the actors of the sector and the authorities are becoming more aware of what the market promises, culturally and politically, in addition to its economic value. Now, the drama industry is often assessed in terms of its "geo-cultural" significance or "soft-power." Big producers even argue that the sector has become a global actor competing with Hollywood and Bollywood. It is a fact that Turkish dramas affect masses in neighbouring regions, reinforcing the "image" of the country and stimulating regional tourism. However, the claim that Turkish drama industry has become a competitive power in the international media market needs further and thorough research.

---

After the early 2000s, a local television industry in Turkey emerged, supplying a substantial amount of television dramas to the lively domestic and foreign markets. Our paper aims to present and discuss the dynamics of this emerging industry. Firstly, we set a brief history to show the relevance of such an emergence with deregulation and commercialization of the audio-visual media in Turkey starting in the 1980s. Our analysis is then followed by an overview of the television drama sector, using available facts, figures, and its main actors, structuring, inter-sectoral relations, impacts and problems. The concluding remarks are on the regional nature of the market and its political, cultural and diplomatic dimensions, where we stress the need for deepening the analyses on the industry's various dimensions. A survey of the still limited literature as well as in-depth interviews with different actors of the industry is conducted for the purpose of this study.

## History and overview

The history of television in Turkey dates back to the early 1950s. A university based television station, İTÜ TV (İstanbul Technical University Television) began transmitting from its campus in İstanbul in 1952.<sup>1</sup> It was a local station, programming once a week for a few hours in the evening, to a very limited number of viewers in the city and to curious groups visiting the studio to watch the programs. Its purpose was predominantly to educate students at the electronics department in “new” television technology. Thus, İTÜ TV not only served to raise the first generation of television staff, but also introduced television and its culture to the middle-class. This service lasted for almost 20 years, until the public broadcasting corporation TRT (Turkish Radio and Television) was founded and its television broadcasts became widespread in the early 1970s. In the meantime, İTÜ TV offered the first studio programming formats such as talk shows, quiz shows, entertainment programs, films and dramas, in addition to occasional live transmission of sports events. However, dramas were live studio replays of popular stage plays and were not in a serial form within the early period of Turkish television.

For another 20 years until the end of the 1980s, television broadcasting remained under the public monopoly of the TRT. The corporation was established in 1964 and started its trial television broadcasts in 1968. However, in the 1970s television increased its reach and became a popular and national phenomenon. The single black and white television channel in the 1970s was embraced by the public while it quickly matured and enriched its programming. Besides usual formats such as news, sports, documentaries, children programs, talk shows and entertainment, television dramas began to appear on the screens. Imported serials such as *Star Trek*, *Mission Impossible*, *Shirley's World* and *The Fugitive* were followed by the first domestic TV drama *Hayattan Yapraklar* (Pages of Life) in 1973, and in 1974-1975 by several others, some of which were adapted from Turkish classics by leading Turkish film directors.<sup>2</sup> Among them, *Aşk-ı Memnu* (Forbidden Love), directed by Halit Refiğ, is particularly significant in Turkish television history: the six episode drama was massively popular, remembered for decades, and also was the first drama that the TRT managed to sell in the foreign market, in 1981.<sup>3</sup> A re-adaptation of the classic novel, this time taking place in the modern-day İstanbul instead of the original 19<sup>th</sup> century setting, was broadcast on a commercial TV channel for 79 episodes between the years 2008-2010, making another success story in terms of domestic viewing and exports.

The 1970s were characterized by right-left ideological conflicts and unstable governments whereas in the 1980s, the neo-liberal policy and its stronger governments were in dominance. In any case, the TRT has always been subject of political struggle and pressure. Nevertheless, by and large the corporation stayed in line with the principles and quality standards of the public service broadcasting during its monopoly (1964-1990). The TRT television also switched to colour transmissions and added a second channel in the 1980s. Although the majority of film and drama programming was dependent on foreign and heavily on American sources, the TRT itself produced a rich variety of TV plays, films and dramas.<sup>4</sup> A strategic move towards commercializing broadcasting came from the government in the second half of the 1980s, with amendments to the TRT law, weakening its public monopoly vested on transmission, programming and production monopolies.<sup>5</sup> In accordance with the amendment, the TRT could begin to buy or commission independently produced programs, which lead to the emergence of a commercial production sector.<sup>6</sup>

Eventually, some larger producers from this sector became associates or program providers of the private broadcasters soon to become operational.

The neo-liberal media policies of the late 1980s quickly resulted in a flourishing of commercial television (and radio) stations by the beginning of the 1990s. Tens of national and hundreds of regional or local television channels (together with thousands of radios) filled the airwaves within a few years. A new law abolishing the monopoly of the TRT and legitimizing and regulating the *de facto* situation eventually came into effect in 1994. In the meantime, and for a couple of years after the law, an unregulated and spontaneous commercial market set up its own rules and mechanisms. In terms of programs other than news and sports, and less costly studio programming, the new channels mostly turned towards cheap imports from the American film market and even cheaper old Turkish movies. It would be possible to argue that the production infrastructure and experience was not compliant with the rapidly growing commercial television sector in these years; however it is hard to claim that there was a substantial demand from the sector for domestic drama productions. The commercial broadcasters preferred the ready-made and safe in the 1990s immature market of strong competition and lower profits. Nevertheless, larger channels screened some popular serial dramas too, some transferred from the TRT and some commissioned to independent or affiliated production companies. These dramas were pretty much reapplying the formulas of the old Turkish movies, especially the “family comedies” of the Yeşilçam era.<sup>7</sup>

In compliance with the cultural proximity theory<sup>8</sup> the Turkish audience preferred national or regional programming over imported competing programs, and the commercial sector became aware of this soon. The warm welcome from the audience for countless screenings and re-screenings of Yeşilçam movies together with the local dramas enabled the television broadcasters and producers to set strategies for reaching the masses in the following decades. The result was quickly obtained: the average number of television dramas broadcast on mainstream national television channels in one week rose from 10 in 1998 to 36 in the year 2000.<sup>9</sup> Throughout the 2000s, this figure stayed between 40 and 50, climbing up to 60 in 2008. Yet by 2010 it was again in the range of the 40s, due to the cost cutting strategies adapted by the channels after the global economic crisis.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, the “new” Turkish cinema which started to rise up by the late 1990s after a long-time crisis, referred to old formulas. Serkan Altunışne, screenwriter of some recent blockbusters produced by Aksoy Film, underlines the Yeşilçam’s influence on their work: “The formula is right, and it is not us who found it... We used the same formula. So there wasn’t such an invention. We grew up with the old Turkish films. The profile of the Turkish cinema audience, his point of view haven’t changed a lot.”<sup>11</sup> Actually, the drama producers borrow heavily from Yeşilçam as well, at times going beyond simply making use of the formulas: a recent trend is to produce the serial drama versions of some Yeşilçam classics, mostly of the melodramas. Programs in this category, namely *Fatmagül’ün Suçu Ne?* (What is Fatmagül’s Fault?, 2010-2012), *Acı Hayat* (Bitter Life, 2005-2007), *Al Yazmalım* (The Girl with the Red Scarf, 2011-2012), *İffet* (Chastity, 2011-2012) proved to be very successful. A similar strategy is evident on the other end since the early 2000s, the movie business has adapted many popular TV dramas to cinema in order to attract loyal audiences to movie theatres. It started with the movie version of *Deli Yürek* (Crazy Heart) in 2001 and continued in the following years with the movies of beloved dramas such as *Asmalı*

*Konak* (The Grapevine Mansion) and *Kurtlar Vadisi* (Valley of the Wolves). These films also had a remarkable box office success.

All of the above examples point at the ever growing symbiotic relationship between television and cinema following the proliferation of commercial television channels in the early 1990's, which mutually shapes the developments in both sectors. The TV drama crews gained experience through advertising, television and cinema sectors, and the technical sophistication of the domestic TV dramas increased considerably, particularly throughout the 2000s. A number of production companies that were initially affiliated with the advertising sector, have produced highly popular movies and/or TV dramas. Zeynep Çetin Erus, in an analysis of the top grossing films between 1996-2005, counted that companies operating solely in the cinema sector could produce only 3 of the 17 most popular films.<sup>12</sup> For instance the movie *Eşkiya* (The Bandit, 1996) which heralded the new era of Turkish cinema was produced by Filma Cass, a company that was mainly operating in the advertisement sector. Casting has been the site for the highest amount of interaction between cinema and television since the 1990s. Stars born on the small screen often take part in feature films in the further stages of their career. Melis Behlil surveyed 192 Turkish films released between 2006 and 2009 and found out that the percentage of acting personnel in cinema who often work for television varies between 76% and 85%.<sup>13</sup>

## Facts and figures, problems and prospects

The Turkish television audience is watching television over 4 hours a day on average.<sup>14</sup> The two most preferred program formats, almost on equal terms, are news bulletins and domestic dramas. This explains the dominance of the two over prime time television. Almost all of the larger mainstream channels prefer to broadcast a television drama episode following the evening news almost every week day. The exceptions to television dramas in certain days may be some reality, talent or quiz shows. Daytime dramas or daily soaps are rare, and some of the existing ones are the re-screenings of older productions or repetitions of the prime time series. A gradual decrease in daytime/daily dramas is mainly relevant to audience and advertiser choice: the Turkish audience seems to have internalized a “serial culture” in time, based on a certain level of quality, production value and star glamour, besides “dramatic” expectations. The local television dramas matching such criteria qualify for prime time and naturally for more advertising income. In recent years, the duration of an episode in prime time has increased considerably, reaching up to 90-100 minutes, and the screening durations can be elongated even to twice of that including a long “summary” of the previous episode and advertising breaks. Actually, longer episodes are demanded from the producers by the broadcasters themselves, since they mean more breaks for advertising. Another advantage of longer episodes for broadcasters is avoiding the need for scheduling a second drama afterwards, to fill the prime time slot. Thus, a single episode usually scheduled to start at eight-nine o'clock in the evening, following the news, and ending at around eleven at night, meets the broadcasters' needs as well as satisfying the audience's expectations.

However, such a broadcasting practice affects to the sector in the form of endless working hours, severe production conditions and a mad rush for weekly schedules. Above all, the sector never had a good record of providing social security rights and fair payment. This receives criti-



cism from the sectorial, artistic and academic circles, and even prompts protests from actors, writers and crews lead by professional organizations like the Turkish Screenwriters Association or the Cinema Workers Union.<sup>15</sup> The regulating body RTÜK (Radio and Television Supreme Council) is also criticized for monitoring only the advertising side and not intervening in the scheduling and duration of the programs. The conflicting parties appear to be the powerful advertiser/broadcaster/producer alliance on one side and weaker employee teams on the other. Both the audience and the regulating bodies prefer to “watch” the outcome for now.

According to a sector-based research, the number of people employed in TV drama production reached up to 150.000 in 2008, and was about 100.000 in 2010 due to the economic turbulence.<sup>16</sup> Although the working force in the sector is substantial and continues to increase, it is very sensitive to economic conditions. Fluctuations in the economy result in sudden adjustments of advertising budgets and thus in the revenues of the broadcasters. Total advertising spending in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century reached its peak of 3,3 billion Turkish lira<sup>17</sup> in 2007 and dropped to 2,7 billion in 2009, afterwards managing to recover with 3,6 billion in 2010 and 4,3 billion in 2011.<sup>18</sup> This is good news especially for television, since it gets the lion’s share from the advertising pie, with over 50% every year, up from 53% in 2007 to 56,6% in 2011. Also given the persistent demand from the audience, one can expect further increase in the number of productions and level of employment in the drama market, yet whether there will be a recovery in working conditions and fees (apart from well-paid stars) remains to be seen.

Sponsorship and product placement agreements are also major sources of income for broadcasters and producers. Although sponsorship is quite an established practice now since it has been regulated by law since 1994, product placement was legalized recently by the amended radio-television law of 2011. The long awaited amendment lead to a rush of brands towards the popular dramas and larger broadcasting companies instantly establishing their product placement divisions. Media planning and emerging product placement agencies also help to manage the traffic. It is now popular opinion that the initial enthusiasm of the market resulted both in over-pricing and unsound placements; and the brands are now becoming more selective with their integration strategies and spending.<sup>19</sup> Undoubtedly, product placement is a very promising business, however the market still needs more experience.

*Forbes Turkey*, in its latest annual report of “richest producers,” counts 39 production companies providing dramas to television stations and a total turnover of 655 million lira.<sup>20</sup> The first ten of them, namely Ay Yapım, D Productions, Tim’s Productions, Pana Film, Süreç Film, Focus Film, Mint Productions, Avşar Film, Adam Film, and TMC, generate almost 400 million of the total. The second ten receive a total of 173 million and the rest share the remaining 85 million.<sup>21</sup> Hence the top companies nominate for the above mentioned powerful alliance more than the rest. The top companies are more privileged and advantageous in their agreements with the broadcasters, which usually impose severe clauses to producers such as rating guarantee/payment according to ratings or holding the post-screening/sales rights of the programs. The bigger producers are powerful enough to produce several projects simultaneously to spread the risk, or to convince the broadcaster to share the possible exporting revenues or to hold some secondary rights.<sup>22</sup> Above all, established producers of highly rated television dramas have the highest negotiation power for their prices and contracts whereas the smaller or newer production companies have to make concessions in terms of their agreements.<sup>23</sup> According to screenwriter/producer Zehra Çelenk, it is

almost impossible for small or medium size businesses to sell their projects to national channels without becoming partners with bigger production companies or intermediary agents.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, the lively market still makes some room for newer, untried and “unusual” content (i.e. absurd, fantastic, crime) occasionally find airtime besides popular genres. Such dramas are targeting younger generations, who are positioned out of the traditional family viewing and inclined to different programs. In this sense, production companies refer to American television dramas which are followed eagerly by young Turkish viewers. When the reference to American TV dramas is in question, one has to underline the fact that global formats or familiar soaps or sitcoms are the major references of domestic productions. On the other hand, imitating the popular/successful within the domestic market is a sectoral reflex, which often leads to seasonal trends for certain formats.

### New horizons: Exports, drama-tourism and tele-power

The local television drama exportation started by the early 2000s, soon after the domestic commercial television market matured. The pioneering program was *Deli Yürek* being sold to Kazakhstan in 2001. It is an action drama produced by Sinegraf and was broadcast in Turkey between 1998 and 2002. However, it was not until 2005 that the exportation of Turkish television dramas increased considerably. Three dramas, *Yabancı Damat* (The Foreign Groom), *Binbir Gece* (Thousand and One Nights) and *Gümüş* (Silver) are often cited as turning points for Turkish drama exportation.

*Yabancı Damat*, produced and distributed by Erler Film with 106 episodes in total, ran in Turkey between 2004-2007. It portrays the problems and especially the prejudices encountered in an intercultural marriage of a Greek man to a Turkish girl. Its comic tone and references to historic Greco-Turkish antagonism made it a huge hit both in Turkey and Greece, turning the leading actors into stars. The Greek channel Mega TV started broadcasting it in 2005 with great success, under the title of *The Borders of Love*. It is also aired in Bulgaria with the title *Marriage with a Foreigner* and on MBC+Drama, an Arabic channel offering various Turkish dramas, with the title *Al-Gharib* (The Stranger).

*Binbir Gece*, a melodrama produced by TMC Film, was originally broadcast on Kanal D between 2006-2009 in Turkey. It is the story of an architect, Şehrazat (Shahrazad) who reluctantly agrees to sleep with her boss, in exchange for the money she needs for the operation of her fatally sick son. The show was aired in Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kuwait, Romania, the Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Greece, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovenia, ranking the top in rating lists. “The new Turkish mania” has become so widespread in Greece that it beat the opening match of the World Cup, being the first time that a soap opera surpassed the ratings of a soccer match in Greece. In Serbia, travel agencies offered trips to Turkey dubbed “Down Shahrazad’s Paths.” Newborn babies in Bulgaria were given the names of characters from the series, and Bulgarian tourists travelling to Turkey to see the places where TV dramas are shot increased by 40%. In Croatia, retailers, tour operators and even Turkish language courses cashed in on the show’s popularity.<sup>25</sup>

*Gümüş*, known as *Noor* in Arabic speaking countries, was another program which became a social phenomenon, and whose popularity increased the demand for Turkish dramas, particularly

in the Middle East. It was produced by D Yapım, on air in Turkey from 2005 to 2007, and was not a success. The show, dubbed in an Arabic dialect, started to be broadcast in 2008 on the Dubai-based, Saudi-owned pan-Arab broadcasting network Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC). It became “an immediate sensation and one of the highest-rated television shows in the world.”<sup>26</sup> *Noor*’s final episode attracted a record 85 million Arab viewers, close to one third of the population of the Arab world from Morocco to Iraq. It was also aired by Romanian, Bulgarian, Albanian, Macedonian and Greek channels. The marriage of the modern couple living in a luxury Bosphorus residence together with a multi-generational, upper class family apparently fascinated millions, but also irritated some. The show became the subject of angry Friday sermons in Saudi Arabia and the country’s chief cleric issued a fatwa calling it “decadent and sinful to watch.”<sup>27</sup> Yet, *Noor* propelled more than 100,000 Saudis to travel to Turkey in 2008, up from about 40,000 the previous year. Moreover, the fictional residence in İstanbul was converted into a museum which was visited by 70,000 people just from Saudi Arabia the same year.<sup>28</sup>

Whatever the reason, be it the cultural similarities, quality, glamour, stars, plots, it has become a fact that Turkish drama sector emerged as a “geo-cultural market.”<sup>29</sup> Turkey has become the major exporter of TV dramas in its region, comprising Central Asia, Middle East and the Balkan Peninsula. The shows have reached even farther, such as New Caledonia, Niger, Vietnam, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Somalia, and Singapore, and the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism reported that a total of 35.675 hours was exported to 76 countries between 2005 and 2011.<sup>30</sup> They generated an export market of 60 million US dollars in 2011, which is eagerly pushed to expand not only by the broadcasters/producers/distributors but also by the authorities. The minister responsible for foreign trade has been active in providing export incentives and relaxing regulations for the film and television sectors in recent years. On the part of investors, aggressive strategies have been on the agendas, as explained by the chief executive of major network Doğan TV:

*At the beginning, we used to sell each episode for 300-500 US dollars. Sometimes we’d even pay them to buy the series – for promotional purposes. Now we have some productions that sell to the Middle East for more than 100,000 US dollars. There’s nothing to stop us becoming a so-called Bollywood. We have the potential.<sup>31</sup>*

Naturally, higher export prices require higher production value. The production cost of a Turkish drama episode may vary from 150,000 to 600,000 US dollars, as well as the export prices.<sup>32</sup> According to a Syrian television owner, there exist parties in the Middle East market who are willing to pay up to 40,000 dollars per episode, which could have been bought for 600-700 US dollars several years ago;<sup>33</sup> a sensational period drama like *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (Magnificent Century, 2011-) may cost even more. *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* represents the state of the art: with a pre-production budget of 2 million US dollars and roughly half a million spent per episode, the show is featured as being the most expensive Turkish television drama ever made.<sup>34</sup> It proved to be a huge success first domestically, being transferred for 1,2 million US dollars per episode by Star TV for its second season from the initial broadcaster Show TV, carrying with it an advertising revenue of 3 million US dollars.<sup>35</sup> Abroad, it has already been sold to 45 countries.<sup>36</sup> Following the footsteps of the “Süleyman the Magnificent,” the Ottoman emperor whose glorious lifetime and loves are treated in the program, the public broadcaster TRT decided to spend around 5 million Euros on *Bir*

*Zamanlar Osmanlı: Kıyam* (Once Upon A Time In The Ottoman Empire: Rebellion, 2012), a TV drama whose story unfolds in another period of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>37</sup>

Besides their commercial success, *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* and the like are seen by many to be the means of spreading “Turkey’s values and lifestyle through the Middle East and North Africa, exerting a sort of ‘soft power’ that is to the advantage of Ankara’s neo-Ottoman diplomacy.”<sup>38</sup> While the idea is obviously provoking reaction in nationalist and/or radical circles in the region, it is generally treated positively by the Turkish public opinion. The prestigious *Time magazine* describing the export of Turkish soap operas as the “secret weapon of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan”<sup>39</sup> or *Newsweek* arguing “the programs are [...] bringing in their wake a renaissance in Turkey’s soft power and ushering in a low-key social revolution among the housewives of the Arab world,”<sup>40</sup> are often taken as a confirmation of Turkey’s “rise” by the Western world. However, that is not to say that the programs receive unanimous acclaim in the country. They do get various and contrary reactions from conservative, nationalist, liberal, radical, intellectual and other groups. Ironically, Prime Minister Erdoğan was himself among the critics of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, calling the series “an attempt to insult our past, to treat our history with disrespect and an effort to show our history in a negative light to the younger generations.”<sup>41</sup> As a matter of fact, criticisms do not disrupt the market mechanism, they may rather serve for smoothing some “extremeness” in the content. For instance, *Kurtlar Vadisi*, a heavily criticized show for its violent, nationalistic and hatred content is still on air in Turkey since 2003, after a few interruptions and repositioning in various television channels. The struggle of the Turkish agent Polat Alemdar and his men with mafia, terrorist organizations and secret agencies, continue to fascinate people at home and abroad, and to be a (not that soft) power of Turkish diplomacy. A Jordanian tourist, summarizes the case: “He [Polat Alemdar] made a great series about Palestine. I consider him a hero.”<sup>42</sup> The words of *Kurtlar Vadisi*’s screenwriter Bahadır Özdenler can be cited here as a generalization of what the sector and probably the public think about the local television drama scene:

*We write here a drama, our people watch it, and 200 million people everywhere in the world watch it sharing the same feelings. Nobody would dream of this ten years ago. [...] Turkish movies and TV dramas give an outstanding chance for Turkey’s promotion. Kurtlar Vadisi sells to 30 countries today. [...] Turkish film industry is now competing with Hollywood and Bollywood. In terms of technical infrastructure, directing, acting and screenwriting quality, it ranks the third following the two global giants. We strive to outstrip.*<sup>43</sup>

## Conclusion

The sectoral rise of Turkish television dramas hand in hand with the cinema sector brings out an economy that necessitates a thorough analysis. Production is a complicated process: from casting agencies to dubbing studios, post-production and animation houses to music studios, catering and transportation firms to real estate offices, designers to copyright agencies, it is multifaceted. The industry is multidimensional: it comprises not only the producers, but broadcasters, networks, distributors, advertisers, sponsors, brands, and all of their integrated activities. It has advantages: a big and eager demand from the domestic market, and even a vast and passionate demand

from the neighbouring countries. So passionate that it attracts people culturally, effects politically, mobilizes socially. Nevertheless, it has a soft belly: it is vulnerable to economic turbulences and global crisis. Although it is dynamic, it still has some structural problems to solve. As such, what is in hand is a complicated case which requires more concrete and comparative data to be fully analysed and understood. Stating that the sector has become a global actor competing with Hollywood and Bollywood is remarkable but the argument needs further elaboration, of which this paper is a first attempt.<sup>44</sup>

Although this essay was jointly elaborated by the authors, the “History and Overview” section was written by Selin Tüzün, “New horizons: Exports, Drama-Tourism and Tele-Power” was written by Cem Pekman and “Facts and Figures, Problems and Prospects” was written by Tüzün and Pekman.

- 1 Servet Yanatma, “Türkiye’de Televizyon Yayınlarının Başlaması ve Gelişimi: İTÜ TV,” in *Toplumsal Tarih*, vol. 17, no. 98, 2002, pp. 50-61.
- 2 Özden Cankaya, *Bir Kitle İletişim Kurumunun Tarihi: TRT 1927-2000*, YKY, İstanbul 2004; Ömer Serim, *Türk Televizyon Tarihi 1952-2006*, Epsilon, İstanbul 2007.
- 3 Sedat Örsel (Former Head of External Productions and Sales Department of TRT), personal interview by Cem Pekman, İstanbul 27 August 2012.
- 4 Özden Cankaya, *Türk Televizyonunun Program Yapısı (1968-1985)*, Mozaik, İstanbul 1990.
- 5 D. Beybin Kejanlıoğlu, *Türkiye’de Medyanın Dönüşümü*, İmge, Ankara 2004.
- 6 Ömer Serim, *Türk Televizyon Tarihi 1952-2006*, cit., p. 157.
- 7 Yeşilçam (Green pine) street was where film production companies of the 1960s and 1970s were settled. The era represents the most productive period of the Turkish cinema in terms of quantity, with hundreds of films produced in a year, reaching its peak in 1972 with 298 films. Giovanni Scognamillo, *Türk Sinema Tarihi*, Kabalcı, İstanbul 1998, p. 191.
- 8 Joseph D. Straubhaar, “Beyond Media Imperialism: Asymmetrical Interdependence and Cultural Proximity,” in *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1991, pp. 39-59.
- 9 Hülya Uğur Tanrıöver, *Türkiye’de Film Endüstrisinin Konumu ve Hedefleri*, İTO, İstanbul 2011, p. 53.
- 10 The figures reflect the average weekly number of dramas shown on mainstream national channels and does not include replays in these or other regional/local channels. Also, more importantly, several dramas come and go throughout the broadcast season according to the ratings. So, the total number of dramas screened in a years time may rise up to 70-80. In the 2010-2011 season total number of dramas broadcast on 6 larger national channels was 73. It was 67 the previous season. See “En Çok Kazanan Dizi Yapımcıları,” *NTVMSNBC*, <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/id/25363998/>. At the opening of the new season in September 2012, 6 larger national channels were continuing with 32 shows from the previous season and 18 new were put on the screen. All the internet links cited throughout this paper have been last visited on 27 September 2012.
- 11 Serkan Altuniğne, personal interview by the authors, İstanbul 18 December 2009.
- 12 Zeynep Çetin Erus, “Son On Yılın Popüler Türk Sinemasında Televizyon Sektörünün Rolü,” in *Marmara İletişim Dergisi*, no. 12, 2007, p. 127.
- 13 Melis Behlil, “Close Encounters?: Contemporary Turkish Television and Cinema,” in *Wide Screen*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2010, p. 4.
- 14 RTÜK, *Televizyon İzleme Eğilimleri Araştırması – 2*, RTÜK, Ankara 2009, p. 38.
- 15 See, for example, Turkish Screenwriters Association (SENDER), “Fact Sheet. Fair Compensation and Working Conditions in the TV and Film Industry,” 2012, [http://www.senaryo.org.tr/page\\_details.aspx?id=533](http://www.senaryo.org.tr/page_details.aspx?id=533).
- 16 İSMMMO, “Dizi Ekonomisi – Mayıs 2010,” 2010, [http://archive.ismmmo.org.tr/docs/yayinlar/kitaplar/2010/10\\_10%20dizi%20arastirmasi.pdf](http://archive.ismmmo.org.tr/docs/yayinlar/kitaplar/2010/10_10%20dizi%20arastirmasi.pdf).

- 17 1 TL equals to 0,55 US Dollars and 0,42 Euros as of September 2012.
- 18 RD, "Reklam Yatırımları," 2012, <http://www.rd.org.tr/>.
- 19 İlyas Demir, Media Planner of Starcom, personal interview by Selin Tüzün, İstanbul, 6 July 2012.
- 20 Özer Turan, "Hayalden Gerçeğe," in *Forbes Türkiye*, July 2012, pp. 36-42.
- 21 For a comprehensive list of production companies operating in the television drama sector in İstanbul, see <http://devam.hypotheses.org/485>.
- 22 Ali Gündoğdu (Producer of Süreç Film), interviewed in *Bloomberg TV*, 14 September 2012.
- 23 Bekir Hazar (Head of Domestic Productions of ATV), personal interview by Selin Tüzün, İstanbul 13 September 2012.
- 24 Zehra Çelenk, "Canım Ailemin İmkansız Aşklardan Memnuniyeti ya da Bir Senarist Olarak Ömrü Hayatım," in *Birikim*, no. 256-257, 2010, pp. 77-84 (here p. 79).
- 25 "Turkish Soap Operas Take Balkans by Storm," *The Balkan Chronicle*, 31 December 2010, <http://www.balkanchronicle.com/index.php/arts-a-culture/entertainment/movies/774-turkish-soap-operas-take-balkans-by-storm>.
- 26 Pierre Tristam, "Noor, the Middle-East's Frothiest TV Soap," *About.com*, 6 November 2009, <http://middleeast.about.com/b/2009/11/06/noor-the-middle-east-s-frothiest-tv-soap.htm>.
- 27 Faiza Saleh Ambah, "A Subversive Soap Roils Saudi Arabia," *The Washington Post*, 3 August 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/02/AR2008080201547.html>.
- 28 Jumana Al Tamimi, "Challenge of the Turkish Soap Operas," *Gulfnews.com*, 1 April 2012, <http://gulfnews.com/business/features/challenge-of-the-turkish-soap-operas-1.1002249>.
- 29 Though USA continues to lead the field in the export of audiovisual products, Joseph Straubhaar posits that, we need to consider "regionalization" as a powerful force to explain the cultural trade in television "into multicountry markets linked by geography, language and culture." Joseph D. Straubhaar, "Distinguishing the Global, Regional and National Levels of World Television," in Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi, Dwayne Winseck, Jim McKenna, Oliver Boyd-Barrett (eds.), *Media In A Global Context: A Reader*, Edward Arnold, London 1997, pp. 284-298 (here p. 285).
- 30 Aslıhan Aydın, "Gitsin Diziler, Gelsin Diziler," *Zaman*, 13 January 2012, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=1228764&title=gitsin-diziler-gelsin-turistler>.
- 31 "Turkish TV – A Device for Social Change in the Arab World?," *Euronews*, 29 June 2012, <http://www.euronews.com/2012/06/29/turkish-tv-a-device-for-social-change-in-the-arab-world/>.
- 32 "The International Scene Hit by Unexpected Powerhouses," in *VideoAge International*, vol. 31, no. 5, September-October 2011, <http://www.videoageinternational.com/articles/2011/10/turkish.htm>.
- 33 Jumana Al Tamimi, "Challenge of the Turkish Soap Operas," cit.
- 34 "3,5 Milyon Liralık Muhteşem Yüzyıl," *Habertürk*, 23 December 2010, <http://www.haberturk.com/medya/haber/584176-35-milyon-liralik-muhtesem-yuzyil>; David Rohde, "Inside Islam's Culture War," *Reuters*, 8 March 2012, <http://blogs.reuters.com/david-rohde/2012/03/08/inside-islams-culture-war/>.
- 35 Bekir Hazar, interview cit.
- 36 See David Rohde, "Inside Islam's Culture War," cit.; Mehtap Özcan Ertürk, "100 Türk Dizisi 60 Milyon Dolar İhracat Geliri," *Hürriyet*, 10 December 2012, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/ekonomi/19436062.asp>.
- 37 "Turkish TV – A Device for Social Change in the Arab World?," cit.
- 38 "Turkey: Conquering Middle East with New Soap Opera," *Ansamed*, 30 March 2012, [http://ansamed.ansa.it/ansamed/en/news/nations/emirates/2012/03/30/visualizza\\_new.html\\_158832709.html](http://ansamed.ansa.it/ansamed/en/news/nations/emirates/2012/03/30/visualizza_new.html_158832709.html).
- 39 Quoted in Jumana Al Tamimi, "Challenge of the Turkish Soap Operas," cit.
- 40 Owen Matthews, "The Arab World's 'Dallas'," *The Daily Beast*, 5 September 2011, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2011/09/04/turkish-soap-operas-are-sweeping-the-middle-east.html>.
- 41 David Rohde, "Inside Islam's Culture War," cit.
- 42 "Turkish TV – A Device for Social Change in the Arab World?," cit.
- 43 Bahadır Özdenler (Screenwriter of Pana Film), personal interview by Selin Tüzün, İstanbul 11 September 2012.
- 44 Academic work on the industrial aspects and the production/distribution of the local TV dramas is scarce in Turkey while the emphasis is rather on textual analysis or on reception. Apart from the ones cited with-

#### TURKISH TELEVISION DRAMAS: THE ECONOMY AND BEYOND

in the article, see Sevilay Çelenk, *Televizyon, Temsil, Kültür, Ütopya*, Ankara 2005; Evrim Töre Özkan, *İstanbul Film Endüstrisi*, Bilgi Üniversitesi, İstanbul 2010; Mustafa Sönmez, *Medya, Kültür, Para ve İstanbul İktidarı*, Yordam, İstanbul 2010; and Sevgi Can Yağcı Aksel, “Yerli Dizi Serüveninde 37. Sezon,” in Seçil Büker, Derya Nacaroğlu, Filiz Erdemir, Sevgi Can Yağcı Aksel, Zeynep Gültekin Akçay (eds.), *Beyaz Camın Yerlileri*, Umuttepe, Kocaeli 2011, pp.13-52. On the political and cultural impact of Turkish TV dramas in the region, some recent analyses are available in Yasin Aktay, Pakinem El-Sharkawy, Ahmet Uysal (eds.), *Culture and Politics in the New Middle East*, Institute of Strategic Thinking, Ankara 2012.





## THE PRODUCTION OF TV FICTION ADAPTATIONS IN SPAIN (1950-2012)

Patricia Diego, Universidad de Navarra

María del Mar Grandío, Catholic University of San Antonio (UCAM)

### *Abstract*

The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of the most significant TV adaptations in Spain from 1956 to 2012. First of all, the following article comprises a brief overview of a number of the most significant fiction adaptations produced by the public television network TVE, rounded out with a more in-depth account of the TV adaptations developed from the 1990s onwards, when commercial television networks, such as Antena 3 and Tele 5, entered the audiovisual market.

Recently, the adaptation of TV series based on foreign programmes has become widespread in Spain. One special category encompasses programmes adapted to the Spanish television market from foreign series formats (US, Latin America and Europe). Television networks and production companies turn to such major television markets in order to identify successful series and formats that may be remade into the buyer's context.

---

### Introduction

Perhaps because of the difficulties involved in developing original projects and the increase in the sale of international formats that have performed successfully in other markets, the adaptation of TV series based on foreign programmes, such as *Doctor Mateo* (Antena 3, 2009-2011) and *Las chicas de oro* (The Golden Girls, TVE, 2010) or *La chica de ayer* (The Girl from Yesterday, Antena 3, 2009), has recently become widespread in Spain, similar to other European markets.

TV adaptation from other formats or series dates back to the earliest days of the television industry in Spain. The original producer of TV fiction adaptations in Spain was the public television network, TVE; no other company could compete in this regard. It should be noted that from 1956 to 1990, the period during which the television sector was dominated by the state-supported TVE, television programmes were produced by the public network, either in-house or in conjunction with independent production companies that had close ties to the film industry. The first TV fiction genres began to conform to standard formats during that time: plays and serialized novels in the 1950s and 1960s, followed by miniseries and drama series from the 1960s onwards.<sup>1</sup> Many of

these TV fiction productions were adaptations of previously published plays and novels, which had enjoyed national and/or international success.

In order to study the production of TV adaptations in any country, it is necessary to clarify some previous concepts from a theoretical perspective: format, genre, TV adaptation and remake. Jonathan Bignell defines format as “the blueprint for a programme, including its setting, main characters, genre, form and main themes.”<sup>2</sup> According to this author, genre is a set of characteristics, conventions and general key elements which identify the format.<sup>3</sup> Other authors like Moran underline that television formats can be adapted into texts because they have several rules which can be adjusted into different markets and cultural contexts.<sup>4</sup>

There are several authors who have studied the concept of adaptation as regards to cinema<sup>5</sup> although it is quite unexplored within the Spanish television context.<sup>6</sup> In this respect, we should underline the differences between a traditional adaptation (from a novel, a poem, or an historical event to a TV show) and a television remake (adaptation in the same medium). For this article, we will include traditional adaptations and remakes as one of the most produced in the Spanish context. As Linda Hutcheon states: “an adapted text migrates from its context of creation to the adaptation’s context of reception. Because adaptation is a form of repetition without replication, change is inevitable.”<sup>7</sup> As such, any adaptation and TV remake is unique and original in itself, as it always involves creating something new.

## The production of TV fiction adaptations at TVE (1956-1990)

Televised plays may be regarded as the first type of television adaptation in Spain. Such productions evince the first attempts to re-cast theatre-based shows, which had remained unchanged for many years, shaped by television pacing and production. The televised play was also the first fiction genre to be broadcasted on TVE. In production terms, two stages may be discerned: the live broadcast of theatre and the recorded plays. Live broadcasting entailed the first attempts to standardize the production process. Such plays were thirty minutes in length, they were recorded on a single set using two or three cameras, and had limited production values in terms of lighting and sound.

The advent of video-recording in 1960 enabled a radical overhaul of the production process for televised plays. The play could be filmed in parts, not necessarily in chronological order, and be put back together subsequently in the editing suite. Production could even be extended over several days, with some scenes shot on external locations. Recorded theatre of this kind created certain production parameters that would later be applied to other TV fiction genres.

The director and producer Juan Guerrero Zamora was the principal promoter and driving-force behind such important theatre productions as *Fila cero* (The Zero Row), *Gran Teatro* (The Great Theater) and *Estudio 1* (Studio 1).<sup>8</sup> Over the course of thirty years, television viewers became used to seeing high-quality national and international plays produced for the small screen. The most renowned adaptations included *Before Breakfast* by Eugene O’Neill (1957, *Teatro en la Televisión Española*, Theatre on Spanish Television), *La herida luminosa* (The Light Wound) and *La señorita Trevelez* (Miss Trevelez) by Carlos Arniches (1958, *Fila cero*), Shakespeare’s *Richard III* (1967, *Teatro de siempre*, Old Theatre), among many others.

As was the case in relation to the televised play, the advent of the video-recorder had a transforming impact on the production criteria for the adapted novel as a television genre. Live broadcast was gradually phased out, although scenes were still shot in one take and in real time as if such broadcasting were still the norm.

In terms of serialization, the adapted novel genre may be further subdivided into weekly and daily televised novels. *Sherlock Holmes* by Arthur Conan Doyle, *Gas Light* by Patrick Hamilton and *Dial M for Murder* by Frederick Knott were among the most successful weekly televised novels in the 1950s and 1960s, adapted and directed by Juan Guerrero Zamora.<sup>9</sup> The most significant programme in the category of daily televised novels was *Novela* (Novel), which was broadcast for almost twenty years. Between thirty and fifty adaptations were produced per year for broadcast in the *Novela* time-slot; each episode ran between twenty and thirty minutes; each novel comprised between two and five episodes; the adaptations were from both Spanish and foreign writers.

The adaptation of novels for television also entailed the further implementation of a number of production standards, which were to be put into practice in the national series produced from the 1990s onwards, albeit to a much lesser extent because of the relatively speedy production process and low budgets. The adjustment of shots to broadcast criteria, the combination of (video-based) studio scenes with scenes shot in exterior locations using cinematic devices, and the use of a number of sets were some of the most significant standards in this regard.

By the 1970s, both the televised play and the adapted novel began to look like television genres that had run their course, largely due to factors beyond TVE's control. A new television genre had begun to appear on other television networks across Europe: the miniseries, which bore close similarities to the serialized novels described above. A number of scholars have defined this genre as "the serialized adaptation of literary works based on a cinematic narrative style."<sup>10</sup> One of the defining features of the miniseries is that it comprises fewer than thirteen episodes. *The Forsyte Saga* (BBC, 1967) was the first instance in European broadcasting of this television genre. In terms of production costs, the genre proved costly, since each miniseries was one of a kind, requiring a tailor-made production schedule and budget. The production process for a miniseries was similar to that of a film. The budget-per-episode costs for miniseries produced in the 1980s ranged from € 120,000 for *Los gozos y las sombras* (The Joys and Shadows) and € 100,000 for *Ramón y Cajal* to € 300,000 for *Goya*.<sup>11</sup> Given such high budget costs, the in-house production model (whereby the miniseries was produced using only the television network's own resources) was soon abandoned, to be replaced with outsourced or independent production through international or part-funded co-production agreements.

International co-productions draw on the participation of a number of financial partners, usually television networks and/or production companies from other countries, which agree to share costs or to undertake more ambitious projects through shared or associated funding contracts. The other option was for TVE to outsource the production of miniseries to independent production companies in Spain.

The miniseries as a genre marked a further milestone in the history of television production and fostered the establishment of new production criteria. Moreover, as described in some detail below, the miniseries continued to be a preferred genre for TV fiction adaptations during the 2000-2012 period. Parameters of progress in this regard included the use of a more cinematic language in the *mise-en-scène*, such as the extensive use of natural locations to give the production a sense

of spectacle; a special focus on artistic design in the recreation of historical periods; the use of film cameras; higher budgets; lengthier production schedules; and episode running-times of between sixty and ninety minutes.

An analysis on the subject-matter of miniseries discloses that the genre is dominated by adaptations. Three types of miniseries may be defined: literary, biographical and original.<sup>12</sup> The defining feature of literary miniseries is that they involve the adaptation of renowned Spanish novels such as *Cañas y Barro* (Reeds and Mud, 1978) and *La Barraca* (Hut, 1979) by Blasco Ibáñez, *Fortunata y Jacinta* (1980) by Benito Pérez Galdós, *Los pazos de Ulloa* (The houses from Ulloa, 1985) by Emilia Pardo Bazán, among many others. Biographical miniseries are based on the lives of significant figures in Spanish history. As Manuel Palacio notes, they enable “the combination of historical events ideally recalled in the people’s collective memory with fictional characters that represent ‘real’ and invented situations in a convincing setting.”<sup>13</sup> Among the most important biographical miniseries of the 1980s were *Cervantes* (1981), *Ramón y Cajal* (1982), *Teresa de Jesús* (1984), *Goya* (1985), *Lorca, muerte de un poeta* (Lorca, Death of a Poet, 1987) and *Miguel Servet* (1988).

In the 1990s, due to the emergence of private television networks and the competitive climate generated as a result, such major miniseries filmed in cinematic style and drawing on substantial budgets ceased to be profitable projects for TVE, and their production thereafter dropped considerably.

Finally, we would like to discuss the development of drama series other than the genres of televised plays, adapted novels and miniseries at TVE. Unlike the other genres, drama series of this type were originally shaped in terms of longer-running serialization and adhered to specific characteristics of television as a medium.<sup>14</sup> TVE produced a significant number of such drama series between 1956 and 1990; adaptations were less common than series produced by pioneering Spanish creative screenwriters and producers, such as Antonio Mercero (*Verano Azul*, Blue Summer, 1981-1982), Adolfo Marsillach (*La Señora García se confiesa*, Mrs Garcia Confesses, 1976-1977) and Narciso Ibáñez Serrador (*Historias para no dormir*, Stories to Keep You Awake, 1966-1968). *Historias para no dormir* comprised stand-alone episodes, some of which were based on original scripts and others on horror stories written by famous authors as Ray Bradbury and Edgar Allan Poe.

### Adaptation in a competitive television market (1990-2000)

The early 1990s marked a key phase in the emergence of private television networks and competition that prompted changes in programming conventions, budget distribution and TV fiction production strategies. Because of the widespread establishment and development of independent production companies during that time, the 1990s may be regarded as the definitive starting-point for the Spanish television fiction industry.<sup>15</sup>

The competitive market also caused an increasingly significant revolution in television viewing habits among audiences. The commitment by networks to achieving the highest possible viewer ratings led to a new emphasis on the idea of audience “loyalty,” a concept that had been more or less invisible during the period in which TVE held a monopoly on the television sector in Spain. Television series play one of the most powerful roles in generating audience loyalty. Thus, both

public and private television networks opted for the same strategy: the production of series to attract higher audience rates. In specific terms, their commitment was to long-running series, programmes that were produced to be broadcast over the course of more than one season, peopled with characters and storylines designed to hold the viewer's interest from one episode to the next. The main difference to the short run series broadcast by TVE before the privatization of the market lays in the fact that the principal plot conflict was not resolved in the first thirteen episodes of the series; rather, the plot might be extended for as long as it continued to generate audience ratings. The script is written as the series progresses and in light of viewer preferences. Hence, a much closer relationship arises between the programme and its audience and the immediate social context, prompting the inclusion of more relevant and real plotlines in the evolving narrative.<sup>16</sup>

Most of the long-running series produced in the 1990s (*Farmacia de guardia*, Pharmacy on Duty; *Médico de familia*, General practitioner, and others) were based on original ideas and broadcast alongside series and miniseries based on adaptations, although the latter were fewer in number. Some of the adaptations produced by public and commercial television networks during this period are outlined in more detail below.

First, TVE altered its production strategy in response to the new market competition, undertaking a range of innovative initiatives such as the *Taller de Telecomedias* (Telecomedy Workshop).<sup>17</sup> Although the production of literary and biographical adaptations went into decline at TVE, it continued to be the network that produced the highest number of series based on adaptation. In line with its previous strategy, TVE remained committed to the development of miniseries based on the lives of major figures such as *Blasco Ibáñez* (1997), *Severo Ochoa: La conquista de un Nóbel* (Severo Ochoa: The Conquest of a Nobel, 2001) and *Vientos del pueblo: Miguel Hernández* (Winds of people: Miguel Hernandez, 2002); and to the adaptation of literary works including *Los jinetes del Alba* (Riders of the Dawn, 1991), *El Quijote* (Don Quixote, 1992), *Celia* (1992), *Entre naranjos* (Among Orange Trees, 1998), *La Regenta* (1995), *Don Juan* (1997) and *El secreto de la porcelana* (The Secret of the Porcelain, 1999).

In 1995, TVE adapted *The Golden Girls* for the first time. The director Antonio del Real adapted the scripts from the original series and the remake was called *Juntas pero no revueltas* (a Spanish expression meaning "together, but apart..."). *Makinavaja*, a sitcom produced in 1995 was based on the film of the same name; and *El último choriso* (The Last Thief, 1992) depicted the life and times of Ivá, a graphic artist working for the weekly humour magazine *El Jueves*.

The strategy adopted at Antena 3 was to focus on original Spanish series, including such achievements as *Los ladrones van a la oficina* (Thieves Go to the Office, 1993-1996) and *¡Ay, Señor, Señor!* (Oh, Lord, Lord!, 1994-1995), as well as the network's outstanding success: *Farmacia de guardia* (1991-1995). Antena 3's production of an adaptation and sequel to TVE's *Curro Jiménez* (1976-1979) during the 1990s should also be noted in this regard. In 1994, the production company Aurum, which belonged to Antena 3 at the time, produced *Curro Jiménez, el regreso de una leyenda* (Curro Jimenez, the return of a legend) in conjunction with Sancho Gracia Producciones, a series comprising thirteen episodes that portrayed the life and times of the famous Spanish outlaw almost twenty years after the original television production. Finally, the series *¡Por fin solos!* (Alone at Last!, 1995) was an adaptation of a film of the same name directed by Antonio del Real and first released in 1994. However, the series generated very little audience interest, and only seven episodes were broadcast.

Given the extraordinary success of *Médico de familia* (1995-1999), as well as other similarly successful series such as *Periodistas* (Journalists, 1998-2002), *Siete vidas* (Seven Lives, 1997-2006), *El comisario* (Police Inspector, 1999-2009), *Hospital Central* (2000-2012) and serials such as *El súper* (The Supermarket, 1996-1999) and *Al salir de clase* (After School, 1997-2002), Tele 5 also began to focus on the development of home-grown series. Tele 5 also produced a wide range of adaptations during the 1990s, some of which met with very little interest among viewers, prompting the network to drop them from the programming schedule. Such adaptations may be subdivided into three categories: adaptations based on films, on foreign series formats, and on literary works.

One of the most significant cinema-based adaptations was *Truhanes* (Rogue, 1993-1994), which drew on the film of the same title (1983); both series and film were directed by Miguel Hermoso and starred Paco Rabal and Arturo Fernández. The series *Historias de la puta mili* (Stories About the Fucking Military Service, 1994) was based on the comic drawn by the cartoonist Ivá, which had also been adapted for cinema; insofar as possible, the scripts for the series followed the graphic stories published in *El Jueves* which parodied the depiction of US troops in American movies.<sup>18</sup> The same approach was taken with regard to *Todos los hombres sois iguales* (All Men Are the Same, 1996-1998), based on the 1994 film of the same name, and likewise produced by Bocaboca.

The adaptation of foreign series formats included imports from Italian commercial television Canale 5: *Casa para dos* (House For Two, 1995), which lasted for only six episodes on Tele 5 because of low audience ratings; *Querido maestro* (Dear Teacher, 1997-1998), which was more successful and ran over three seasons; and *Hermanas* (Sisters, 1998) which lasted for two seasons.

Finally, the series *Petra Delicado* (1999) was an adaptation of the literary character invented by the writer Alicia Giménez Bartlett, a police inspector based in Barcelona, who appeared for the first time in the novel entitled *Ritos de muertes* (*Death Rites*) in 1996; the series, comprising thirteen episodes, starred Ana Belén.

Due to the competition between television networks and the speed at which the programming schedule consumes its own contents, many of these adaptations marked an attempt on the networks' part, to avoid failure by using series formats that had already proven successful in generating audience loyalty. Nevertheless, television networks and production companies remain aware of the fact that there is no such thing as a sure success in the audiovisual industry.

## A typology of television adaptations in Spain (2000-2012)

The production of television adaptations in Spain has begun to peak again nowadays. The typology of the programmes produced in recent years may be categorised as follows. These distinctions are made by the authors of the article after the examination of the most important titles adapted in Spain between 2000 and 2012. The classification is as follows: 1) historical adaptations; 2) literary adaptations; and 3) adaptations based on foreign series formats.

First, there has been an increase in the number of historical or period drama series produced. The preferred format used by Spanish production companies is the miniseries. In 2010, a total of seven miniseries made the top twenty list of television broadcasts for the year. The miniseries with the highest audience ratings was *Felipe y Leticia* (Felipe and Leticia): more than five million viewers tuned into the second episode, a 24.6% audience share (Fórmula TV, 2010). An overview

of the main historical and/or biographical series produced during this period is provided below:

- Miniseries, biographical, made-for-TV movies (biopics). This category comprises series adapted from the lives of members of the royal family or other important public figures in Spanish cultural life. These productions are shaped by a common theme: they tell the story of Spanish people and/or events in Spain. Among the most significant were: *La Duquesa* (Telecinco, 2010), about the Duchess of Alba; *Los Borgia* (Antena 3, 2008), which recounted the life and times of the Borgias, the family to which the only two Spanish popes in history belonged; *Adolfo Suárez, El Presidente* (Adolfo Suárez, the President, Antena 3, 2010), which dealt with the political career and personal life of one of the most significant presidents in the history of Spanish democracy; and finally, *Felipe y Letizia* (Felipe and Letizia 2010, Telecinco), which tells the story of the early days of the romance between the heir to the Spanish throne and his future bride.

- Miniseries or made-for-TV movies based on recent historical events. Many of the television adaptations based on historical events have drawn on the recent history of Spain, especially the transition to democracy; for example, *23-F, El día más difícil del Rey* (The Hardest Day of the King, TVE, 2009), which dealt with the failed *coup d'état* in 1981, and more recently still, the failed attempt by the terrorist organization ETA to assassinate King Juan Carlos I in Mallorca in 1995, as depicted in the made-for-TV movie, *Una bala para el Rey* (A Bullet to the King, Antena 3, 2009).

- Miniseries or made-for-TV movies based on major news stories or contemporary issues. Such productions may be regarded as “instant movies” because they deal with very recent and significant news events. Among the most prominent programmes in this regard were *Padre Coraje* (Father Courage, Antena 3, 2002) which told of the killing of Juan Delgado at a petrol station in Jerez de la Frontera in 1995 and his family’s fight to see justice done; *48 horas* (48 Hours, Antena 3, 2008), an account of the murder of Miguel Ángel Blanco at the hands of ETA; *El caso Wanninkhof* (The Wanninkhof’s Case, Antena 3, 2008), which offered an account of the disappearance and murder of Rocío Wanninkhof, a nineteen-year-old girl, in 1999; *Días Sin Luz* (Days Without Light, Antena 3, 2009) which followed the fifty-four day search for a young girl called Mari Luz Cortés, whose body was eventually recovered (the girl’s father oversaw the production of the miniseries); *Vuelo IL8714* (Flight IL8714, Telecinco, 2010), about the Spanair airplane crash at Barajas Airport (Madrid) in August 2008 and the official enquiry into its causes; finally, *Alakrana* (Telecinco, 2010), which depicted the hijacking of the Basque fishing vessel, the Alakrana, by Somali pirates, and *11M, para que nadie lo olvide* (11 M, For nobody to forget, Tele 5, 2011) which told how the biggest terrorist attack in Spain was planned.

The second category in the typology of adaptations produced between 2000 and 2012 comprises programmes based on literary works, most of which were Spanish-language texts written by Spanish or Latin American authors. Significant series in this regard included *Arroz y tartana* (Rice and Trap, TVE, 2003) directed by José Antonio Escrivá, based on the novel by Vicente Blasco Ibáñez; *Las cerezas del cementerio* (The Cherries of the Cemetery, TVE, 2005), based on the work of Gabriel Mir, a writer from Alicante, which tells the story of the relationship between a young engineering student and an older woman who is unhappily married to an English ship-owner (the story is set on the Valencian coast at the turn of the twentieth century); and *Un Burka por Amor* (A Burka for Love, Antena 3, 2009), a miniseries based on the eponymous book by Reyes Monforte, concerning the life and times of María Galera, a woman from Majorca who married an Afghani man, went to live in Afghanistan and experienced great difficulty upon trying to return to Spain.

## Foreign TV series adaptations in Spain

Finally, the third category encompasses programmes adapted to the Spanish television market from foreign series formats (in the US, Latin America and Europe). As it happened worldwide and has been studied by many European scholars,<sup>19</sup> many international formats have been adapted in Spain, including drama, comedy and soap-operas. Television networks and production companies turn to such major television markets so as to identify successful series and formats that may be remade in the buyer's context. Examples include *Mesa para cinco* (La Sexta, 2006), an adaptation of the US series *Party of Five* (Fox, 1994-2000); *Matrimonio con hijos* (Cuatro, 2006), the Spanish adaptation of the US comedy *Married with Children* (ABC, 1987-1997). The series entitled *Suárez y Mariscal: caso cerrado* (Suarez and Mariscal: closed case, Cuatro, 2005) was based on a German format, *Niedrig Und Kuhnt* (Sat 1, 2003-); *Los simuladores* (The Simulators, Cuatro, 2006-2007) was based on the Argentinian series of the same name (Telefé, 2002-2003); *Hermanos y detectives* (Brothers and Detectives, Telecinco, 2007-2009), likewise based on the 2006 Argentinian series of the same name; the soap opera *Sin Tetas No Hay Paraíso* (Without Breasts There is No Paradise, Telecinco, 2008-2009), based on the Colombian series of the same name, which was broadcast on Caracol Televisión in 2006 (the original Colombian series, in turn, was based on the novel of the same name by Gustavo Bolívar); *Doctor Mateo* (Antena 3, 2009-), based on the British series *Doc Martin* (ITV, 2002-); the comedy series *Lalola* (Antena 3, 2008-2009) was based on the Argentinian comedy of the same name broadcast on América TV in 2007 and 2008; and most recently, the second adaptation of the famous sitcom *The Golden Girls* (NBC, 1985-1992) *Las chicas de oro*; *Pasión de Gavilanes* (Antena 3, 2010) is an adaptation of the Colombian tele-novela called by the same title written by Julio Jiménez and broadcasted originally by R.T.I. Televisión, Caracol Televisión and Telemundo (2003-2004); another successful TV adaptation in Spain has been the soap-opera *Yo soy Bea* (Telecinco, 2006-2009) from the original Colombian telenovela *Yo soy Betty, la Fea* (I am Betty, the Ugly; which also inspired the American TV series *Ugly Betty*). As Chicharro suggests, soap-operas are more flexible to adapt themselves into different audience and television systems. This is exemplified through the Spanish television trends of the last decades.<sup>20</sup>

We want to pay special attention to one of the most important TV adaptation coming from the European market: *La chica de ayer* (The Girl From Yesterday). It is the Spanish adaptation of the British TV series *Life on Mars* (BBC, 2006-2007). The original series has been broadcast in a number of countries, including the US, Canada, France, and also Spain; and the series format has been adapted in two foreign markets, the US and Spain.<sup>21</sup> ABC adapted the *Life on Mars* format for the American market, but the adapted series did not enjoy the expected success among critics and viewers. ABC cancelled the series after one season; difficulties with genre definition, as well as a failure to establish a clear identity, have been cited as possible explanations for its underperformance.<sup>22</sup>

The idea of adapting the British series for the Spanish market first arose in Los Angeles where Álvaro Ron, one of the series' directors, was working. Ron has produced a number of films, including *Mia Sarah* (Gustavo Ron, 2006), *Americano* (Kevin Noland, 2005) and *Green Zone* (Paul Greengrass, 2010). He came across the original script for *Life on Mars* and felt that a Spanish version would have significant potential. He wrote an adaptation prospectus and sent it to Antena



3, which was intrigued by the possibility. Sonia Martínez, the Director of TV Fiction at Antena 3, set out the reasons that prompted the network to purchase the broadcasting rights:

*We were intrigued by Life on Mars. It was one of the formats we wanted to get our hands on. We had very high expectations from the very beginning: a love story, a family to be rebuilt, a trip to be seen as a mission to be fulfilled, a character that has to learn to face life, himself, his friends... all set years in the past. A second chance at life, to learn how to approach it... A great format.*<sup>23</sup>

Enthused by the project, Antena 3 requested adaptation pitches from a number of Spanish production companies. The most convincing pitch was made by *Ida y Vuelta*, which developed the production of the series. *Ida y Vuelta* had already produced a number of series for Antena 3, such as *Círculo Rojo* (Red Circle, 2007) and *Física o química* (Physics and Chemistry, 2008-). Antena 3's only condition was that Álvaro Ron, who had come up with the idea, be included in the production team. The series comprised a total of eight episodes, each with a running-time of seventy minutes. The shooting schedule ran over six months, from September 2008 to February 2009. There were a series of meetings with the BBC in London throughout the production process for *La chica de ayer*, the purpose of which was to oversee the eight episodes of the Spanish version that had been approved by the BBC. Representatives of the BBC visited the set in Madrid, observed auditions, met the cast, and supervised the pilot episode. However, with the exception of the first episode, which reached an audience share of 19.7%, the series failed to meet the viewer ratings expected by the network; as a result, the production company was forced to bring the series to a close in the eighth episode.

## Conclusions

The overall purpose of this article was to present a general and classificatory overview of the most important TV adaptations in Spain from 1956 to 2012; in historical terms, TVE, the state public service broadcaster, has been the biggest investor in such productions. The wide-ranging overview of adaptations presented in this paper illustrates the preeminent significance and influence of plays, novels and also foreign TV series as sources in the production process. Traditionally, many TV fiction adaptations come from relevant authors within Spanish literature and theatre. These TV adaptations produced by TVE from 1956 and 1990 have mainly a pedagogical objective to bring well-known tales and stories closer to the audience. Furthermore, since copyright expired on these materials, the producers had easy access to them.

On the contrary, from 1990 onwards, TV adaptations stemming from private channels, and from TVE, have mainly a commercial objective. Miniseries or made-for-TV movies based on major news stories or contemporary issues have a great appeal for contemporary viewers. Recently, there has been a notable increase in the adaptation of foreign television series (comedy, soap opera, and drama) in the Spanish market over the course of the last ten years (2000-2012). TV producers trust in these formats due to the previous success they have in the original country. Therefore, producers attend the most remarkable TV markets like MIPCOM (Cannes), NATPE (Las Vegas) or Los Angeles TV Screening (Los Angeles), among others, to sell and buy television formats.

By and large, the circulation of European TV series has been quite positive in Spain, as the examples illustrated in this article make clear. Adaptations such as *Life on Mars* or *La Chica de Ayer* are symbolic examples of the complexities involved in (re)producing a series from another audiovisual market. The Spanish creators look at them as a source of inspiration to reproduce successful international series. However, the results in artistic terms and in terms of audience ratings have been mixed. Some of the adaptations have not matched the success of the original versions on which they are based. Spanish media professionals cannot limit their approach to the simple application of the know-how acquired through the purchase of the rights to the series; rather, there are issues relating to the content that require in-depth revision and re-construction on the part of scriptwriters, producers and directors.

Although this essay was jointly elaborated by the authors, "Introduction", "The production of TV fiction adaptations at TVE (1956-1990)" and "Adaptation in a competitive television market (1990-2000)" were written by Patricia Diego, whereas "A typology of television adaptations in Spain (2000-2012)", "Foreign TV series adaptations in Spain" and "Conclusions" were written by María del Mar Grandío.

- 1 Patricia Diego, *La ficción en la pequeña pantalla. Cincuenta años de series en España*, Eunsa, Pamplona 2010, p. 11.
- 2 Jonathan Bignell, *An Introduction to Television Studies*, Routledge, London 2004, p. 118.
- 3 *Ibidem*.
- 4 Albert Moran, *The Pie and The Crust: Television Programs Formats*, in Id., *Copycat TV: Globalisation, Program Formats and Cultural Identity*, University of Luton Press, Luton 1998, pp. 13-15.
- 5 See for example: Marta Frago, "Reflexiones sobre la adaptación cinematográfica desde una perspectiva iconológica," in *Comunicación y Sociedad*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2005.
- 6 María del Mar Grandío, Patricia Diego, "The Influence of the American Sitcom on the Production of TV Comedy in Spain," in *Scope. Journal of Film and TV Studies*, no. 16, 2010, <http://www.scope.nottingham.ac.uk/article.php?issue=16&id=1170>, last visit 15 January 2013.
- 7 Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, Routledge, New York 2006, p. XVIII.
- 8 Virginia Guarinos, *Del teatro al cine y a la televisión: el estado de la cuestión en España*, in Rafael Utrera Macías, Virginia Guarinos Galán (eds.), *Televisión, Teatro y Cine*, Padilla Libros, Sevilla 2003, pp. 61-77.
- 9 *Mariona Rebull* and *El viudo Rius* (The Riu Widower) by Ignacio Agustí might also be highlighted in this context. See: Patricia Diego, *La ficción en la pequeña pantalla*, cit., pp. 22-23.
- 10 Manuel Palacio, *Historia de la televisión en España*, Gedisa, Barcelona 2001, pp. 152-153.
- 11 Patricia Diego, *La ficción en la pequeña pantalla*, cit., p. 26.
- 12 See: Patricia Diego, *La producción de miniseries durante la etapa hegemónica de TVE (1956-1990)*, in Elsa Moreno, Elea Giménez Toledo, Cristina Etayo, Ruth Gutiérrez Delgado, Cristina Sánchez Blanco, José Enrique Guerrero Perez (eds.), *Los desafíos de la televisión pública en Europa*, Eunsa, Pamplona 2007, pp. 445-455.
- 13 Manuel Palacio, *Historia de la televisión en España*, cit., p. 157.
- 14 Encarna Jiménez Losantos, Vicente Sánchez-Biosca (eds.), *El relato electrónico*, Filmoteca Valenciana, Valencia 1989, p. 37.
- 15 Patricia Diego, *La ficción en la pequeña pantalla*, cit., p. 51.
- 16 *Idem*, p. 53.
- 17 *Idem*, pp. 72-76.
- 18 *Idem*, p. 68.
- 19 See for example: Els De Bens, Hedwing De Smade, "The Inflow of American Television Fiction on European Broadcasting Channels Revised," in *European Journal of Communication*, vol. 16, no. 51, 2001,

THE PRODUCTION OF TV FICTION ADAPTATIONS IN SPAIN (1950-2012)

- pp. 51-76; Daniel Biltereyst, Phillippe Meers, "The International Telenovela Debate and the Contra-Flow Argument: a Reappraisal," in *Media, Culture and Society*, no. 4, 2001, pp. 469-497; Kristin Moran, "The Global Expansion of Children's Television: A Case Study of the Adaptations of *Sesame Street* in Spain," in *Learning, Media and Technology*, vol. 31, no. 3, 2006, pp. 287-300.
- 20 María del Mar Chicarro, "Historia de la telenovela en España: aprendizaje, ensayo y apropiación de un género," in *Comunicación y Sociedad*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2011, p. 212.
- 21 Joseba Bonaut, Teresa Ojer, *El trasvase de formatos exitosos: el caso de Life on Mars*, in Alejandro Salgado (ed.), *Creatividad en Televisión. Entretenimiento y ficción*, Fragua, Madrid 2010, pp. 202-225.
- 22 Serra Tinic, "Life on Mars as Seen from the United States: The Cultural Politics of Imports and Adaptations," in *Flow TV Journal*, [www.flowtv.org/2009/04/life-on-mars-as-seen-from-the-united-states-the-cultural-politics-of-imports-and-adaptations-serra-tinic-the-university-of-alberta/](http://www.flowtv.org/2009/04/life-on-mars-as-seen-from-the-united-states-the-cultural-politics-of-imports-and-adaptations-serra-tinic-the-university-of-alberta/), last visit 10 October 2012.
- 23 Production Diary, *La chica de ayer*, p. 5.



NEW STUDIES



## IMAGE, SPACE, AND THE CONTEMPORARY FILMIC EXPERIENCE

Miriam De Rosa, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore

### *Abstract*

The article tackles the current debate dealing with the possibilities of expansion of contemporary cinema, trying to provide theoretical tools in order to build a framework, which takes into account the delicate relationship between space, image, and cinematic experience.

Based on the background of researches devoted to cinema's medium-specificity, the author identifies some possible contribution from Cultural, Media and Visual Studies, with the aim of formalizing some key-concept for the study of contemporary "cinematic forms".

---

### Settling the research

After a century-long history, one of the main issues of cinema theory seems to neglect its exclusive attention to film, in order to focus on the hybridization of expressive visual arts and reflect on its own specificity. The comparison with different objects, which progressively became worth studying, and the subsequent approach to various disciplines led to a widening of the theoretical field. This features in contemporary debates, and it is precisely the territory my research aims to explore.

The idea of an "expanded cinema" is not something typical of the latest reflections: the text by Gene Youngblood<sup>1</sup> represents the main and most explicit contribution in this sense, but it is just one of the voices emanating from a larger choir. For a long time, scholars and intellectuals have been dealing with the idea of a moving image able to go beyond its own precinct, spreading itself in space, conquering alternative situations and surfaces. This is an opening process, which broadens the traditional linguistic possibilities and allows cinema to mix itself with other arts, in a sort of contamination, which turns different territories into cinematic ones. In the last years a similar perspective worked as speculative basis both for artistic projects and for further academic or institutional explorations.<sup>2</sup> Quite paradoxically, film studies recently included in the debate the expanded forms of cinema and those hybrid productions, which test the use of moving images in new contexts and experimental filmic works.<sup>3</sup> Although they take root in a series of previous famous editorial and research experiences, such developments of theory are particularly flourishing in the most contemporary studies.

In fact, the presence of screen media and the use of the cinematic element are increasingly frequent in the most diverse situations, establishing themselves as typical aspects of the communicative processes and as assumed tool of everyday practices. Moreover, the artistic production and the cultural industry both contribute in setting this framework (in which cinema is also expected to survive), where languages mix, expressive forms tend to converge, codes and arts end up hybridising.<sup>4</sup> The resulting scenario is thus characterized by a constant redefinition: media convergence gives birth to complex platforms and to superimpositions among *dispositifs*, which often complete one another and sometimes even collide. Codes and media are constantly subject to a mechanism of unification, a tendency that coexists anyway with a strong tension towards innovation<sup>5</sup>. In this perspective, cinema and every medium in its way “overflow” their own original formats, “eroding” territory from other cultural productions. The instability of such a scenario is self-evident.<sup>6</sup> In this environment, media are literally invested by convergence, which plays a central role in leading to a medial “explosion”. The same dynamics obviously involve cinema as well, enlarging the pertinence of the moving image domain.

Such an expansion implicitly raises a theoretical urge: being conscious of such an enlargement obliges to revise the aesthetic and medial status of cinema, that is to say to establish what is to be defined “cinema” and what is not, what are the most suitable categories and tools to analyse the new set of practices and procedures shaped by the widening of the possible film studies scenario.

*Medium-specific approaches risk simplifying technological change to a zero-sum game in which one medium gains at the expenses of its rivals. A less reductive, comparative approach would recognize the complex synergies that always prevail among media systems, particularly during periods shaped by the birth of a new medium of expression.<sup>7</sup>*

The traditional methods, which distinguished media from a particular specificity, are now breaking up, because of the current blurring of medial boundaries. The strong remediation process,<sup>8</sup> which characterizes the contemporaneity, causes a sort of repetition, an extension and a critical re-examination of styles, texts and cultural products. The distribution mechanism of content is deeply altered, influencing the nature and the functionalities of medial devices as well; this opens up a wide range of possibilities which are now reserved to spectators/users, allowing them to act and play a first rank role. Far from being replaced, the old media transform themselves; their uses and the conventional behaviours connected to them are reshaped. This does not simply represent our time as “media transition time,”<sup>9</sup> but also highlights a further modification that takes place in terms of imaginary, since the symbolic construction of media undergoes a massive renovation. In fact, the coexistence of multifaceted and articulated medial systems creates what Henry Jenkins defines “transmedia storytelling.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, a series of aesthetic choices gives birth to a brand new language, able to answer the questions of convergence and its systemic, structural needs.

From a theoretical point of view, this implies a methodological necessity: in order to study cinema today and to understand the new forms the filmic element takes up, a wide perspective is essential. This would include the profitable intersections between cinema and other media, and would give the chance to compare those aspects, which still maintain a cinematic specificity. To explore the contemporary “extended cinema” scenario, the research approach should consider the width imposed by the trends just mentioned. In this sense, the cinematic specificity is not to be intended



as something outdated, but it definitely has to be taken into account under a comparative light, able to emphasize its features and the new relationships and balances with the specificities of other media. Therefore, a methodological view such as that of media studies has such a qualification and would show the phenomena of reconfiguration concerning the filmic element, simultaneously providing the opportunity to frame them, focusing on their connections with those processes that produce and regulate the whole media system. The devices, the practices and the contexts, which get increasingly closer to the cinematic element depicting a new medial and visual geography, are programmatically included in the domain of the post-cinema debate.

### How to explore post-cinema: Some methodological hints

From what has already been explained, it seems that an exploration of the field is needed, to sketch the borders of the occurring media expansion, and in particular to trace the changes in the cinematic precinct. This will be useful at least to identify its potential developments, observe its products and results, describe its ruling principles and – possibly – try to give an interpretation of them. The main intention of this article is exactly to suggest a possible framework able to answer the theoretical urge to update the debate, encompassing the forms that shape and reshape moving images. The ambition is thus to propose a sort of taxonomy of those forms.

To focus on the unconventional cinematic forms means here to choose a particular observation point: the reflection has to be close to its objects in order to really be able to follow and trace their evolutions, without the risk of a self-referential theorization. In this sense, this research attempts to be a reflection about the real processes taking place in our contemporary society and daily practices, exploring the phenomena from the inside.

### Cultural studies

The complexity featuring the analysed phenomena should emphasise the status of cinema taking into consideration the processes which progressively involve moving images on the one hand, and on the other hand, those dynamics which the filmic element influences. This provides the opportunity to take into account both the vectors challenging cinema's condition as a medium, and the linguistic characters together with the fruition patterns imposed by a "cinematic attitude" to reality. Only the intersection of these aspects can support the true chance to sketch the audiovisual and medial geography framing the filmic instance. In other words, the main issue is to catch the redefinition which is touching cinema, in terms of its symbolic meaning, of its cultural position within a wider mediascape, of the ways in which it is perceived and defined by people and their use.

The value assumed and the practices developed by moving images are the centre of interest of such a theoretical framework. It has to go through the expressive hybrid dynamics, describing how one cultural space absorbs another and how elements belonging to a certain field turn out to become cinematized component of our visual system. This research perspective shares with cultural studies a special attention reserved to social praxis, intended as an important component

MIRIAM DE ROSA

of culture and an accumulation of values and shared imagery. To assume such an approach allows a wide exploration, which succeeds in including a number of mechanisms that would otherwise be excluded from the research field. It is an important step, because these processes provide important experimental materials for the construction of a media aesthetic of transition. In fact, the deep sociocultural uncertainty and the strong technological development characterizing the present historical period are accompanied by a bidirectional response: the effort to pragmatically answer the urge of finding new linguistic and expressive models has a counterpart in the need to reflect and analyse culture and its forms with the aim of absorbing innovation at best. The idea of “culture” in its full potentiality is fundamental: it is “something much larger than the arts, something anthropological in definition. Given the particular functions of culture that were being explored – identity, cohesion, direction – media assumed increasing prominence.”<sup>11</sup> Just for these reasons, the centrality reserved to culture is clear. The culturological perspective guarantees this attention<sup>12</sup> and moreover, it does underline the structural connection between culture and media. Cultural and media studies are set side by side by the belief that both perspectives can offer a set of study tools and assumptions which fit one another, representing the basis to investigate the forms of moving images today.

## Media studies

Media, and cinema among them, play a central role in the articulation of cultural practices. They represent essential elements, which concur to the construction of a complex scenario. This complexity is the result of governance policies, experiences and the fragile balance between editors and users/spectators that are connected by a set of highly embedded relations. The junction between cultural and media studies aims precisely to interface the research with “a full definition of media [that] requires an embrace of multiplicity, complexity and even contradiction if sense is to be made of such a pervasive cultural experience.”<sup>13</sup> In order to face the intertwining nature of such a scenario the most suitable methodological perspective seems to be an interdisciplinary one. The explicit choice is not to close the research within rigid theoretical constraints. On the contrary, it is important to deal with the cinematic element in its “environmental” condition, trying to seize intertextual and intermedial links. Moving images should be considered then as part of the contemporary mediascape, emphasizing their potential as representational strategies and visual experiences.

## Visual studies

The same interdisciplinary background is something typical of visual studies as well. This approach takes into account visual data considering their historical and sociocultural context, in order to highlight both their origin and developments. The notion of *visual culture* gives synthetically the idea of the importance of the environmental aspect: the visual element inevitably features something around it, something which turns out to be vital, since it influences its relationships with the scenario it enters and the individuals it addresses.

The reflection on visual culture focusses on everything able to define images as they are, their functions, their ways of transmission and distribution – mechanisms characterized by a central role played by media.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, this research perspective reserves a deep attention – once again – to the concept of culture, emphasizing the shift which characterized it: the huge development of mass media, combined with a number of variables, not only granted a progressively larger importance to the visual element, but also encouraged the production of different visual expressive forms, that are part of culture and are spread and reproduced as products of the cultural industry.<sup>15</sup> On a conceptual level, this implies a broadening of the idea of culture, which is not reserved to the *élite* anymore but opens up to alternatives or non-institutional forms.<sup>16</sup> The classical cultural model, in which the artwork represented the manifestation of a non-reproducible originality, preserved in museums collections and symbol of “high culture”, gives way to a new conception of culture. This renovated approach directs the attention to visual language; in other words, towards objects which historically belonged to the most intellectual production, and towards common and definitely standardized ones. The focus shifts to a more basic meaning of culture, where the aesthetic qualities and the refinement are not lost but where the base for reflection is just wider and more accessible: the core concern for a visual culture model is the visual nature of objects, which represents the sufficient condition to make something worth studying. This is an important difference, because it includes in the debate grassroots artistic and filmic forms.<sup>17</sup> The strength and pregnancy of the visual element throughout the cultural and cinematic productions work as qualitative factors, as aspects that make a certain object to be thought of as the result of a representation system, an element able to intersect reality, users, their imagery and the traditional producers of content. In practical terms, the attention is drawn to cultural objects, which are part of a wider discourse, whose peculiarities are seized thanks to perceptive experiences – particularly thanks to vision. The scopic experience is thus intended as an action able to articulate and influence meaning. It finds expression both traditionally and through a broad practice: vision becomes a full perceptive modality, in which the eye assumes a sort of “touching” ability; a haptic perception, where the eye activates a tactile prehension. This dynamic triggers the subject embedment in the visual space of perception – in this sense, vision is a powerful kind of scopic experience, in which more than seeing is involved, and the senses seem to merge in order to emphasize an intense corporeal feeling.<sup>18</sup>

Images, with their meanings, values, aims, and their fruition patterns give birth to what has recently been named “contemporary iconosphere”.<sup>19</sup> The subjects who are responsible for the interpretation of images are also part of this context, because they are in charge of the construction of the symbolic establishment connected to the visual element, that is to say they formalize its meaning and redefine their own identity starting from it. The idea of a discourse weaved around the image underlines the passing from a simple visual “data” to a more complete visual “instance”. Moreover, it supports the reflection on visual culture as research paradigm characterized by a bilateral and structural relation between visual and social elements.<sup>20</sup>

A big part of the explorations developed within visual studies considered the object of their inquiries as visual text. In fact, one of the first aims was to reinterpret the visual-/artwork as textual system, but the necessity of taking into account an expanded scenario (including the social, medial, cultural element) redirected the whole approach. More precisely, this has been possible thanks to a number of conceptual turns, that marked the evolution of the framework. Assuming that a visual text always sets itself at the intersection of different practices, means to focus on the

hypersaturation and pervasiveness of media, on the rising importance and influence of the cultural element, on the synesthetic predisposition of the image to produce sensory overloads. For these reasons, the visual culture perspective is nowadays a dynamic project, which tries to mirror socio-cultural trends, aesthetic choices, and the most innovative technological offer. This opens up the approach towards a research, which neither only studies the pure image, nor the image producer in an exclusive way, but on the contrary, addresses the creative intersections and the fruitful relations between the two of them. In particular, the visual culture debate tries to work on the one hand on the ability of the image to signify something, and on the other, on the individual's capability to interpret a certain meaning.

To see the research object as a simple "visual sign" is a limited interpretation. Indeed, the visual culture perspective guarantees an extended set of objects, explicitly including in its debate practices and processes concerning the visual instance in its complexity. First of all, this legitimates the focus not (only) on what is seen, but on the act of seeing. Emphasizing practices and processes does not mean to focus just on vision, because it does not encompass the whole set of mechanisms connecting the object and the subject of observation. The concept of visual experience comes therefore into play: vision, plus a complex set of dynamics able to define its articulations enter the arena.

As Tom Gunning also stated, visual culture

*identifies [a] new field as a research based on a description of the alteration of modern experience. [...] Gunning uses the word "experience" instead of "perception" to describe the situation when "visual stimuli [...] have multiplied enormously, often outside of the regimes that are usually thought of as culture, such as the museum or the gallery". These stimuli are simultaneously part of our experience and a record of it, and visual culture accordingly reflects and investigates the entire domain of this experience.*<sup>21</sup>

After the *iconic* and the *cultural turn*, the visual culture perspective seems to face a further shift – an *experiential turn*. The approach follows a more general orientation recently influencing the humanities. This is the sign of an overall urge towards a "restoration of experience as a central concern of cultural theory at the present time."<sup>22</sup>

## Analytical perspective and research hypothesis

The analytical framework I propose is part of the same trend, since its main references are cinema<sup>23</sup> and semiotics<sup>24</sup> theories assuming an experiential approach. It is precisely in these contexts that scholars have explicitly referred to an "experiential turn,"<sup>25</sup> which does not refer to a strict disciplinary precinct, rather opens up an interdisciplinary exchange. In this perspective, those discourses and processes gravitating around the new contemporary filmic forms are included in the theoretical debate, in which they are considered as vivid fabric, made up of different fibers, constantly revived and re-articulated. In fact, the essence of the expanded forms of cinema represents something which is continuously subject to reorganization, reformulation, since its *mise en forme* is directly influenced by sociocultural trends, technological innovation, evolution of aesthetic and medial codes.

This leads to two consequences at least: firstly, new expressive configurations appear, implying a reflection and a research of new interpretative strategies of images. In other words, in order to take into consideration cinema in its expanded dimension, diverse analytical perspectives should intersect, assuming precisely their junction as the vantage point where the observation has to be settled. This clearly implies a hybridization of method, based on a programmatic blurring of disciplinary boundaries and an intense dialogue among the inquiry directions. According to this idea, such research perspective should be founded on a threefold frame, set right in the area where *media*, *cultural* and *visual studies* overlap, emphasizing continuities and discontinuities among them.

The second consequence is the urge not to separate theory from the phenomena it wants to describe. Moving images are thus to be considered as part of experience, since this gives the chance to seize their true nature and their full potential in the very moment in which they are *moving*. Even visual culture literature shares a similar point of view: in his *Introduction to Visual Culture*, Nicholas Mirzoeff states that “the constituent parts of visual culture are [...] defined [...] by the interaction between viewer and viewed, which may be termed the visual event,”<sup>26</sup> that is to say “an interaction of the visual sign, the technology that enables and sustains that sign, and the viewer.”<sup>27</sup>

To stress the dynamic element of the process means to underline the sensory and meaningful immediacy of moving images, but above all, it means highlighting the ability of the filmic element to collect components from the context where it is settled, earning vitality and shaping itself from it, whilst feeding it at the same time. The context itself does not simply contain the image; on the contrary it also gains new substance through it. The idea of an image displaying itself *en train de se faire* is something important precluding a progressive mechanism along which a visual and symbolic fulfilment is expected. Moreover, this process echoes the sense of progress characterizing the concept of experience,<sup>28</sup> and thus legitimates the methodological choice of according to an experiential research frame.

This is a central passage within the framework of visual studies, but at the same time it is something grounded on a phenomenological conception of experience,<sup>29</sup> and on a certain philosophical tradition which examines the two essential faces of experience itself, that is to say its nature of manifestation and encyclopaedia.<sup>30</sup>

On a conceptual level, dealing with such an *experiential turn* means to divide the visual element from its textual medium, supporting its substance in itself. As I have already pointed out, the experiential perspective turns the traditional visual text into visual instance, not neglecting the textual framework, but showing how a text is always to be intended as an experience too. Following this shift, seeing becomes a full interpretative practice, contributing to the composition of experience as many other social, symbolic and aesthetic mechanisms do. Obviously, the image plays a central role in this dynamic, since it is still the representing core, but many other elements are added to it in order to get the complex nature of the filmic experience. “Visual experience in this sense is an event resulting from the modern that takes place across the ‘wandering lines’ marked by consumers traversing the grids of modernism.”<sup>31</sup> Therefore, I would argue that visual experience is defined by the continuity/discontinuity trajectories followed by the cinema medium, remaining inside the precinct of its classical pertinence or – on the contrary – going outside of it, exploring new strategies and thus creating those very expressive forms which are the center of this analysis.

My main hypothesis is that the proliferation of screens and the wide variety of occasions in which the filmic device finds its space in the contemporary scenario, does not simply cause a new

collocation of cinematic experience. A *relocation*<sup>32</sup> is definitely the first phenomenon to occur, but something else seems to characterize the situation as well: a real colonization of space takes place, and the moving image does not just enter new contexts but merges with them. It becomes part of it, forming its surface, allowing it to be practicable and dwelled in. The filmic experience becomes the rough material of space – or better, it is the subject of a kind of weaving process with space, which gives birth to a complex visual and experiential texture. A *space-image* materializes, meaning with it the place of filmic experience, which is a synthesis of the imaginary, symbolic, representative environment and physical one.

Exploring the situations in which this space-image seems to arise, it is possible to sketch its typical aesthetical, expressive features, the relationships linking its components, and its possible function. These variables can be useful in order to reconstruct the context framing those particular experiences and situations in which the filmic element is to be found today. Such a territory represents the area where a conceivable theoretical framework should develop, aiming to explore the possible research directions and to systematize them. The attempt is to understand the regulation and working mechanisms of space-image by means of an analysis of certain examples (i.e. space-image and the city, space-image and the gallery, space-image and everyday practices, space-image and performance, space-image and surveillance, etc.).

A second hypothesis is tightly related to these dynamics: the main idea is that the interpretation key to be used in order to study the space-image is the concept of *design*. This notion of design originally includes a manipulation, an operative and a projectual attitude, which is here to be directed towards space. Design becomes thus synonym for an action on space able to connote, furnish and dwell a certain environment.

The question which arises refers to the very experience of this manipulation: where does it come from? Which circumstances are propitious for the space-image to take place? And which are those that help to develop its design?

Design defines a space-image as the place of a specific filmic experience, characterized by a set of contextual features and a particular aim. In this sense, the main experiential features of the situations in which a space-image is recognizable are important variables in order to define its design. Taking them into consideration is essential to identify how and in which context the filmic element is used nowadays, whilst simultaneously sketching the basis of contemporary cinematic experience. The attention is to be directed towards the formal and functional feature of space-image. From time to time, the synthesis of these two sets of traits give birth to a microcosm. This intersection allows the determination of a number of situations where the filmic device is inserted as formal and functional part of the mechanism able to shape visibility and reality. It is precisely the experience, in its visual aspect and in its adherence with reality that is here at stake. In particular, this deals with the configuration of filmic experience. Better yet, it means to deal with a design that weaves the cinematic element and the spatial dimension it enters. The space-image resulting from this weaving process represents the direct effect of the disposition operated by the cinematic element in space, which makes the space itself become a place characterized by a specific function.

Further developments of such a research should consider a number of images and situations, which testify to the presence of moving images outside its precinct. Emphasizing the potential of the cinematic element for differential use<sup>33</sup> will possibly be useful in composing a catalogue of different space-images.

- 1 Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, P. Dutton & Co., Inc., New York 1970.
- 2 Among the recent initiatives which can be described as an expanded form of cinema, there is for example Peter Greenaway's work *Tulse Luper VJ Performance*, or the complex *Urbanscreens* project directed by Mirjam Struppek. As far as the editorial work is concerned, see Susan Lord, Janine Marchessault, *Fluid Screens, Expanded Cinema*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2007; Jeffrey Shaw, Peter Weibel (eds.), *Future Cinema: The Cinematic Imaginary After Film*, The MIT Press, Cambridge (MA)-London 2003; Martin Rieser, Andrea Zapp (eds.), *New Screen Media: Cinema/Art/Narrative*, BFI-ZKM, London-Karlsruhe 2002; Domenico Quaranta, *Media, New Media, Postmedia*, Postmedia, Milano 2010; Philippe Dubois, Lúcia Ramos Monteiro, Alessandro Bordina (eds.), *Oui, c'est du cinema. Formes et espaces de l'image en mouvement*, Campanotto, Pasion di Prato 2009; Philippe Dubois, Elena Biserna, Frédéric Monvoisin (eds.), *Extended cinema*, Campanotto, Pasion di Prato 2010; Alice Autelitano (ed.), *The Cinematic Experience: Film, Contemporary Art, Museum*, Campanotto, Pasion di Prato 2010.
- 3 This implies an updating of theory as well; on the one hand this means that the research has to encompass some aspects which were initially not pertinent with the film studies field. On the other hand, the debate unavoidably triggers a redefinition of the research objects: along this direction are to be considered those efforts to elaborate a "post-textual" approach and the so called "post-cinema" debate. The theoretical basis of this study are to be found along the vector which connects the reflections about medium-specificity by Rosalind Krauss, to the position formalised by Stanley Cavell regarding the ontology of film, and – in turn – to a number of more recent contributions about "post-media aesthetics." The most important references are: Rosalind E. Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," in *October*, no. 8, Spring 1979, pp. 30-44; Id., "Reinventing the Medium", in *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 25, no. 2, Winter 1999, pp. 289-305; Id., *A Voyage on the North Sea. Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, Thames & Hudson, London 1999; Id., *Perpetual Inventory*, The MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 2010; Staley Cavell, *A World Viewed. Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) 1979 (1971); with regards to the more recent debate, please refer to Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, The MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 2001; Christine Gledhill, Linda Williams (eds.), *Reinventing Film Studies*, Arnold-Oxford University Press, London-New York 2000; Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles 1993; Id., *The Virtual Window: from Alberti to Microsoft*, The MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 2006; John Fullerton (ed.), *Screen Cultures: History and Textuality*, John Libbey, Eastleigh 2004; Ji-Hoon Kim, "The Post-Medium Condition and the Explosion of Cinema," in *Screen*, vol. 50, no. 1, Spring 2009, pp. 114-123; Francesco Casetti, "Theory, Post-theory, Neo-theories: Changes in Discourses, Changes in Objects," in *CiNéMAS: Journal of Film Studies*, vol. 17, no. 2-3, July 2007, pp. 33-45; Id., "L'esperienza filmica e la ri-locazione del cinema," in *Fata Morgana, Esperienza*, no. 4, 2008, pp. 23-40; Id., "Filmic Experience," in *Screen*, vol. 50, no. 1, Spring 2009, pp. 56-66; Id., "Back to the Motherland: the Film Theatre in the Postmedia Age," in *Screen*, vol. 52, no. 1, Spring 2011, pp. 1-12 (already published in *Montage AV. Zeitschrift für Theorie und Geschichte audiovisueller Kommunikation, Erfahrung*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2010, pp. 10-35 and in *Fata Morgana, Visuale*, no. 8, 2009, pp. 173-188).
- 4 Among the others, see Wu Ming, *Prefazione*, foreword to the Italian edition of Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York University Press, New York-London 2006 (it. ed. *Cultura convergente*, Apogeo, Milano 2007), especially pp. vii-xv.
- 5 See Ithiel De Sola Pool, *Technologies of Freedom: On Free Speech in an Electronic Age*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) 1983, mentioned in: Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, cit., p. 10.
- 6 A rich literature is available as this regards; see, at least, Francesco Casetti, "I media dopo l'ultimo big bang. Cosa cambia e cosa resta, quando sfumano i confini," in *Link. Idee per la televisione, Che fare? La tv dopo la crisi*, no. 8, 2009, pp. 197-209; Matteo Bittanti (ed.), *Intermedialità. Videogiochi, cinema, televisione, fumetti*, Unicopli, Milano 2008; Nicola Dusi, Lucio Spaziante (eds.), *Remix-remake: pratiche di replicabilità*, Meltemi, Roma 2006; Henry Jenkins, "The Cultural Logic of Media Convergence," in *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, no. 7, March 2004, pp. 33-43; Id., "Taking Media in Our Own Hands," *Technology Review*, <http://www.technologyreview.com/biomedicine/13905/>, last visit 7 May 2012.

- 7 David Thornburn, Henry Jenkins (eds.), *Rethinking Media Change. The Aesthetics of Transition*, The MIT Press, Cambridge (MA)-London 2003, p. 3.
- 8 Jay David Bolter, Richard Grusin, *Remediation. Understanding New Media*, The MIT Press, Cambridge (MA)-London 1999.
- 9 David Thornburn, Henry Jenkins (eds.), *Rethinking Media Change. The Aesthetics of Transition*, cit.
- 10 See Henry Jenkins, "Transmedia Storytelling. Moving Characters from Books to Films to Video Games Can Make Them Stronger and More Compelling," *Technology Review*, <http://www.technologyreview.com/biotech/13052/>, last visit 7 May 2012; Id., "La vendetta dell'unicorno origami. Sette concetti chiave del transmedia storytelling," in *Link. Idee per la televisione, Vedere la luce. Dio e la televisione*, no. 9, 2010, pp. 17-28.
- 11 William Uricchio, *Historicizing Media in Transition*, in David Thornburn, Henry Jenkins (eds.), *Rethinking Media Change. The Aesthetics of Transition*, cit., p. 26.
- 12 The notion of *culture* is here intended as in the grounding contributions of cultural studies. See, for example, Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950*, Harper and Row, New York 1958; Id., *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, Fontana, London 1974; Id., *Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, Verso, London 1989; Stuart Hall, David Morley, Kuan-Hsing Chen (eds.), *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, Routledge, London-New York 1996; Stuart Hall (ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Sage – The Open University, London 1997; Id., *Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies*, in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Paula Treichler (eds.), *Cultural Studies*, Routledge, London-New York 1992, pp. 277-294. For a definition of the concept, see Michele Cometa, *Dizionario degli studi culturali*, Meltemi, Roma 2004; Lawrence Grossberg, *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*, Duke University Press, Durham-London 2010 (in particular, chapter IV, *Contextualizing Culture: Mediation, Signification, and Significance*).
- 13 William Uricchio, *Historicizing Media in Transition*, cit., p. 24.
- 14 The visual culture approach owes its germinal perspective to the German *Bildwissenschaft*, which is to be traced back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and has developed afterwards, with some important contributions by Hans Belting, Klaus Sachs-Hombach, Horst Bredekamp. For a definition of its research object see, for example, AA. VV., "Visual Culture Questionnaire," in *October*, no. 77, Summer 1996, pp. 25-70.
- 15 This is precisely what has been defined as the *iconic turn*.
- 16 This issue does not precisely belong to the visual culture reflection, but is eventually part of the agenda of visual studies in general. The question has been addressed by so many scholars that it would be impossible to list all their contributions here. Anyway, James D. Herbert's opinion (as it's been pointed out by Margaret Dikovitskaya) can summarize the debate and underline its importance for visual studies: "Visual studies does not pursue the goal of redefining all cultural artifacts as art, expanding the canon, or erasing the 'high-low' distinction. The boundaries – high, low, and middle – still exist, but their definitions are determined by the type of materials [...] rather than by the degree of aesthetic sophistication. What we see in contemporary exhibitions is that these margins are continually being redefined: there are mixtures of the high and the low, and there are instances of border crossing in multimedia works. At the same time, when mass culture items are placed in a museum, the border is reset as much as erased because of the nature of the museum as an institution." Margaret Dikovitskaya, *Visual Culture: The Study of the Visual after the Cultural Turn*, The MIT Press, Cambridge (MA)-London 2005, p. 70.
- 17 For a definition of the grassroots cinematic production, see Emiliana De Blasio, Paolo Peverini (eds.), *Open cinema. Scenari di visione cinematografica negli anni '10*, Fondazione Ente dello Spettacolo, Roma 2010; Barbara Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex. Cinema, New Technologies, and the Home*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 2006; Laura Tettamanzi, "I Want You. Il controllo dei big media sui contenuti generati dagli utenti," in *Link. Idee per la televisione, News from Everywhere*, no. 6, 2008, pp. 107-112.
- 18 On these issues, see Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1992 (in particular, chapter 1); Antonia Lant, "Haptical Cinema," in *October*, no. 74, Fall 1995, pp. 45-73; Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion. Journeys in Art, Architecture,*



- and Film*, Verso, New York 2002; Jane Stadler, "Intersubjective, Embodied, Evaluative Perception: A Phenomenological Approach to the Ethics of Film," in *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, vol. 19, no. 3, July 2002, pp. 237-248; Nicholas J. Wade, *Perception and Illusion. Historical Perspectives*, Springer, New York 2005; *Infant Behavior and Development, The Development of Haptic Perception* (edited by François Jouen, Michèle Molina), vol. 28, no. 3, September 2005, pp. 227-388; Andrea Pinotti, *Un'immagine alla mano. Note per una genealogia dello spettatore tattile*, in Antonio Somaini (ed.), *Il luogo dello spettatore. Forme dello sguardo nella cultura delle immagini*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2005; Jennifer M. Barker, *The Tactile Eye. Touch and the Cinematic Experience*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2009. On corporeity and the relation between body and emotions, see Luca Malavasi, *Racconti di Corpi. Cinema, film, spettatori*, Kaplan, Torino 2009.
- 19 The idea of "contemporary iconosphere" is used here as understood by Antonio Somaini. See Antonio Somaini, *Sul concetto di cultura visuale*, in Tonino Griffero, Michele Di Monte (eds.), *Potere delle immagini?*, Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2009, p. 211.
- 20 See W. J. Thomas Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago-London 2005.
- 21 Margaret Dikovitskaya, *Visual culture: The Study of the Visual after the Cultural Turn*, cit., p. 79; see also the full interview with Tom Gunning, pp. 173-180.
- 22 Martin Jay, *The Limits of Limit-experience*, in Id., *Cultural Semantics. Keywords of our Time*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst 1998, p. 78.
- 23 The main reference is to Francesco Casetti and his studies about filmic experience; for a systematic synthesis of the author's perspective, see Francesco Casetti, "Filmic Experience", cit.
- 24 See Ruggero Eugeni, *Semiotica dei media. Le forme dell'esperienza*, Carocci, Roma 2010.
- 25 *Ibidem*.
- 26 Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, Routledge, London 1999, p. 13.
- 27 *Ibidem*.
- 28 The almost obvious reference is to the idea of *Erfahrung* and the implicit sense of movement it conveys (from German, *fahren*, namely *to go*).
- 29 It's the Heideggerian elaboration to be taken here into particular consideration. My idea is neither to ignore the primary work by Husserl and his important studies leading to the foundation of phenomenology, nor to reduce and underestimate the connection among the reflections by the two philosophers, but to assume them and focus on the notion of being as "being in the world." This is something which mainly characterizes Heidegger's thought and his further conception of phenomenology, leaving somehow the fundamental logics of eidetic reduction and *epoché* on the background, developing a framework that encompasses a situated subject, who directly experiences the authenticity and historicity of reality, plus the subsequent feeling of thrownness. Experience rouses in this sense as something "alive," occurring as an event which unfolds itself in space and time as "projected" action (etymologically, from Anglo-French *pro-jecter*, from Latin *projectus*, to throw, send forth). Such a connotation represents an important hint, because at least it describes one of the two meanings of experience, that's to say its immediacy and its projectual possibilities. This last observation represents the link connecting the concept of vivid experience and the notion of design, which will be introduced further on. The two categories share the idea of an ideal progression: the movement of experience which develops as occurrence on the one hand, and the "culture of the project" featuring design, making the whole view progressing and turning it into something tangible. For the most important references on the phenomenological and the experience issue in the frame of Heidegger's literature, see Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, Niemeyer, Tübingen 1927 (eng. ed. *Being and Time*, Harper and Row, New York 1962); Id., *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, in Id., *Holzwege*, Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main 1950 (eng. en. *The Origin of the Work of Art*, in Id., *Off the Beaten Track*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002); Id., *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, Günther Neske, Pfullingen 1954 (eng. ed. *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Harper and Row, New York 1971); Id., *Identität und Differenz*, Günther Neske, Pfullingen 1957 (eng. ed. *Identity and Difference*, Harper and Row, New York 1969).
- 30 I refer to the concepts of *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, intended as two aspects of a complex structure which

encompasses a double temporality. The former concerns to things as they are happening (the event dimension), while the latter is connected to what remains after the manifestation of events and feeds our memory, ideas, knowledge – a sort of “symbolic material,” deposited by *Erlebnis*. These notions intersect a vast literature, belonging to philosophy of experience and to different Western philosophical traditions; see, for example, Wilhelm Dilthey, *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung. Lessing – Goethe – Novalis – Hölderlin*, Vanderhoeck & Rupert, Göttingen 2005 (1895); Giorgio Giannini, *La nozione di esperienza. Implicazioni filosofiche ed esistenziali*, Città Nuova Editrice, Roma 1987; Rüdiger Bubner, *Esperienza estetica*, Rosenberg & Sellier, Torino 1992 (1989); Valeria E. Russo (ed.), *La questione dell'esperienza*, Ponte alle Grazie, Firenze 1991; Loredano Matteo Lorenzetti (ed.), *La dimensione estetica dell'esperienza*, Franco Angeli, Milano 1995; Alfredo Marini, *Alle origini della filosofia contemporanea. Wilhelm Dilthey. Antinomie dell'esperienza, fondazione temporale del mondo umano, epistemologia della connessione*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2008 (1984). See also the short definition of the term *Esperienza*, in Nicola Abbagnano (ed.), *Dizionario filosofico*, UTET, Torino 1998, pp. 393-400.

31 Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, cit., p. 26.

32 Please refer to the research on the notion of “relocation” developed by Francesco Casetti. See Francesco Casetti, “L'esperienza filmica e la ri-locazione del cinema,” cit.

33 This expression is drawn from Rosalind E. Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea. Art in the Age of Post-Medium Condition*, cit.

## PROJECTS & ABSTRACTS



## LA JEUNESSE A L'ÉPREUVE DES SÉRIES TÉLÉVISUELLES SYRIENNES : MODES DE PRODUCTION, RÉCEPTION ET RÉPRÉSENTATIONS (2000-2010)

Nicolas Appelt / Ph.D. Thesis Project<sup>1</sup>

Université de Lausanne

Durant la période 2000-2010 et jusqu'aux événements politiques qui ont débuté en mars 2011 (rébellion dans plusieurs parties du pays)<sup>2</sup>, la Syrie s'est imposée comme un exportateur important de séries télévisuelles, rivalisant avec l'Égypte qui a longtemps bénéficié d'une position hégémonique dans le domaine. Les chaînes satellitaires, qui constituent la principale manne de financement de ces programmes « récurrents » depuis le retrait de l'Etat dans ce domaine<sup>3</sup>, se disputent des parts d'audience surtout durant le mois de Ramadan où sont diffusées les séries télévisuelles, les *musalsalat*, soit une trentaine d'épisodes de quarante-cinq minutes. Afin de se démarquer de leurs concurrents régionaux, les concepteurs (producteurs, scénaristes, etc.) ont en effet cherché à occuper un créneau susceptible d'assurer un certain public à leurs produits. Compte tenu d'un tel environnement concurrentiel, qui constitue l'un des principaux axes développés pour l'instant dans la littérature secondaire, il est possible de s'interroger sur l'influence de cette compétition sur les manières dont ces séries élaborent certains modes de discours et de représentation sociale.

Il est ainsi possible de relever une implication importante de la production télévisuelle syrienne dans des séries de type « historique » qui, selon Christa Salamandra, correspondent au passage d'un échelon national à un échelon régional<sup>4</sup>. Dans la mesure où les chaînes satellitaires donnent accès à un public plus beaucoup plus large, mais avec des références historiques hétérogènes, et que les sources de financements du Golfe imposent certaines idées, ces séries manifestent en effet un glissement vers des thématiques plus largement partagées. Situées traditionnellement durant la fin de l'occupation ottomane et la période du Protectorat français, soit un contexte propre à la Syrie, ces séries « historiques » s'orientent pour la plupart, à partir du début des années 2000, vers un ancrage dans l'âge d'or de l'empire islamique. Celui-ci fait référence à un passé supposément commun, animé par la nécessité de surmonter des dissensions internes pour lutter contre un même ensemble de menaces extérieures<sup>5</sup>. En parallèle, les séries syriennes se sont aussi démarquées, comme le relèvent plusieurs auteurs (Malrin Dick, Yves Gonzalez-Quijano), par la manière dont elles pointent certaines problématiques d'ordre social et politique.

Parmi ces questions, quelle place est-elle accordée à la jeunesse et aux difficultés que rencontrent les jeunes en Syrie? La population de ce pays est jeune, dans la mesure où 60% des Syriens sont nés après 1980<sup>6</sup>. Cette jeunesse est en proie à un « sentiment de profond désarroi », pour reprendre l'expression de Caroline Donati<sup>7</sup>. Tout d'abord, elle est durement frappée par le chômage, puisque sur les 20% de chômeurs que compte la population active 72,3% d'entre eux appartiennent à la tranche des 15-24 ans<sup>8</sup>. Ensuite, toujours d'après Caroline Donati, les jeunes n'ont guère

profité de l'ouverture économique opérée après l'accession au pouvoir de Bachar al-Assad, en 2000<sup>9</sup> (ouverture qui s'est également propagée, signalons-le, au secteur des médias). Enfin, l'Etat ne crée pas assez d'emplois et le secteur privé n'arrive pas à absorber les 300.000 nouveaux chercheurs d'emplois annuels<sup>10</sup>. Dans ce contexte où l'autonomie des jeunes par rapport à la sphère familiale est retardée, de nombreux jeunes sont tentés par l'émigration<sup>11</sup>.

Même si ce projet de recherche se trouve encore dans une phase d'élaboration méthodologique, et de récolte de matériel et d'information directement sur place, plusieurs lignes-forces apparaissent déjà. Tout en évitant l'écueil qui consiste à voir dans les fictions télévisuelles un simple reflet de la réalité, ce projet se propose de comprendre dans quelle mesure les séries produites et diffusées en Syrie permettent de mieux saisir le désarroi évoqué ci-dessus, ainsi que les attentes et les aspirations des jeunes. Pour pouvoir répondre à cette question, il convient non seulement de recenser, parmi l'ensemble de la production de télévision des années 2000-2010, les séries qui ont eu comme thème central la jeunesse, mais aussi de tenter de prendre en compte, pour la même période, leur réception critique, c'est-à-dire l'accueil que leur a réservé la presse nationale. Ce dernier point servira, entre autres critères, à définir le corpus de séries. Il sera également important de comprendre comment se structure le champ de la production télévisuelle syrien entre les différents acteurs (privés, publics), ainsi que la façon dont ce secteur entre en interaction avec des partenaires ou concurrents étrangers. L'objectif de cette première phase de recherche sera de définir l'impact de cette double structuration sur les choix de thématiques liées à la jeunesse. Précisons qu'à ce stade, il sera indispensable de mener des entretiens avec des professionnels des différents secteurs.

C'est seulement après ces étapes préliminaires qu'il conviendra d'analyser plus concrètement les figures de la jeunesse élaborées par les séries qui auront été retenues. Il ne s'agira pas seulement répertorier les caractéristiques liées à l'identité des protagonistes et les situations auxquelles ils sont confrontés, mais encore, et surtout, d'analyser les modalités proprement filmiques (mise en scène, cadrage, montage...), comme les codes iconographiques auxquelles celles-ci font écho.

- 1 Projet de thèse sous la direction du Prof. Laurent Guido.
- 2 Bien qu'une vingtaine de séries soient annoncées pour la saison de Ramadan 2012, il est possible de constater un net ralentissement dans la production de séries télévisuelles en Syrie. Ce chiffre (vingt séries environ) doit en effet être considéré avec précaution, car il englobe les séries déjà tournées, celles en cours de tournage, celles dont le financement est assuré mais dont le tournage n'a pas encore commencé et d'autres prêtes depuis la saison précédente. <http://www.bostah.com/news/local-news/20499-ام-ارد-2012-ل-ق-ال-ى-ع-ا-ي-روس-ال-س-ل-م-20-ر-ظ-ت-ن-ت>, dernier accès 8 mars 2012.
- 3 Christa Salamandra, *Arab Television Drama production in the Satellite Era*, dans Diana I. Rios, Mari Castañeda (sous la direction de), *Soap Operas and Telenovelas in the Digital Age. Global Industries and New Audiences*, Peter Lang, New York 2011, pp. 278-279.
- 4 Christa Salamandra, « Television and the Ethnographic Endeavor : The Case of Syrian Drama », dans *Transnational Broadcasting Studies*, vol. 14, printemps-été 2005, republié dans *Arab Media & Society*, <http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=36>, dernier accès 12 juin 2013.
- 5 Marlin Dick, « The State of the Musalsal : Arab Television Drama and Comedy and the Politics of the Satellite Era », dans *Transnational Broadcasting Studies*, vol. 14, Spring-Summer 2005, p. 6.
- 6 Rama Najmeh, « La presse et la jeunesse en Syrie : la sortie du silence... mais pas encore le droit à la parole », dans *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, n° 115-116, décembre 2006, p. 89.

## LA JEUNESSE A L'ÉPREUVE DES SÉRIES TÉLÉVISUELLES SYRIENNES

- 7 Caroline Donati, *L'Exception syrienne. Entre modernisation et résistance*, La Découverte, Paris 2009, p. 342.
- 8 Rama Najmeh, « La presse et la jeunesse en Syrie : la sortie du silence... mais pas encore le droit à la parole », cit., p. 89.
- 9 *Idem*, p. 342.
- 10 *Ibidem*.
- 11 *Idem*, pp. 342-343.

## AMERICAN TV SERIES: HOW THE ECONOMIC NETWORK SHAPES CONTENT

Paola Brembilla / Ph.D. Thesis Project<sup>1</sup>

Università di Bologna

In the last decades, TV series have gained prominence in the fields of film and media studies: narrative complexity, quality and audience engagement<sup>2</sup> are just three of the most examined and debated features. Overall, analysis tend to focus on texts, casting lights on contents, forms, styles and leaving productive processes on the background. However, there is still a need for new approaches that take into consideration the complexity of media industries as a whole.

American TV industry is in fact a network of economic transactions and institutional relations, set into the complex scenario of contemporary *media-scape*. Diversified agents and factors such as technology, business models, industrial strategies and institutional regulations do interact and ultimately contribute to the creation of the product.

Speaking in particular of TV series, contents and forms reflect this complexity and appear as multilayered as their productive counterparts. This is why these shows can no longer be examined as singular text, but, instead, as the outcome of reticular relations. The analysis of this structure requires a systemic perspective where economic and industrial processes gain the foreground, understanding narrative forms as the primary result of commercial interplays and needs.

Given these forewords, the aim of my Ph.D. research is to tie texts (TV series) to their contexts (TV industry, market, media scenario) through the identification of connections between aesthetics and industrial strategies.

The production model of conglomerates multiplies distribution and fosters audience fragmentation, capitalizing on economies of scope and scale.<sup>3</sup> It thus requires contents that can be partitioned into smaller pieces, in order to fit all of the niches the media conglomerate needs to cover. Narration therefore turns into a carefully designed architecture that directly reflects the networked spaces and practices of the media system, but that also keeps the narrative concept as its central core.<sup>4</sup> To adopt a system and process-oriented analysis on the subject, means to conceive these narrative concepts as parts of an heterogeneous and ever-evolving scenario, which certainly requires flexible methods that withstand constant revisions and updates. It also requires tools that goes beyond traditional film studies analysis: this is why I am going to borrow from economics, in particular from the branch of strategy analysis, and network theory.

Strategy analysis, combined with the niche theory, provides valuable frames when it comes to understand the markets of TV series. In particular, the method of segmentation allows to divide broad markets into subsets, according to certain variables such as the demographics of consumers or financing methods. The clusters resulting from segmentation, identify substitutive products and



trace the patterns of competition, the main market force that shapes the strategy of a company. In the specific case of TV series, this process of segmentation helps to map a field where markets overlap on many levels. For instance, practices such as off-network syndication, online licensing (see the recent case of Netflix and Amazon) and illegal downloads (which de facto frees viewers from subscriptions, schedules and measurements), blur boundaries among markets and introduce new forms of competition and coexistence that push the networks to broaden their niches and diversify their content.<sup>5</sup> Maps of cluster and niches, more than markets in the traditional sense, help to examine how networks build and adapt the “architectures” of their shows according to competitive forces.

Once this economic frame is established, I am going to practice it on actual case studies. The selection criteria for TV series are going to be mainly based on similarities that foster competition and, at the same time, on diversification that makes coexistence possible. Specifically, four series offer such a possibility: *Grimm* (NBC), *The Vampire Diaries* (The CW), *Teen Wolf* (MTV) and *True Blood* (HBO). All of these shows draw from the same narrative genres – supernatural, fantasy and horror – but build and modulate their narrative architectures according to different industrial strategies, as their “parts” move across various markets and niches. The aim is therefore to trace their patterns of competition and coexistence, eventually relating them to peculiar narrative and aesthetic tropes. At this point, a direct contact with production company is essential, in order to acquire reliable data and information.

These preliminary considerations suggest that a network analytic approach is also required; so I am also venturing an hypothesis: the versatile discipline of network analysis could allow to graphically represent the afore mentioned interactions and relations, turning them into reticular networks of nodes and ties.<sup>6</sup> The challenge here is eventually to find the proper spot for TV series.

- 1 Ph.D. dissertation supervised by Guglielmo Pescatore and Edoardo Mollona. For information: paola.bremilla3@unibo.it
- 2 See Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture. Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York University Press, New York/London 2008; Janet McCabe, Kim Akass (eds.), *Quality TV: Contemporary American Television and Beyond*, IB Tauris, London 2007; Jason Mittell, “Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television,” in *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 58, 2006.
- 3 On the matter of audience fragmentation and polarization: James G. Webster, “Beneath the Veneer of Fragmentation. Television Audience Polarization in a Multichannel World,” in *Journal of Communication*, no. 55, 2005, pp. 366-382; James G. Webster, Thomas B. Ksiazek, “The Dynamics of Audience Fragmentation: Public Attention in an Age of Digital Media,” in *Journal of Communication*, no. 62, 2012, pp. 39-56.
- 4 See Veronica Innocenti, Guglielmo Pescatore, “Dalla cross-medialità all’ecosistema narrativo. L’architettura complessa del cinema hollywoodiano contemporaneo,” in Federico Zecca (ed.), *Il cinema della convergenza. Industria, racconto, pubblico*, Mimesis, Milano/Udine 2012.
- 5 See John W. Dimmick, *Media Competition and Coexistence. The Theory of the Niche*, LEA Communication Series, Mahwah (NJ)/London 2002.
- 6 In the field of media studies, Thomas B. Ksiazek recently implemented network analysis to trace cross-platform audience behavior. See Thomas B. Ksiazek, “A Network Analytic Approach to Understanding Cross-Platform Audience Behaviour,” in *Journal of Media Economics*, no. 24, 2011, pp. 237-251.

## LA THÉÂTRALITÉ AU SERVICE DE LA REPRÉSENTATION DES IDENTITÉS ET DES RAPPORTS HOMMES-FEMMES DANS LE « NOUVEAU CINÉMA SUISSE »

Jean-Marie Cherubini / Ph.D. Thesis Project <sup>1</sup>

Université de Lausanne

Dès le début de leur activité, les critiques féministes issues des Gender Studies se sont intéressées au travail de réalisatrices tant américaines qu'européennes pour mettre à jour l'existence d'un rapport étroit entre la notion de théâtralité et celle de quête identitaire. A ce titre, des revues comme *Camera Obscura* ou *Screen* se sont penché sur des films qui opèrent un travail sur la narration et qui utilisent des « emprunts » au théâtre ou aux spectacles de rues, pour montrer que ces usages proposent une réflexion sur les représentations habituelles et canoniques des femmes au sein même du film.

Or, si cet aspect semblait fonctionner pour plusieurs réalisatrices concernées directement par des questions féministes, il n'y a pas eu de réelles études qui montrent la validité d'une telle approche pour des cinématographies masculines.

Pourtant, si on se penche sur le contexte<sup>2</sup> dans lequel certaines réalisatrices œuvraient dans les directions « prônées » par les critiques féministes, on y remarque un environnement politique et théorique qui ne touche pas uniquement ces prérogatives.

En ce qui concerne la théâtralité, on sait qu'en cette période les théories de Bertolt Brecht sur la distanciation ont connu un regain d'intérêt et ont beaucoup circulé dans certains milieux cinématographiques au même titre que celles de Michael Fried<sup>3</sup> qui analysent les effets d'un objet d'art selon son degré de théâtralité. Or, si ce type d'approches intéressait foncièrement un certain cinéma, c'est avant tout en ce qu'elles permettaient de remettre en cause des manières de construire un récit au sein d'un film de fiction et, partant, de trouver un mode narratif plus « transparent » et donc plus à même de laisser une place participative au spectateur et à la spectatrice dans l'appréhension de l'œuvre filmique.

En outre, cette remise en cause de pratiques « dominantes » a permis d'opérer comme une sorte d'épuration de la diégèse qui visait à faire (re)nouer le film avec sa capacité « monstrative » et à exploiter ses facultés dramatiques en dehors des codes fictionnels « classiques ». En faisant également recours à des emprunts provenant de genres spécifiquement codés, filmiques ou non, certains cinéastes ont pu jouer en quelque sorte avec les fonctionnements respectifs de ces genres afin d'en exhiber les artifices au sein même du texte filmique.

Parmi ces emprunts, on peut remarquer des séquences qui proviennent de genres filmiques comme la comédie musicale, le film publicitaire, le reportage de télévision, ou, plus généralement, des arts de la scène comme le théâtre et ses sous-genrés (tragédie, vaudeville), le spectacle de rue,

le cirque, le cabaret, le spectacle de music-hall ou encore le ballet. Or, puisqu'il s'agit de modes axés sur le *spectaculaire*, l'utilisation de ces procédés a logiquement comme effet de poser une réflexion sur la notion même de *représentation* et ceci, tant dans le processus lui-même que dans ce qui est effectivement représenté.

Dans cette optique, tout ce qui compose le tissu dramatique d'une narration est alors soumis à critique et parmi les composantes de celui-ci, *le personnage* se trouve au centre d'une attention particulièrement visible, tant dans sa fonction actancielle ou dans sa position énonciative qu'en tant que pôle d'identification sans lequel semble-t-il, le film narratif ne saurait fonctionner<sup>4</sup>.

Par ailleurs, il y a eu dans cette même période de nombreux bouleversements politiques qui ont trait à la remise en question de la place et de la représentation des individus au sein d'une société changeante, et auquel ce cinéma particulier a largement fait écho. Parmi ces questionnements, ceux qui provenaient des mouvements féministes ont eu évidemment un effet notable sur la place des femmes. Toutefois, il serait réducteur de penser que ces perspectives n'ont pas eu d'effet sur la notion du masculin dans la mesure où, au-delà de revendications directes qui touchaient leurs droits, les féministes ont aussi érigé un certain nombre de modèles théoriques qui ont ouvert une réflexion sur la notion plus générale de Genre<sup>5</sup>.

Par conséquent, l'à priori selon lequel il pourrait sembler plus pertinent que ce soient plutôt des réalisatrices qui donnent un écho à ces réflexions dans leur film peut être remis en question et examiné plus avant. Même s'il est vrai, d'une part que ces dernières cherchaient plus activement à questionner la position et l'image des femmes au sein d'un système qui les stigmatisait et les maintenait dans une position sociale inférieure, et que d'autre part les hommes pouvaient sembler moins préoccupés par une remise en question d'une position « souveraine » sur le plan socioculturel et se concentrer davantage sur des thématiques politiques « neutres » de ce point de vue, il n'en reste pas moins vrai que de nombreux films faits par ces derniers reflètent clairement des problématiques identitaires héritées de ces approches.

En visionnant certains films réalisés notamment par Jacques Demy, Jean-Luc Godard ou Alain Resnais pour la France, et de Michel Soutter ou d'Alain Tanner pour la Suisse, il apparaît qu'à l'intérieur même des problématiques de type politico-social que ceux-ci véhiculent effectivement, les rapports entre hommes et femmes restent omniprésents et constituent souvent un pôle réflexif important.

Chez Tanner par exemple, les personnages masculins se trouvent systématiquement confrontés à des femmes qu'ils peinent à « saisir » ou à comprendre, et ce motif, loin de ne constituer qu'une toile de fond sur laquelle se met en place une réflexion plus globalement sociale, apparaît au contraire comme générateur de cette dernière. En outre, l'utilisation de la théâtralité chez ce réalisateur permet non seulement de mettre en scène ces personnages dans un rapport à un monde diffracté mais également d'ouvrir une réflexion sur l'identité masculine et/ou féminine comme une modalité participant de cette quête. C'est le cas notamment dans des films comme *La Salamandre* (1971), *Le Milieu du monde* (1974) ou *Jonas qui aura 25 ans en l'an 2000* (1976), dont les scénarios ont été coécrits par John Berger, considéré comme un précurseur d'une certaine critique féministe<sup>6</sup>, et qui présentent tous trois les rapports hommes-femmes comme pris dans des sortes de « mascarades », et ce tant dans le récit qu'au niveau des procédés narratifs mêmes.

Par le biais de la théâtralité, des cinéastes comme Tanner semblent ne pas se contenter de mettre en scène des personnages préalablement « *génrés* » selon les canons habituels particulièrement

propres à un cinéma narratif, mais contribuent à remettre en question des représentations dominantes du féminin et du masculin au sein même de la diégèse filmique.

Par conséquent, loin de ne constituer qu'une approche spécifique de réalisatrices engagées dans une perspective ouvertement féministe, le lien entre théâtralité et représentation du genre pourrait être envisagé comme une approche esthétique qui peut aussi bien concerner des cinéastes masculins.

Au final cette approche pourrait permettre non seulement de mettre en lumière les rapports étroits qui existent entre la question de la représentation des genres à l'écran, celle de la théâtralité et les théories basées sur la déconstruction de caractéristiques formelles propres aux Nouveaux Cinémas, mais également, en utilisant des outils analytiques provenant des Gender Studies, de mettre en lumière tout le travail réflexif que certains de ces cinéastes opèrent spécifiquement sur la représentation du masculin.

Le projet se donne ainsi pour but de comprendre premièrement quel rôle a joué l'influence du théâtre sur le procédé d'écriture des films<sup>7</sup> ainsi que celui de certaines théories sur la théâtralité, pour deuxièmement examiner plus concrètement comment ces procédés filmiques sont porteurs de questionnement sur la représentation des genres tels que Judith Butler conçoit ces derniers, c'est-à-dire comme « actes performatifs »<sup>8</sup> capables de subvertir la valeur socioculturelle qui leur est habituellement allouée.

1 Projet de thèse sous la direction du Prof. Laurent Guido.

2 Les années 1960-70, qui voient l'émergence des « Nouveaux Cinémas ».

3 Michael Fried, « Art and Objecthood », dans *Artforum*, n° 5, juin 1967, pp.12-23. Dans cet article, Fried oppose la notion d'*absorption* à laquelle il rattache l'art contemporain et qui met en scène des spectateurs « passifs », à celle de *théâtralité* pour désigner des œuvres qui réfléchissent à leur propre dispositif.

4 A ce titre, les écrits de Brecht et sa théorie de la distanciation sont évidemment cruciaux car ils permettent à de nombreux cinéastes de proposer à l'intérieur même du texte filmique, une véritable réflexion sur ce qui constitue la substance d'un personnage et sur sa valeur socioculturelle, en vue notamment de renoncer au procédé habituel d'identification.

5 Le *Deuxième Sexe* de Simone de Beauvoir analyse le processus de création du Genre qui touche aussi bien les hommes que les femmes.

6 John Berger a réalisé pour la télévision anglaise en 1972 une série de 4 films intitulée *The Ways of Seeing* dans laquelle il parle notamment des manières patriarcales de représenter les femmes dans les images (photographiques ou picturales).

7 Principalement dans le Nouveau Cinéma Suisse.

8 Judith Butler, *Trouble dans le genre*, La Découverte, Paris 2006.

## «IT'S MUCH MORE BEAUTIFUL!». COLOUR IN THE AMATEUR ITALIAN CINEMA: HISTORY, DISCOURSES, SOCIAL USES

Elena Gipponi / Ph.D. Thesis Abstract<sup>1</sup>

Libera Università di Lingue e Comunicazione IULM, Milano

The purpose of my dissertation is to discuss the role of colour in the amateur Italian cinema.

The first chapter of the research addresses to a theoretical overview on colour studies and to a technological review on the development of the main colour processes throughout the history of cinema, in order to come to a definition of this complex and multilayered area.

As a matter of fact, colour has been examined by many disciplines, from physics to chemistry, from biology to neurology. In the field of social and human sciences, colour is mainly defined as a social construction: every cultural context influences colour perception, as French historian Michel Pastoureau argues,<sup>2</sup> therefore every *universal* symbolism should be avoided (red stands for..., blue stands for...).

If this is true in general, it can be reasonably assumed that colour perception in the cinematic experience is *culturally* conditioned as well. So, what does “studying colour in cinema” mean? According to the best known studies on the subject by Jacques Aumont,<sup>3</sup> it means primarily comparing it with black-and-white moving images. Compared with black-and-white film, colour film on the one hand offers a faithful reproduction of reality, while on the other hand, by virtue of the same perceptual power, triggers an imaginary and spectacular deviation from reality.

In the history of cinema, to be more precise, there are two main types of colour film processes: the applied colour processes of the silent period, like hand-colouring, tinting or toning, and the so-called “natural” colour processes, which in turn are divided into additive, like Kinemacolor, and subtractive systems, like Eastmancolor. In the natural processes, colour is mechanically recorded out of extra human handlings and this automatic source gives rise to an interesting contradiction: little by little, while becoming a standard quality of films and replacing black-and-white films, colour becomes actually invisible. Colour is everywhere but, because of its “naturalness,” it tends to be unperceived, just an expected and insignificant property of films. This happens in particular in the mainstream and *genre* movies, while many authors, like Eisenstein or Antonioni, grow a personal style and develop a creative use of colour in their works.

This thesis is centered on the first of these two possible uses of colour in the cinema: the impersonal and invisible colour. Looking for the anonymous and collective chromatic styles in cinematic practices, we could argue that the amateur production is a key subject matter. Indeed, we can assume that home movies and amateur films are very distant from any artistic research: they are generally shot in order to celebrate the happy moments of family history, like births and birth-

days, christenings and weddings, holidays and Carnivals. It's exactly because of their stereotyped nature that amateur images are truly representative of a *nameless* style: they resemble each other and in this repetitiveness lies their illustrative power; furthermore, home movies images are the quintessence of collective memory, as Roger Odin points out.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, and conversely, home movies are the most personal and once-off kind of cinema: addressed to a private and restricted public (family members), every home movie is a unique exemplar, because it is usually shot on reversal film (a negative film chemically converted in a positive one, ready for the home projection). The second chapter of the thesis describes and analyzes some important studies on the amateur cinema in order to define the borders of this multifaceted practice: while amateur cinema has been studied in many countries, from Europe to the US, little attention has been devoted to the technological issue of colour and to the introduction and spread of colour films. Retracing the small-gauge (16 mm, 9.5 mm, 8 mm, Super8) technological history, a pivotal factor emerged: colour film were developed *before* in the small-gauge and reversal version employed by the amateurs and only *at a later stage* in the 35mm negative-positive version used by the professionals and the industry. This technological leadership shows that amateur cinema was considered by manufacturing firms as a test bench in the field of colour films. Hence, this technical innovation was launched "from below" and was directed to the mass of the amateurs.

My work concentrates on the use of colour in the amateur *Italian* cinema and home movies: did the Italian amateur filmmakers develop, though unwittingly, a shared and widespread chromatic style? How did they use colour in their home movies?

In order to evaluate the implementation procedures of colour films, the third chapter is devoted to the discourses' analysis: a sample of around thirty Italian, French, English and American handbooks on amateur colour cinematography has been assembled. This "how to" literature gives expression to the trade magazines' editorial staff or to the film manufacturers: according to them, how should a *good* home movie look like? And, specifically, how should a *good colour* home movie be? The answers are rather uniform all over the world – the Western world, at any rate: a good colour home movie does not distance itself from standard norms and approved solutions of harmonious composition. Colour should not jar on our senses and should be limited in order not to distract from the story: it must be practiced "colour restraint," just as in the classical Hollywood of the 1930s and 1940s. So, handbooks and manuals have a strong prescriptive power and their precepts exercise a conservative function: the amateur filmmaker has not to try new chromatic solutions and his/her creative potential is neutralized.

But, did the amateur filmmakers conform to the handbooks' norms? Or did they find new stylistic solutions and ways of using colour? In order to recognize the appropriation and the adjustment of colour films by the Italian amateurs, the fourth chapter is devoted to the practices' analysis: a sample of ten private collections of home movies between the 1930s and the 1960s has been taken into consideration. Colour reversal films, indeed, were launched in the middle of the 1930s, but their widespread availability in Italy was achieved only since the mid-1950s. Therefore, in order to observe not only the introduction but also the stabilization of this innovation, it has been isolated a wide lapse. The sample includes 16mm, 9.5mm and 8mm films, while Super8 films are excluded because this format was launched in 1965, when colour movies were by then common not only in the amateur practices but also in the theatrical cinema. In order to collect some information about the social and technological context, the amateur (or a family member) has been interviewed.

From the analysis carried out, it can be observed that a shared and widespread chromatic style does exist: it harks back not to painting and fine arts but to a minor artistic and iconic tradition, represented for instance by magic lantern plates, hand-painted photographs, picture postcards or tour guides. We could argue that colour home movies follow the accepted codes of this kind of images more than handbooks' advices. Among favourite and recurring subjects there are landscapes and flowers, flags and parrots, balloons and kites: Kodachrome, Agfacolor and other colour reversal films eventually allows the exact reproduction of true hues and shades of things. But beyond reality, in home movies colour is also used to stage family harmony's show: amateur filmmakers often shot parties and merrymakings, and these situations are utmost bright and colourful (to this end, Carnivals are the quintessential topic). Thus, the two main cultural meanings of colour – reality and, on the other hand, daydream – are put together in our Italian home movies sample. In turn, this *textual* aesthetic negotiation get along with a deeper *contextual* change in the Italian culture and society. In fact, between the 1950s and the 1960s Italy was overcoming postwar hardship and was opening up to a sudden modernization that appeared also by way of new colours in the everyday framework: coloured cars, coloured clothes, coloured furniture and hand tools, even coloured food and beverage... Although for the most part Italy still was an outdated and underdeveloped country, new colour reversal films captured these clues of innovation for the first time. Moreover, Italian amateurs were a sort of advance guard projected toward technological progress, an inner circle of pioneers that eagerly embraces newness and, doing so, helps decreasing the fear of technology and, more broadly, of the future. Even though many colour home movies show the “same old subjects,” nevertheless their representation is as much up-to-date as possible just because *it is in colour*. In conclusion, the amateurs met during the research are not true innovators of the visual chromatic style; rather, they are active protagonists of their time because of their openness toward technological change marked by new colour films as opposed to previous black-and-white films.

- 1 Ph.D. dissertation defended on 18 March 2013. Thesis supervisors: Prof. Luisella Farinotti and Prof. Federico Pierotti.
- 2 Michel Pastoureau, *Dictionnaire des couleurs de notre temps. Symbolique et société*, Bonneton, Paris 1992; Michel Pastoureau, Dominique Simonnet, *Le petit livre des couleurs*, Editions du Panama, Paris 2005; Michel Pastoureau, *Les couleurs de nos souvenirs*, Seuil, Paris 2010.
- 3 Jacques Aumont, *Introduction à la couleur: des discours aux images*, Armand Colin, Paris 1994; Id. (ed.), *La couleur en cinéma*, Cinémathèque française, Musée du cinéma/Fondazione Mazzotta, Paris-Milan 1995.
- 4 Roger Odin (ed.), *Le film de famille: usage public, usage privé*, Meridiens Klincksieck, Paris 1995; *Le cinéma en amateur, Communications* (edited by Roger Odin), no. 68, 1999.

## LE REALISME CINEMATOGRAPHIQUE : DEBATS CULTURELS ET THEORIQUES DANS LES REVUES ITALIENNES DE CINEMA (1945-1960)

Delphine Wehrli / Ph.D. Thesis Project<sup>1</sup>

Université de Lausanne

Dès la fin des années 1940, nous assistons en Italie à un riche débat culturel et théorique concernant le cinéma, qui met en tension les questions du réalisme et de son lien à la littérature italienne contemporaine ; ce sujet, curieusement peu traité jusqu'ici dans les études cinématographiques, y compris italiennes, donne une ampleur aux enjeux qui se condensent sur le cinéma dans les années 1945-60 du XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle et qui mobilise les grands noms de la littérature (Pavese, Vittorini, Fortini, Moravia, Calvino, Pasolini notamment) et de la philosophie (Adorno, Kracauer, Sartre notamment) et permet d'adopter une approche pluridisciplinaire et d'établir des passages entre les différentes pratiques et les différents arts. En effet, le débat sur le réalisme cinématographique, qui pouvait sembler réduit à une analyse traditionnelle du phénomène et à une évaluation déplacée par analogie à l'univers des lettres, est aujourd'hui plus que jamais riche d'implications et de conséquences. L'exigence concrète est de reprendre certaines problématiques liées à la question du réalisme cinématographique, non pas pour clore définitivement les polémiques qui sont continuellement réouvertes, mais plutôt pour vérifier l'utilité, le sens de telles polémiques, leurs vrais termes, au-delà de leurs schématisations faciles et imprécises.

L'objectif de cette thèse est d'offrir une contribution à l'approfondissement de la recherche sur le thème « cinéma et littérature », débütée par Gian Piero Brunetta, Giorgio Tinazzi, Marina Zaccan, durant la période du néo-réalisme et au-delà, à travers une recherche dans les revues de l'époque. D'un point de vue méthodologique, nous repérerons dans ce but non seulement les articles, les essais etc. qui abordent l'argument du rapport entre les deux arts dans une dimension théorique générale mais, en identifiant ces deux perspectives d'analyse dans les revues « de cinéma » d'une part et dans celles politico-culturelles et littéraires de l'autre, nous prendrons également en compte les interventions qui indiquent l'intérêt explicite que les premières ont pour les phénomènes littéraires et les secondes pour le monde du cinématographe.

Nous retiendrons donc les publications qui ont eu au minimum une fréquence bimensuelle et qui, en raison de l'intérêt national, de la qualité et la durée de la contribution culturelle, nous apparaissent comme plus importantes. Notre corpus est constitué des revues italiennes de cinéma suivantes : *Rivista del Cinematografo* (1928-), *Cinema* (1936-1956), *Bianco e Nero* (1937-), *Film-critica* (1950-), *Rivista del Cinema Italiano* (1952-1955), *Cinema Nuovo* (1952-1996), *Cinema Sovietico* (1953-1955); et des revues italiennes de littérature, de culture et politique telles que *Letteratura* (1937-1968), *Rinascita* (1944-1991), *Il Politecnico* (1945-1947), *Società* (1945-1961),



*Comunità* (1946-1960), *Paragone* (1950-), *Il Mulino* (1951-), *Il Contemporaneo* (1954-1965). Parallèlement à l'élaboration de ce débat en Italie, nous tirerons aussi profit à considérer le versant français (en France) des débats italiens, y compris quand ils sont exprimés par leurs protagonistes mêmes, peut-être différemment que « sur place ». Les revues françaises de cinéma, de littérature et culture prises en considération seront notamment: *La Revue du cinéma* (1928-1949), *L'Ecran français* (1943-1952), *Cahiers du cinéma* (1951-), *Positif* (1952-), *Les Lettres françaises* (1941-), *Les Temps modernes* (1945-).

L'espace que les revues politico-culturelles et littéraires dédient aux problèmes du cinématographe, minime au début des années 1940 et dans l'immédiat après-guerre, va croissant dans le courant des années 1950 jusqu'à devenir une présence ample et constante dans quasiment tous les périodiques. C'est une indication évidente de l'augmentation progressive de l'intérêt que le cinéma réussit à obtenir du milieu culturel; intérêt qui va de paire avec l'implication toujours plus diffuse d'écrivains, de journalistes etc. au sein même des organes de production.

Dès les années 1930, l'impact que les revues italiennes de cinéma ont eu dans le contexte international de la culture cinématographique est non négligeable et est dû à certaines revues importantes, telles *Cine Convegno*, *Cinema*, *Bianco e Nero*. Un phénomène important d'opposition, qui a engendré la naissance d'un discours culturel accompli et d'un choix d'action politique décisif pour la résistance au fascisme (et ensuite, à la réaction cléricale et démocrate-chrétienne), s'est développé au sein de la critiques cinématographique italienne, principalement entre 1940 et 1944 sur les pages de deux revues cinématographiques les plus importantes en Italie, *Bianco e Nero* et *Cinema*, et a trouvé son moment de plus grande lucidité au moment de la réalisation du premier film de Luchino Visconti, *Ossessione*, en 1943. L'analyse de *Cinema* et *Bianco e Nero* nous semble primordiale pour reconstruire les grands thèmes des débats et des polémiques de l'époque, pour comprendre quelle a été la position des chercheurs par rapport au cinéma, vu comme fait industriel, politique, pédagogique ou considéré du point de vue théorique. Alors que l'étude de *Cinema* et de *Bianco e Nero* reste utile pour approfondir la compréhension du phénomène d'opposition et pour clarifier quelle a été la situation du débat théorique durant le fascisme et après, les autres revues cinématographiques nous fournissent un panorama stimulant du renouvellement du débat et de la relève de la production cinématographique.

Une partie importante de l'analyse est consacrée à la revue *Cinema Nuovo*, dirigée par le critique et théoricien Guido Aristarco qui a exercé une influence profonde et durable sur la réflexion sur le cinéma dans son pays (et même à l'extérieur comme en témoignent ses polémiques avec André Bazin et ses échanges et sa collaboration avec Barthélemy Amengual). Malgré sa longévité et son autorité, il faut dire que cette revue n'a jamais fait l'objet d'une analyse approfondie de son contenu, à forte idéologie marxiste. Notre approche souhaite intégrer cette problématique pour examiner le contenu et la structure de la revue, qui reste un point d'ancrage dans le débat.

Tout au long des années 1950 et parmi les premières, elle a concentré son débat critique autour de la question du réalisme: sur la base des canons du « réalisme critique » mentionnés dans le champ littéraire par György Lukács, Aristarco et ses collaborateurs se sont interrogés sur la manière de dépasser les limites du néoréalisme, luttant contre la tendance à considérer le « réalisme ontologique » de Bazin comme seule formulation théorique de l'après-guerre – sans prendre en compte d'autres théoriciens tels que Balázs, Eisenstein et Arnheim. La revue a accueilli les interventions de nombreux représentants culturels de premier plan, tels que André Bazin, Georges

DELPHINE WEHRLI

Sadoul, Rudolf Arnheim, Siegfried Kracauer, Theodor Adorno, Boris Pasternak, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze et Jean-Paul Sartre, et parmi les italiens, Carlo Bo, Italo Calvino, Alberto Moravia, Luigi Chiarini, Franco Fortini, Vittorio Gelmetti et Salvatore Quasimodo, afin de débattre sur la question. Elle témoigne en fait à elle seule, à travers l'abondante correspondance entretenue entre Aristarco et les représentants culturels italiens et européens, d'un panorama vaste et compliqué autour de cette discussion critique et théorique controversée de 1945 à 1960.

Si la finalité de notre étude est celle de contribuer à la connaissance d'une période importante de la culture italienne, il est en effet essentiel que le phénomène cinématographique ne soit pas considéré comme un élément en soi, mais placé en rapport avec de nombreux autres, dans le cadre de l'histoire de la culture italienne.

1 Projet de thèse sous la direction du Prof. François Albera. Pour information: Delphine.Wehrli@unil.ch.

## REVIEWS / COMPTES-RENDUS

Catherine Johnson,  
*Branding Television*,  
Routledge Chapman & Hall,  
London 2011, pp. 224

In *Branding Television* Catherine Johnson studies the development of branding in US and UK television industries, exploring the reasons who these different industries address.

In the first part of the book, the author offers a critical analysis of the industrial and legislative changes in the US television market. From 1980s, the deregulation of the Republican government under Ronald Regan deteriorates the oligopoly of the three main broadcasters: NBC, CBS and ABC. Johnson focuses on the birth of new channels like MTV, FOX and HBO analyzing scheduling, advertising and promotion. Every network defines a specific identity, which communicates in terms of brand not only to previously identified niche targeting, but also to advertisers and employees. The presence of new competitors forces also the big three to embrace the brand strategies through innovative campaigns. This experience demonstrates that niche cable channels can easily built a differentiated brand identity, while national networks have to focus on the quality of the program mix. HBO is the only channel that develops both strategies, in order to obtain larger numbers of subscribers and income from syndication and merchandising. Over the 1990s, new technologies and the business of media conglomerates radically alter the US landscape, changing the viewing experience and turn the uses of television set itself, for instance it's possible to use television as a monitor for a computer or to access on line. In the digital era, content creators can distribute their products on web, evading networks<sup>1</sup>. The major conglom-

erates develop new services, which entails that organizing content is more similar to database philosophy than to traditional television flows. The author argues that in the digital era, brands do not function as form of recognition, but as form of loyal relationship. Networks embody ideas and values, which spread also through corporate social responsibility campaigns. In this landscape Hulu is an interesting reality, it is a joint venture platform between Fox, NBS and Disney, but it does not publicize the relationship between the networks. Johnson's analysis underlines that Hulu does not promote a particular product or a company but an experience, its brand focuses on selling a service.

The second part of the book centers on British television industry, which is marked by public service broadcasting policy. Compared to the European landscape, commercial channel was introduced early in the UK, but ITV and state BBC share the same public service broadcasting logic. Unlike the USA market, satellite offers such as Sky and BSB transformed the television industries in United Kingdom. The first alternative terrestrial mass channel is Channel 5, which is aimed at a younger audience. Channel 5 builds its brand identity on youth power and on an alternative programme, identifying a gap in the previous national television landscape. In the late 1990s, digital terrestrial television develops in Europe and every British broadcaster sets up new channels based on existing channel brands. The public BBC conquers new networks (joined under the umbrella brand identity of UKTV) and a different platform, like BBC Online, but it prefers to launch different brand identities, so the new channels are called UKTV People (then Blighty), UKTV History (then YeSTERDAY), UKTV Gardens, UKTV Food (then Good Food) and do not carry the

BBC initials in the name of the channel. Also Channel 4, which had a specific public service orientation, expands to innovative service like 4oD (on demand channel) or 4Mobile (mobile service), but in distinctly separate sites. In this way, Johnson argues that traditional boundaries between public and commercial service broadcasting are declined. In this perspective, brand and marketing are useful strategies to communicate also the value of public service to the national audience.

Finally, the author considers the different elements that build the brand identity – such as name, trademark, communication and visual appearance – and chooses to focus her attention on interstitials between the programmes. This aspect of brand communication received relatively poor attention from previous researches. A further area of analysis is connected to the ancillary texts around television – like trailers, posters, promotion on magazines. In fact, these paratexts contribute to assign a precise meaning to a program, a channel, a broadcaster. Johnson retrieves and studies the development of interstitials on main British channels: BBC One, ITV1 and Channel 4. These ancillary elements are first based on clearness, and are used to give coherence to an inhomogeneous scheduling of the public service. Instead in the US landscape, NBC, ABC, CBS and Fox initially utilize interstitials in a more commercial way, to retain the audience. In the digital era, both UK and US broadcasting use interstitials to steer the spectator toward a multiplatform offer of programmes and services. However, in this age, emerges the importance of brand for the high concept programs, which extends the text through the transmedia storytelling.

Johnson argues that programme branding have specific properties: longevity, transferability, multiplicity. Moreover, it adapts well to types of programs like serialized drama and reality. Most of all, program branding shows the loss of centrality of television channels, as site to access for content; networks have become just one site for distribute programmes also available online .

*Branding Television* analyzes different strategies from channel branding to quality schedule branding, from relationship branding to service branding and to programme branding in the UK and the US landscape. While other recent researches like Temporal<sup>2</sup> and Banet-Weier<sup>3</sup> more thoroughly analyze a single brand identity, a value of this present book is the plenitude of case studies: from different broadcasts of two different nations and addressing both commercial and public services. Instead traditional marketing theory distinguishes product brand form service brand associated to corporation, Johnson analysis shows a more complex situation. Moreover, to compare corporate, channel/ service and a program's brand as interrelated elements allows to consider television as a cultural form and to understand its evolution from a different perspective.

[Deborah Toschi,  
Università degli Studi di Pavia]

- 1 T.M. Todreas, *Value Creation and Branding in Television's Digital Age*, Greenwood Pub Group In 1999.
- 2 P. Temporal, *The Branding of MTV. Will Internet Kill the Video Star?*, John Wiley & Son, 2008
- 3 S. Banet-Weiser, *Kids Rule! Nickelodeon and Consumer Citizenship*, Duke University Press Book 2007.

Anikó Imre, Timothy Havens,  
Katalin Lustyik (eds.),  
*Popular Television in Eastern Europe  
During and Since Socialism*,  
Routledge, New York/London 2013, pp. 285

For a long time, the reflection devoted to cultural formations in Central and Eastern Europe excluded television from academic discourse. A number of reasons explains such a blind spot: the privilege accorded to traditional arts when considering cultural production in the area; the reduction of mass media to their political function; scholars' limited access to national productions, due to linguistic barriers that prevented the developing of a truly transnational approach to the area; the dominance of a Western paradigm in media studies. The project underneath the volume fills in many gaps, by acknowledging TV's multifaceted nature and role in the former Socialist block, from its early development to the present date. As the editors state in their introduction: "such a volume might spotlight, nurture and reclaim Eastern European television studies from the margins of both television studies and Eastern European media studies. As an intellectual endeavor, Eastern European television studies suffer from the Western nature of most television scholarship and theory, while the field of Eastern European media studies almost exclusively addresses questions of journalism, democracy and civic life." (p. 1).

The volume is organized in three main sections. The first two examine "Popular Television in Socialist Time" and "Commercial Globalization and Eastern European TV;" the third one discusses "Television and National Identity on Europe's Edge," thus centering on a crucial question for the region, at least from 19<sup>th</sup> century onward. Compared to previous contributions, the three sections displace the discussion, not confining the reflection on TV to the narrow

borders of media and political power relationships. This approach does not dismiss political agency in popular TV during Socialism (Katja Kochanowski, Sascha Trültzsch, Reinhold Viehoff, *An Evening with Friends and Enemies: Political Indoctrination in Popular East Germany Family Series*). However, the chosen pathway enables single contributions not to look at medial transformations through the sole sociopolitical lens. Such a standpoint leads to a more thorough account for the development of television in the former Soviet bloc, its different policies in terms of imports and broadcasting, its placement within a broader continental TV history. As Sabina Mihelj puts it, "an adequate understanding of these developments cannot rely on the perception of the Cold War as a black and white confrontation between capitalism and communism, nor can it proceed solely from the established interpretive frameworks of post-socialist democratization and economic liberalization. Instead, we should acknowledge that many of the promises and challenges posed by television everywhere were similar, and that both popular and elite reactions to them often defied the logic of the East-West divide." (*Television Entertainment in Socialist Eastern Europe*, p. 25; see also Dana Mustata, *Television in the Age of (Post-)Communism: The Case of Romania*). Equally, post-Socialist reality appears far more complex than its widespread representation as the uncontrolled realm of US production. US dominance cannot be underestimated, and certainly affected regional production, as children's edutainment (Katalin Lustyik, *From a Socialist Endeavor to a Commercial Enterprise: Children's Television in East-Central Europe*), but persisting policies are to be discovered, as for instance broadcasting (Sylwia Szoztak, *Post-Transitional Continuity and Change: Polish Broadcasting Flow and American TV Series*). At the same time, European strategies to contrast US hegemony

and foster continental cultural diversity seem to follow rather a commercial, Western-based logic (Timothy Havens, Evelyn Bottando, Matthew S. Thatcher, *Intra-European Media Imperialism: Hungarian Program Imports and the Television Without Frontiers Directive*).

The concern with the role of TV in national and regional culture enlightens the dialogue between multiple cultural expressions at the core of popular production, as Dorota Ostrowska explains through the cultural analysis of a 1980s Polish TV series (*The Carnival of the Absurd: Stanislaw Bareja's Alternatywy 4 and Polish Television in the 1980s*). By connecting historical loose descriptions with high and folk culture, “edutainment series [...] were instrumental in fostering national unity through television entertainment not despite but because of the fact that they were mostly made up. In other words, their affective power and longevity within national memory derives precisely from folk culture’s and high literature’s mutual validation of nationalism’s loose treatment of historical fact.” (Anikó Imre, *Adventures in Early Socialist Edutainment*, p. 37).

A will to grasp cultural dynamics in popular TV brings to close examination its role in defining identities. These may be declined as national ones (Adina Schneeweis, *To Be Romanian in Post-Communist Romania: Entertainment Television and Patriotism in Popular Discourse*; Alice Bardan, *Big Brothers and Little Brothers: National Identity in Recent Romanian Adaptations of Global Television Formats*). Otherwise, identities can be considered collectively, shaped by a memory of totalitarian past and traumatic shift triggered through popular TV (Irena Carpentier Reifová, Kateřina Gillárová, Radim Hladík, *The Way We Applauded: How Popular Culture Stimulates Collective Memory of the Socialist Past in Czechoslovakia*); or political (Ferenc Hammer, *Coy Utopia: Politics in the First Hungarian*

*Soap*). Finally, the term concerns also minorities and popular TV, especially telling within a region where the strive for national identities marked discursive and political practices (Annabel Tramblett, *Why Must Roma Minorities Be Always Seen on the Stage and Never in the Audience? Children’s Opinions of Reality Roma TV*; Ksenija Vidmar-Horvat, *Racing for the Audience: National Identity, Public Tv and the Roma in Post-socialist Slovenia*).

*Popular Television in Eastern Europe During and Since Socialism* greatly contributes to a better understanding of cultural Eastern European specificity. To achieve this goal, the volume does not keep its reflection to established geopolitical boundaries, instead, it proves how productive a more problematic approach can be. It questions assumed historical paradigms, includes Eastern European popular TV in the broader international history of the medium, promotes further reflection on national, regional and transnational medial identities, and includes gender and ethnic varieties into a broader scope. A more defined approach to popular culture could clarify the methods, and the issues at stake. At the present stage, the contributions maintain the contradiction at the core of the notion of popular: “On the one hand an emphasis on something produced for the ordinary people, on the other, something approved by the people. It is in the switch between the two emphases that we can locate the problematic of popular culture.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, different approaches are juxtaposed, coupling broadcasting and TV flows analysis with research focused on social discourses on or through media, on ways of building identities, overcoming cultural, social and political traumas by appropriating popular TV. Besides, the same notion of popular has been forged within and applied mostly to Anglo-Saxon cultural production, but does not necessarily fit into different cultural typologies. Eventually, an approach based on a symbolic

economy might provide this vivid discussion with the missing link between modes of production and broadcasting and cultural processes. Though, thanks to this unprecedented and welcomed effort, the reader can take such a step, and further carry on the research.

[Francesco Pitassio,  
Università degli Studi di Udine]

Miriam Bratu Hansen,  
*Cinema and Experience. Siegfried Kracauer,  
Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno*,  
University of California Press,  
Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 2012, pp. 378

A genuine testament of Hansen, who died prematurely after the publication of the book, *Cinema and Experience* appears as the summation of her long research work. It is also, at the same time, a masterly confrontation with that longstanding theoretical tradition (born in the twenties in Germany mostly around the Institut für Sozialforschung in Frankfurt), which was the first to reflect, in an often contradictory and antinomic way, upon modernity and the transformations it had brought about, and upon the crisis for a way of knowing based on memory and tradition. Technological modernity is defined above all by a crisis of experience, a fragmentation of sensory life, which is disintegrated into its different parts in a sort of “apocalypse of the sensible.”

It is “that great overhaul of the perceptual inventory that will modify again and in an unpredictable way our image of the world,” as Benjamin wrote in 1928 trying to define the contours of a new scopic regime and its huge epistemological and social impact. As the subtitle of her book points out, Kracauer, Benjamin and Adorno are Hansen’s direct interlocutors, but Habermas, Negt and Kluge – the last exponents of Critical Theory – are fundamental in

1 Colin MacCabe, *Defining Popular Culture*, in *High Theory/Low Culture*, edited by Colin MacCabe, St. Martin’s Press, New York 1986; now in Id., *The Eloquence of the Vulgar. Language, Cinema and the Politics of Culture*, British Film Institute, London 1999, p. 76.

her analysis of the developments of technological modernity, and of the new forms of experience, sharing and spreading knowledge. When she thinks of cinema as the new public sphere of modernity, the scholar refers to the well-known notion, elaborated by Negt and Kluge<sup>1</sup>, of the ‘public sphere’ “as a ‘social horizon of experience’ grounded in the subjects’ ‘context of living’, that is, the lived relationality of social and material, affective and imaginative re/production.” The social and political role of cinema is defined precisely by this ability to create a collective horizon of experience, in which an ever more fragmented and alienated existence can be recomposed. Hansen finds this emancipatory power above all in the work of Kluge, which has been for many years a recurring point of reference for her own research.

In the preface, among various other autobiographical remarks, Hansen admits that the direction of her research has overlapped with that of Film Theory: her studies at Frankfurt University, from 1967 to 1976, are contemporary with the rise of the debate on cinema and media in Germany, a debate which started much later than in France or the United States, but which has been fundamental in identifying the categories and the thinkers that would dominate the theoretical scene in the following decades. As a student of Theodor W. Adorno and Karsten Witte, who edited the writings of Benjamin and Kracauer respectively, Hansen began in those years that careful reading of these au-

thors that would enable her – at various times and with admirable accuracy and meticulousness – to understand their postulates avoiding those oversimplifications, keywords and slogans, through which these scholars (Benjamin in particular) have very often been read. The essays Hansen published over nearly twenty years in «Critical Inquiry», «New German Critique» and «October», have been fundamental not only in introducing in the United States a ‘philological interpretation’ of the thought of Benjamin and of other German theorists of the twenties and the thirties, but also in defining a new model of interpretation inspired by those thinkers. Also in *Cinema and Experience* Hansen defines a method of re-reading that can be considered a theoretical model: theory itself allows a continuous revision of its own premises, a correction and a reformulation of its own hypothesis, which are adjusted and adapted to an everchanging context or situation. In the same way, Benjamin’s re-writings – the different drafts of his essays, the continuous reversal of his decisions, which has often been read as the antinomic character of Benjamin’s philosophy – are forms of thinking that take account of ongoing transformations: revision is ‘memory directed at the future,’ an ability to measure up to his times. It’s the same effort to be contemporary that can be found in the work of Hansen, who was never satisfied by the “simple” philological reconstruction, but is able to see the anticipatory qualities of those theories and the resurgence of old issues in new forms.

The book is divided into four parts, each dedicated to a single author and a particular phase of his production, which also corresponds to the progressive definition of problems, categories and models of interpretation. Not only for chronological reasons, Kracauer opens and closes this trajectory. The first part is dedicated to his writings in the twenties, whereas the last is about *Theory of Film*, which was written ‘in

exile’ in 1960 and ignored at the time of its publication in Germany in 1964, to then become a point of reference for the Munich movement of ‘Sensibilismus’ ten years later. From the phenomenology of the unapparent – the study of the ‘surface manifestations’ in which one can see the fragmentation and the serialization of sensory life in modern industrial societies – to the theory of the redemption of Physical Reality, Hansen delineates a story of loss and reconstruction in which cinema plays an essential role, not only as part and symptom of the crisis, but also as a powerful matrix for modernity’s liberatory impulses. Kracauer considers cinema, literally, as “a self-representation of the masses subject to the process of mechanization,” and consequently as a form of education to the new regimes of experience and models of identity.

In the middle of this trajectory, in which cinema defines the aesthetic-cognitive horizon of modernity, we find Walter Benjamin, to whom the most substantial part of the book is dedicated. Hansen considers his analysis of the new forms of perception – in which contemplation is replaced by a more general and complete sensorial stimulation – a fundamental and also prophetic response to the increase of nervous stimulation in modern technological societies, since it identifies a sort of physiological, and anthropologically fixed features of them. This idea is still valid and useful to understand the way in which new media are assimilated today. Crucial in this reflection is the idea of *innervation* as a way to adapt to technology and to incorporate it, a sort of imitative faculty which allows a new perceptual experience that does not oppose human and machine, subject and technique. “In Benjamin’s dictionary, innervation broadly refers to a neurophysiological process that mediates between internal and external, psychic and motoric, human and machinic registers.” Also the ‘optical unconscious’ – a



key concept in Benjamin's thinking – is read by Hansen “as a form of mimetic innervation specifically available to photography and film.”

If *Cinema and Experience's* interpretation of Benjamin and Kracauer is not altogether a novelty in Hansen's *oeuvre*, the interpretation of Adorno is undoubtedly new and surprising if compared with his stereotypical image as a firm opponent of mass culture. Hansen's book is almost a counter-interpretation of Adorno, depending less on classic references to his *Culture Industry* in *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, and more on his essays on theory of music. In Adorno's analysis of the changes brought about in musical listening by the new technologies of sound reproduction and diffusion, Hansen looks for an interpretation of the changes and the opportunities imposed by all technological media. The author challenges Adorno with the same weapons and uses his categories to interpret in an emancipatory way the new sensory culture created by technological modernity.

By combining the speculative accuracy of the German tradition with the freedom and inter-

pretive hazard of the American school, Hansen leaves us illuminating philological interpretations and unexpected questions. Not only does she confront Adorno's writings on musical aesthetics and propose a sort of 'implicit theory of cinema' attributable to the Frankfurt philosopher, but she also builds an unexpected and fruitful bridge between past and present: she never reduces history to a relic but releases the new and the unexpressed that the past brings to us and that still belongs to us. It is 'the heritage of our times,' as another Jewish-German thinker, exiled in America, had understood.<sup>1</sup>

[Luisella Farinotti,  
Università IULM, Milano]

1 Negt and Kluge's *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung* (1972) is the continuation of (and the answer to) Jürgen Habermas's likewise famous book on public opinion: *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, 1962 (*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*). Miriam Hansen wrote the foreword to the American edition: *Public Sphere and Experience*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1993.

Jacques Aumont,  
*Que reste-t-il du cinéma?*,  
Vrin, Paris 2012, pp. 120

The digitalization of the media had the effect, among others, of having renewed an ontological speculation. Or, at least, that was the case of cinema, an 'old' medium apparently overwhelmed by the new ones, significantly transformed by the emergence – in the name of plurality and impurity – of a new phenomenology of 'making a movie' and 'going to the movies,' and crossed by unusual phenomena, in nature and intensity, of displacement and evasion from itself. Thus, think about the forms of survival of cinema in contemporary society and, at the same

time, about the constant elements of its technological, experiential and cultural identity, elements that have proved to be necessary and urgent in some ways. And France has undoubtedly been the center of this renewed speculation, as evidenced by, among others, *Horizon cinéma* by Jean-Michel Frodon (2006), *Virtuel?* by Angel Quintana (2008), *Cinéma contemporaines* by Luc Vancheri (2009) and *La querelle des dispositifs* by Raymond Bellour (2012). The publication of *Que reste-t-il du cinéma?* by Jacques Aumont dates back to January of this year, and it does not only fit perfectly this scenario, but it is also an attempt to provide a definitive answer to the doubt that the book presents in the title, where it claims in

the first place the recovery of a ‘singular look.’ “Le cinéma, seul,” to quote Daney: it carries not only the meaning of a lonely cinema, perhaps put aside as something outdated, but it rather conveys the idea of “just the cinema.” Aumont’s book reacts explicitly against the media model – very popular today – of convergences, changes of medium and short circuits. This model seems to annihilate a sectorial look, since it is interested in understanding the differences and not – for the umpteenth time – in the superimposition of practices and languages. On the contrary, it shows a peculiarity of contemporary communication strategies: “redouble their media and remove all traces of mediation: ideally, it would like to erase their own media at the same time which multiplies them” (Bolter-Grusin, 2002). A model that, among other things, feeds a dangerous tendency: that of “plaquer le même nom de ‘cinéma’ sur ce magma,” the magma of contemporary vision; that of exchanging the dissemination of cinematographic models or elements with the dissolution or the uncontrolled expansion of cinema (Youngblood and the *Vulgata* of expanded cinema are liquidated maybe a little too radically), and hastily assimilating the fate of cinema to the fate of moving images.

Aumont’s discussion then proceeds, in the four chapters of the book, to mark the differences or, better, to remember that there are, even today, *differences*; that cinema is neither dead nor gone, nor digitally disfigured to the point of being unrecognizable. And the progress of the argumentation is both historical and ontological: on the one hand, in fact, Aumont focuses on the ‘historicity’ of cinema in the present, he establishes a comparative path with art, and he concludes that if it is true that cinema has lost the monopoly of the moving image – more radically, “il n’a plus tout à fait le prestige d’être le seul art d’image mouvante” – it continues nevertheless to appear, for ethical and aesthetic reasons, “la référence positive et dernière.” On

the other hand, the last part of the book, aptly titled ‘Permanences,’ is properly of ontological order: the author proceeds to analyze the reasons for this centrality, of what cinema is – and continues to be – on the basis of what it does and of what it still manages to do. Briefly: it creates “un’alliance originale d’une fiction et de conditions de réception propices à la captation psychique sur un mode à la fois individuel et collectif,” which, in fact, continues to “distinguer le cinéma de toutes autres sortes d’images en mouvement et de pas mal d’autres pratiques culturelles et artistiques.”

A triple singularity, that of cinema: the structure of the device, the linguistic operations, the values offered to the experience of the viewer. And as to the first point, Aumont does not fall into the common error of interpreting the current proliferation of visual platforms as an index of the dissolution of cinema identity; the architecture of the cinematic apparatus, historically settled, should be rather understood as a mental model, formed by the junction of some elements (in particular, the dynamics of the projection and the experience of a “matière visuelle” that is released in front of the viewer) and liable to happen even outside the context of a seemingly ‘canonical’ model such as that of movie theater. In short, the cinematographic device can be defined as the meeting between a specific and original way to experience the moving image and an intention, that of a spectator who chooses to “voir (et entendre) un film,” in respect of the temporal integrity of the projection. This last comment introduces the second value that Aumont recognizes as specific of cinema: the production and the complex management of time, which leads to a ‘three-dimensional’ experience of temporality: the time of the vision, the time represented by the diegesis (through which the film captures one of the world *tout court*), and the time “sculpté, modelé, mis en forme, celui du film, qui nous apparaît avec son

rythme c'est-à-dire son écoulement, fluide ou heurté." It is from here, from this work of narrative and articulation, that cinema can achieve a 'realist' equivalence between the world of film and life, where it gives rise to a unique and original 'meeting,' to the "expérience d'un monde que nous ne connaissons pas, mais qui s'accorde à notre vie." A relation through which the film celebrates and realizes a dramatic and aesthetic

confrontation between the human being – whose "corps tout entier" is brought into play – and the reality that surrounds him. Including, of course, that of contemporary society, in which cinema participates without sacrificing its own identity, but continuing to exercise its faculties. Those that belong to cinema, and to cinema only.

[Luca Malavasi,  
Università degli Studi di Genova]



## CONTRIBUTORS / COLLABORATEURS

### **Gunhild Agger**

is Professor at Aalborg University, Denmark. She has been the Director of the collaborative, cross-disciplinary research programme *Crime Fiction and Crime Journalism in Scandinavia* (2007-2010). Her current research areas include: history of media and genre, television drama, national and transnational film, bestsellers and blockbusters. Among her recent books: *Dansk tv-drama* (2005) and *Mord til tiden – forbrydelse, historie og mediekultur* (2013).

### **Alice Autelitano**

works as editor at the Cineteca di Bologna. She earned a Ph.D. in Audiovisual Studies at the University of Udine. She has edited *The Five Senses of Cinema* (with V. Innocenti and V. Re, 2005), *Narrating the Film. Novelization: From the Catalogue to the Trailer* (with V. Re, 2006), and *The Cinematic Experience. Film, Contemporary Art, Museum* (2010). She has published *Cronosimi. Il tempo nel cinema contemporaneo* (2006), *Il cinema infranto. Intertestualità, intermedialità e forme narrative nel film a episodi italiano (1961-1976)* (2011), and various essays in journals and books.

### **Stéfany Boisvert**

is a Ph.D. candidate in communication (Joint Doctorate in Communication) at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM). She is currently working on different research projects about television and cinema. Her doctoral research is focused on the representation of masculinities in contemporary TV fictions (SSHRC scholarship). She was the editor of a special issue of the journal *COMMposite*: « L'identité culturelle dans les fictions audiovisuelles contemporaines » (vol. 15, n°1, 2012).

### **María del Mar Grandío**

is currently Associate Professor at the Catholic University of Murcia, Spain, where she teaches Audiovisual Programming and Advertising. Her main research interests are television and entertainment, with a special focus on television fiction and audiences. Currently, her research focuses on television fiction and new platforms, crossmedia production and audience involvement.

### **Miriam De Rosa**

earned her Ph.D. at the Catholic University of Milan in 2011. The article included in this volume refers to her research focusing on contemporary forms of cinema, with particular regard to the relationship among subject, space and filmic device. Objects of her studies range from visual arts to media platforms and live cinema performances. She is the author of diverse essays collected in Italian and international anthologies, and of the volume *Cinema e postmedia. I territori del filmico nel contemporaneo* (2013). She currently holds the seminar in Audiovisual Cultures at the Catholic University of Milan, where she also collaborates as assistant lecturer for the classes of Communication Pragmatics and Cultural History of Audiovisual Media. She is also a member of NECS and editor of *Screen-city* project ([www.screen-city.net](http://www.screen-city.net)).

### **Patricia Diego**

is Professor of TV Drama Production and TV Programming at the School of Communication, University of Navarra (Spain). She earned a Ph.D. with a thesis entitled *Production of TV fiction in Spain (1990-2002). History, industry and market*, that received the Outstanding Doctoral Thesis Award. She has been a Visiting Researcher at the University of Westminster and has published several articles about TV production in Spain in books and journals.

**Veronica Innocenti**

is Assistant Professor at the University of Bologna, where she teaches History of Broadcasting and Film Marketing. She holds a Ph.D. in Film studies from University of Bologna. She has been a visiting scholar at UCLA and a speaker at several national and international conferences (among others, University of Lugano, University of Glasgow, University of Huddersfield, University of Nottingham). She has been the organizer of the international conferences Media Mutations 3 and 4, dedicated to narrative ecosystems. She authored several publications, including books, chapters and articles. She co-authored, with Guglielmo Pescatore, a book on television serial narratives: *Le nuove forme della serialità televisiva. Storia, linguaggio e temi* (2008).

**Bernard Papin**

is Maître de conférences at the Université Paris-Sud, and a member of the CEISME-CIM research team at Université Paris 3 – Sorbonne Nouvelle. His work focuses on television fiction and the regulation of television pictures. He leads a working group on the representations of the Enlightenment on television. He has been the editor of the collection of essays *Images du Siècle des Lumières à la télévision. Construction d'une culture commune par la fiction* (2010).

**Cem Pekman**

is Professor at the Communications Faculty of Kocaeli University, Department of Advertising. He lectures on broadcasting history, history of film and animation, broadcasting systems and media policies. He is the author or editor of the following books: *Private Television: The Transformation Process of European Broadcasting*, *The Music of Image*, *The Image of Music*, and *Ertem Eğilmez: A Film Man*. His articles focus mainly on broadcasting history and policy in Turkey and Europe, film and music, advertising and product placement.

**Sylwia Szostak**

is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Nottingham's Department of Culture, Film and Media. Her research examines the impact of international media flows on Polish television in the post-Soviet era, with particular attention to the influence of American fiction television. She has chapters in Timothy Havens, Anikó Imre, Katalin Lustyik (eds.), *Popular Television in Eastern Europe During and Since Socialism* (2012) and in Laura Mee, Johnny Walker (eds.), *Rethinking Cinema and Television History: Contemporary Approaches and Critical Perspectives* (in press). She has also published an article in *The Journal of European Television History and Culture*.

**Lucia Tralli**

is a Ph.D. candidate in Film Studies at the University of Bologna. Her main research focus is on the re-use of media images in audiovisual productions. She received her MA with a thesis on the practice of found footage in relation to the work of two contemporary women filmmakers. She is now conducting a research on contemporary forms of audiovisual remixes, especially focusing on fan vidding and gender related issues in remix practices.

**Selin Tüzün**

is a Research Assistant at Marmara University in Istanbul, Faculty of Communications, Department of Radio-TV and Cinema. She completed her Master thesis at the Communication Faculty of Galatasaray University and received her Ph.D. from the Radio-TV program of Marmara University in 2011. Her work mainly focuses on Turkish film and TV industry.

**Paola Valentini**

is Associate Professor at the University of Florence, where she teaches Film History and History of Broadcasting. Her research is focused both on television (leading attention to historic, cultural and philological analysis of television texts) and on cinema, particularly on sound film in Italian cinema and media interactions between 1930s and 1970s. She wrote *Il suono nel cinema. Storia, teoria e tecniche* (2006), *Presenze sonore. Il passaggio al cinema sonoro in Italia tra cinema e radio* (2007) and a forthcoming book on Italian game and quiz shows (2013).

**CINÉMA & CIE**  
*International Film Studies Journal*

Fascicoli pubblicati

- Vol. 1, no.1, Fall 2001  
*Where Next? / Par où continuer?*  
(edited by / sous la direction de François Jost)
- Vol. 3, no. 2, Spring 2003  
*Dead Ends / Impasses*  
(edited by / sous la direction de Leonardo Quaresima)
- Vol. 3, no. 3, Fall 2003  
*Early Cinema: Technology, Discourse / Cinéma des premiers temps: technologie, discours*  
(edited by / sous la direction de Rosanna Maule)
- Vol. 4, no. 4, Spring 2004  
*Multiple and Multiple-language Versions / Versions multiples*  
(edited by / sous la direction de Nataša Đurovičová)
- Vol. 4, no. 5, Fall 2004  
*Transitions*  
(edited by / sous la direction de Francesco Casetti, Mariagrazia Fanchi)
- Vol. 5, no. 6, Spring 2005  
*Multiple and Multiple-language Versions II / Versions multiples II*  
(edited by /sous la direction de Hans-Michael Bock, Simone Venturini)
- Vol. 5, no. 7, Fall 2005  
*Multiple and Multiple-language Versions III / Versions multiples III*  
(edited by / sous la direction de Francesco Pitassio, Leonardo Quaresima)
- Vol. 6, no. 8, Fall 2006  
*Cinema and Contemporary Visual Arts / Cinéma et art contemporain*  
(edited by / sous la direction de Philippe Dubois)
- Vol. 7, no. 9, Fall 2007  
*Configuring Alternation / Configurations de l'alternance*  
(edited by / sous la direction de Nicolas Dulac, Bernard Perron)
- Vol. 8, no. 10, Spring 2008  
*Cinema and Contemporary Visual Arts II / Cinéma et art contemporain II*  
(edited by / sous la direction de Philippe Dubois)
- Vol. 8, no. 11, Fall 2008  
*Relocation*  
(edited by / sous la direction de Francesco Casetti)
- Vol. 9, no. 12, Spring 2009  
*Cinema and Contemporary Visual Arts III / Cinéma et art contemporain III*  
(edited by / sous la direction de Philippe Dubois, Jennifer Verraes)
- Vol. 9, no. 13, Fall 2009  
*Le Film pluriel*  
(edited by / sous la direction de Marie Frappat, Michel Marie)
- Vol. 10, no. 14-15, Spring-Fall 2010  
*Animer et ré-animer les images. Cinéma, animation et bande dessinée / The Animation and Re-animation of Images. Cinema, Animation and Comics*  
(edited by / sous la direction de Pierre Chemartin, Stefania Giovenco)
- Vol. 11, no. 16-17, Spring-Fall 2011  
*Revisiting the Archive / Revisiter l'archive*  
(edited by / sous la direction de Simone Venturini)
- Vol. 12, no. 18, Spring 2012  
*Nothing Is More Practical than a Good Theory. Genette Goes to the Movies / Rien n'est plus pratique qu'une bonne théorie. Genette va au cinéma*  
(edited by / sous la direction de Valentina Re)

