Strung Pieces:

On the Aesthetics of Television Fiction Series

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To Filipa, *ohana,*

familia

Contents

Abstract

As layered and long works, television fiction series have aesthetic properties that are built over time, bit by bit. This thesis develops a group of concepts that enable the study of these properties. It argues that a series is made of strung pieces, a system of related elements.

The text begins by considering this sequential form within the fields of film and television. This opening chapter defines the object and methodology of research, arguing for a non-essentialist distinction between cinema and television and against the adequacy of textual and contextual analyses as approaches to the aesthetics of these shows. It proposes instead that these programmes should be described as televisual works that can be scrutinised through aesthetic analysis.

The next chapters propose a sequence of interrelated concepts. The second chapter contends that series are composed of building blocks that can be either *units* into which series are divided or *motifs* that unify series and are dispersed across their parts. These blocks are patterned according to four kinds of relations or principles of composition. *Repetition* and *variation* are treated in tandem in the third chapter because of their close connection, given that variation emerges from established repetition. *Exception* and *progression* are also discussed together in the fourth chapter since they both require a long view of these serial works. The former, in order to be recognised as a deviation from the patterns of repetition and variation. The latter, in order to be understood in its many dimensions as the series advances. Each of these concepts is further detailed with additional distinctions between types of units, motifs, repetitions, variations, and exceptions, using illustrative examples from numerous shows. In contrast, the section on progression uses a single series as case study, *Carnivàle* (2003-05), because this is the overarching principle that encompasses all the others.

The conclusion considers the findings of the research and suggests avenues for their application.

Acknowledgements

Introduction:

Pieces, Strings

The episode opens with a cacophony of sounds: police sirens, the loud protest of a woman, the spraying of water, background voices. The screen is black, intercut with very brief shots, flares of colour and movement, too short to be perceived as synchronous with what we hear. The other episode starts in a different way. The camera moves forward following rows of dresses and then backward over rows of shoes, while a hand touches them to the disco sound of Andrea True Connection's "More, More, More". Both episodes, "On Tilt" (3.15) from *The Shield* (2002-8) and "Oona Wentworth" (2.13) from *Nip/Tuck* (2003-10) were directed by Scott Brazil. The director had to understand and adopt the regular style of each series when he directed the two episodes. As a result, the episodes have more in common with other episodes of the same series than with each other. They follow the particular stylistic patterns of the series instead of a directorial style: the fragmentary, nervous style of *The Shield*, and the elegant fluid style of *Nip/Tuck*. This is a thesis about these patterns.

Directing a television series is not like directing a film. It is not a concentrated effort in which the choices and contributions of the director are decisive. We know that the production of a series employs several different directors throughout a season. When a new director arrives, the basic style of the show has already been decided by creators and producers and established in previous episodes. As Tetzlaff explains, "The director, then, takes an existing, basic aesthetic set-up and works out the details for the episode at hand."[1] My aim is to classify, describe, and analyse the general guidelines of these aesthetic set-ups. These guiding principles that govern and structure the aesthetics of television series foster consistency, but not rigidity, so that the style of a series may develop instead of simply change. Throughout their long run, shows have to find new ways to sustain and to renew the attention of the audience without contradicting their established identity.

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1. David J. Tetzlaff, "Director, Television", in *Encyclopedia of Television*, vol. 2, ed. Horace Newcomb (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997), p. 719.

1. Television Aesthetics

"Aesthetics" and "television" are still two words rarely seen in tandem. If they are mentioned together it is usually as a means to some other end, for instance, the scrutiny of gender and minority representations. Paying attention to the aesthetic facet of television involves the close observation of elements and then a detailed analysis that considers these elements in context — two methods that the study of television has often disregarded. Sarah Cardwell rightly points out the two major reasons for this lack of interest. First, the fact that the study of television developed out of sociology and cultural studies. Second, the way television is still regarded as artistically poor. She later defines television aesthetics as drawing on "a generalised understanding of the key foci of philosophical aesthetics: the criticism and evaluation of art, and the raising and tackling of questions that arise from our engagement with works of art".[2] Cardwell's writings are representative of this approach, pursuing conceptual aspects that stem from the detailed examination of programmes.[3] There is no doubt that her definition of television aesthetics fits her project.[4] Yet because of her interest in both analysis and theory, she articulates and clarifies a position that is by no means unique, but instead common in contemporary television studies.

There is a tendency in the scholarly work around television and aesthetics to associate it with evaluative and interpretative claims,[5] as if an aesthetic approach leads inevitably to such claims. Doubtless this has been a fruitful avenue of research as Christine Geraghty's considerations on the aesthetic evaluation of drama[6] and Steven Peacock's stylistic criticism of

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2. Sarah Cardwell, "'Television Aesthetics' and Close Analysis: Style, Mood and Engagement in *Perfect Strangers* (Stephen Poliakoff, 2001)", in *Style and Meaning: Studies in the Detailed Analysis of Film*, ed. John Gibbs and Douglas Pye (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 180.

3. See Cardwell, *Andrew Davies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005). This monograph is a realised example of this approach: it begins as an analysis of Davies's oeuvre and becomes a reflection on authorship.

4. This project is developed more fully in Cardwell, "Television Aesthetics", *Critical Studies in Television*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2006), pp. 72-80.

5. This tendency is made explicit in John Corner, "Television Studies and the Idea of Criticism", *Screen*, vol. 48, no. 3 (2007), pp. 363-69. Corner opens this article on the intellectual character and possibilities of television criticism with a pertinent paragraph:

> There has recently been a growth in discussion and dispute about "values" in the study of television. This has gone along with an increased use of the term "aesthetic" to signal a refreshed emphasis on matters of form and creative quality, following perception of their relative neglect. (p. 363)

6. See Christine Geraghty, "Aesthetics and Quality in Popular Television Drama", *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2003), pp. 25-45.

programmes[7] demonstrate. Yet it also seems too narrow to contrast with the narrowness that has been prevalent in television studies. Value and interpretation in art, the aspects that Cardwell highlights, are important issues in philosophical aesthetics, but they are not any more key than, say, intention and expression in art. Perhaps the problem here is that what is meant by aesthetics is not clear. A deeper engagement with philosophy is in order.

Aesthetics has two meanings relevant to this discussion, already alluded to in passing.

It may be the branch of philosophy that focuses on art and aesthetic experience. This can be confusing. Although "aesthetics" may be used as a synonym of "philosophy of art", this does not mean that the only or even primary value of art is aesthetic. Art may have other values such as moral value. In addition, we can have an aesthetic experience of a table lamp that is not a work of art, but aesthetics is not mainly interested in this kind of work. According to Jerrold Levinson, aesthetics has three main foci that delimit its domain of inquiry: *art* as concept and practice; *aesthetic properties* as the perceptible features that characterise artworks; and *aesthetic experience* as the perception of aesthetic properties.[8] The second line of inquiry is the one adopted in the following pages. The aesthetic properties of television series can only be accessed by way of an aesthetic experience of them, but that does not entail that they cannot be studied by themselves. If my emphasis were on the experience, properties would also come into play in some way since they are what is experienced. Levinson is clear about the interdependence of the three topics under the heading of aesthetics. Concentrating on one of them is just a matter of choice and research focus.

Aesthetics may also be the perceived formal structure of a thing, which may not be an artwork — we can talk about the aesthetics of nature, for instance. My focus in this thesis is on the aesthetics of artworks. Noël Carroll characterises an experience as properly aesthetic when it involves the identification of the aesthetic properties of an artwork — as well as design appreciation. He writes that "[t]o experience aesthetic properties is to detect and discriminate them".[9] This elucidates the subtitle of this thesis: "on the aesthetics of television fiction series"

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7. See, e.g., Steven Peacock, "In Between *Marion and Geoff*", *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2006), pp. 115-21.
8. Jerrold Levinson, "Philosophical Aesthetics: An Overview", in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, ed. Levinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 4-7.
9. Noël Carroll, *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 202.

means *on the aesthetic properties of this group of artworks*. Within this framework, aesthetic properties are general whereas stylistic properties are specific. Aesthetics may be described as the philosophical study of the artistic possibilities of an art form and therefore of the possible aesthetic properties of instances of this form. Style may be defined as a set of specific aesthetic properties of an artwork or group of artworks. We talk about the aesthetics of sculpture, but about the style of Michelangelo's *Pietà* and the style of Renaissance sculpture — hence the aesthetics of television series, and the style of *The Practice* (1997-2004) and the style of television legal drama series.

Bearing these two meanings in mind, *television aesthetics* may be understood as the aesthetics of television or as the aesthetic study of television, that is, as a set of characteristics or as an approach to research. These two definitions, separated for the sake of clarity, are related. An aesthetic approach to television may encompass more than describing and analysing the aesthetic features of its programmes, but it is the *sine qua non* of such description and analysis. The dissection of these works can only be modelled after film analysis because of the basic commonalities between television and film. Both films and television series use settings, costumes, makeup, lighting, staging, and they are audio-visual artworks based on the editing of images and sounds. This pluralist strategy that combines references from philosophy of art and ideas from film analysis may seem to stray away from the prevalent research methods in television studies. That is true to an extent. Be that as it may, grounding this study on the philosophy of art is a way of making its contributions more solid, inscribing them into a larger context. Similarly, using film analysis as a model, albeit one that has to be adjusted to television, is a way of gathering relevant knowledge related with the issues at hand, be it on set design or on voice-overs. In the end, this is not such an unusual methodology. Television is a rich and multifaceted phenomenon and as Horace Newcomb recalls, "television demands, and television studies now acknowledges, the application of intersecting theoretical and methodological examinations".[10]

Moreover, the prime function of analysis in this study is to provide evidence for the theoretical points being made. This is in essence a work of theory. Not in the sense of an

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10. Horace Newcomb, "Television: An Overview", in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, vol. 4, ed. Michael Kelly (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 367.

application of a theoretical perspective like psychoanalysis over an object, but as a work that develops a system of concepts to elucidate something. This something is the aesthetic structure of television fiction series researched from an analytical and descriptive approach.[11]

2. Fiction Series

Ted Cohen suggests that if philosophy of art devoted attention to television it would concentrate first on dramatic and comedy series.[12] They seem likely to him to be of more interest than other programmes and other aspects of television. That is probably because within the televisual context they are more easily identified as artworks. Fiction television series resemble fiction films in the sense that they are both produced with expressive and narrative ends in sight. This leads us to put them in the same category. This similarity does not exist in regards to quiz shows, for example, which are programmes that present a rewarded competition for entertainment purposes.

Cohen singles out two topics that follow from this philosophical approach to television: the objects and the audience. Questions about the aesthetic experience that audiences have and the sensibility that this experience fosters belong to the latter. My focus is on the former, the objects, the fiction series. Cohen does not tackle the classical distinction made in television studies between serials and series, or serial and episodic narrative works. Yet this needs clarification. Serials, of which miniseries are a subtype, tell a continuous story divided into parts. Series are composed of self-contained episodes that may not amount to an overarching story. This distinction has been made less clear, and has become less useful, now that hybrid forms are widespread. *Chuck* (2007-), an action-comedy series about an ordinary worker at an electronics retailer who becomes part of the secret and dangerous world of espionage, is just one of many examples. It combines episodes centred on specific missions with a larger narrative that revolves

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11. For a contrasting approach, general in aim and empirical in method, see Nikos Metallinos, *Television Aesthetics: Perceptual, Cognitive, and Compositional Bases* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1996).
12. Ted Cohen, "Television: Contemporary Thought", in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, vol. 4, ed. Michael Kelly (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 369.

around the antagonism between The Ring, a rogue spy agency, and the CIA. Most contemporary serialised fictions on television present narrative arcs using self-contained episodes in this way. "Series" is therefore used here as Cohen uses it: as an all-embracing term that designates programmes in instalments that are in general hybrid, tending towards either the serial or the episodic.

Potentially all television programmes can provide aesthetic experiences, asking us to appreciate their forms and design. This appreciation may enable us to acknowledge and articulate the differences between instances of the same type of programme, such as two chat shows like *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (1986-2011) and *Larry King Live* (1985-). In the first, Oprah chats with her guests on a big couch, often filmed in a two shot, fostering an intimate and informal ambience that also includes the studio audience. In the second, Larry King conducts interviews in a small studio set, and the regular use of split-screen with a shot of the presenter and a reversed shot of the guest, both in medium close-ups, makes the atmosphere even more cramped and tense. It is not surprising then that topics like sports, talking, journalism, advertising, and interactivity have been approached from an aesthetic perspective with productive results.[13] Yet fiction series bring up specific issues and the aesthetic experiences that they provide are more layered and more sustained. Documentary series like *First Person* (2000-1) and factual series like *Wife Swap* (2003-) do not typically involve the depiction of imaginary events and characters, something that characterises works of fiction. This does not mean that the findings of this investigation tell us nothing about these other series. After all, they share fundamental attributes like their division into instalments. In a straightforward manner, concentrating on fiction series limits the scope of research. Following a similar practical rationale, animated series will be hardly mentioned. This tighter focus on live-action fiction series will make the argumentation of this entire study more precise.

There have been misgivings about the aesthetic study of television fiction series. These programmes may have aesthetic properties, but the study of such properties may not be valuable. Such qualms stem from common criticisms levelled against television. Television is often seen as

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13. See Gunhild Agger and Jens F. Jensen, eds., *The Aesthetics of Television* (Aalborg: Aalborg University Press, 2001).

a formulaic medium that offers only passive, quick gratification. In contrast, Alexander Nehamas contends that television calls for a specific literacy and attention. He reminds us that considering art and amusement as antithetical has a long tradition in the history of thought, from Plato to Pierre Bourdieu — but that the history of popular art has discredited these positions. Nehamas posits that

> The television audience is highly literate (more literate about its medium than many high-culture audiences are about theirs) and makes essential use of its literacy in its appreciation of individual episodes or whole series. Its enjoyment, therefore, is both active and comparative.[14]

His central argument is that "television rewards serious watching. Serious watching, in turn, disarms many of the criticisms commonly raised against television".[15] Such careful observation is the basis of this academic inquiry. Only this serious attention can lead us to the most crucial questions on the aesthetics of television fiction series.

Cohen points out the fact that television series, unlike movies, are not self-contained but discontinuous.[16] Even if in series like sitcoms the episodes are self-contained, a sense of the characters, if not of their development, can only be grasped if we watch more than one episode. This appears to be above all related with narrative, but has also to do with aesthetics. Just like we want to see the same characters doing fairly similar or quite different things, we also wish to revisit a universe, uniquely framed, inhabited, patterned, coloured, lighted, and textured. Once we are aware of these successive structural features, television series come across as more complex and subtle. Yet investigating these aesthetic properties requires selectivity insofar as it is fruitless to be attentive to them without a focal point. This centre of attention are salient aesthetic properties, those that underpin a set of principles governing the aesthetic structuring of fiction series. They are not fixed rules, but patterns that are usual, typical, standard. As we will see, they

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14. Alexander Nehamas, "Serious Watching", in *Television: Aesthetic Reflections*, ed. Ruth Lorand (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), p. 58.
15. Ibid., p. 47.
16. Cohen, "Television", p. 369.

evolve and take different forms within a general structure of arrangement that establishes relations between serial pieces.

An aesthetic study of series must attend to the narrative dimension of these works. This is because it has to analyse the chain of relationships between the parts of a partitioned work, bits that relate and refer to other bits.[17] Furthermore, aesthetic features are frequently bound up in narrative needs and emphases. Since fiction series are narrative works, it is misguided to separate aesthetics from narrative, unless the purpose were to pursue a formalistic approach. This does not mean that aesthetics serves or is subordinated to narrative, just that they are intertwined. No matter what narrative aspects are called into play, the focus of this thesis will always be on the aesthetic aspects of series. The aesthetics of television fiction series is a *narrativised aesthetics* that is yet to be examined attentively. That is why it is so refreshing to see Cohen putting these works into perspective, along with popular artworks that have been, and continue to be, seriously studied:

> Standard commercial television series may just be examples of a kind of art familiar elsewhere, namely, that kind of art that somehow supports responses both sophisticated, intense audience responses and less arduous, easier, more superficial responses. Operas by Guiseppe Verdi, novels by Charles Dickens, poems by Robert Frost, much jazz music, and even some plays by William Shakespeare are all like that. It scarcely shows the inferiority or slightness of these works that they have long sustained audiences deriving simple pleasures and enjoyment, because they also support very complicated and intricate considerations from audiences with a taste for that. Neither should that fact about television, by itself, underwrite a low estimation of television programs, should it be possible — as it almost certainly is — to subject television series to complex aesthetic analyses.[18]

These sentences display optimism. Cohen declares that it is "almost certainly" possible to produce complex aesthetic analysis of television series. But so far this analysis has not been

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17. "Narrate" comes from the Latin *narrar* (to relate) and "relate", in turn, stems from *referre* (to refer).
18. Cohen, "Television", p. 369.

conducted in a systematic or concentrated manner. Jason Jacobs has traced the visual changes within a genre, the medical drama.[19] Jacobs has done this in depth, examining the stylistic development of the genre and calling attention to such topics as the portrait of the human body and the different characterisation of male and female doctors and of their patients. Robin Nelson has studied the links between the aesthetics of series and new cultural, economic, and technological contexts.[20] Nelson's work displays a deeper engagement with theory and a determination to situate the trends of contemporary drama within the social and institutional history of television. More generic books have explored features that are also found in other forms, from commercial spots to news programmes. Jeremy Butler has presented an overview of television style as a historical poetics of the medium.[21] Influenced by David Bordwell, Butler looks closely at the diverse styles of television productions, considering their stylistic connection with theatre, film, computer graphics, and video games. Karen Lury has made clear how major formal features reveal the central concerns of various types of programmes.[22] Lury's focus on the construction of images and sounds and on the organisation of time and space is another demonstration of the growing interest of television studies in detailed analysis.

All of these books provide invaluable insights that will be integrated into these chapters. Nevertheless, none of them attempted a sustained aesthetic analysis of series — more precisely, the kind of analysis that considers their seriality as well as entirety, that approaches series as made of pieces and also as a whole. That is why, while instances of style in particular episodes of series have been commented on, the complete series remains elusive. Film analysis can make us more sensitive to, for instance, mise en scène and editing in series. However, it cannot provide the necessary tools to approach them as gappy and vast works that escape our grasp — as we shall see, narratology is helpful here, when the aesthetics of series is understood as narrativised. This study aims to provide these tools as a group of concepts that are born of film and narratological

19. See Jason Jacobs, *Body Trauma TV: The New Hospital Dramas* (London: BFI, 2003).
20. See Robin Nelson, *TV Drama in Transition: Forms, Values and Cultural Change* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997) and the subsequent *State of Play: Contemporary "High-End" TV Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).
21. See Jeremy Butler, *Television Style* (London: Routledge, 2009).
22. See Karen Lury, *Interpreting Television* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005).

analyses. These concepts can guide and frame the aesthetic analysis of fiction television series. Cohen's encouragement may be read as an appeal waiting for a reply. This thesis may be seen as a response to his plea.

3. An Overview

This thesis develops from the particular to the comprehensive, from units to relations, from pieces to strings. Its basic argument is that the aesthetic properties of television fiction shows are built over time, bit by bit. Series are made of strung pieces. They are layered and long works made of distinct parts that have intricate relations. Elucidating and specifying exactly what this means entails defining and examining these parts and relations that aesthetically characterise series. This thesis puts forward a group of concepts that enable the study of these related parts.

The general issues that immediately arise regarding the object and methodology of research are addressed in the first chapter. These issues have to do with the placement of this investigation within television and film studies, concerning the distinction between television and cinema and the divide between textual and contextual analyses. This chapter argues for a non-essentialist distinction between cinema and television and against the adequacy of textual and contextual analysis as approaches to the aesthetics of television series. It tackles the current debates on television aesthetics and argues that approaching serial aesthetics involves considering how series are made sequentially, with elements and a structure which are usually clear, but evolving, because they are open to reformulation. The conclusion is that series should be considered as televisual works, works that are surely influenced by cinema, but that come out of television production, which has its own history and body of works. The aesthetics of these televisual works can be scrutinised through aesthetic analysis.

Following the preparatory work of this chapter, the next chapters propose a sequence of interrelated concepts that enable the description of the aesthetic structure of series. These chapters are structured around the following major concepts: units and motifs, repetition and

variation, and exception and progression. The aim is to pin down the elements and relationships that create the aesthetic possibilities of series and label them.[23]

The second chapter contends that series are composed of building blocks that may be either *units* or *motifs*. As structuring aesthetic elements, units segment series whereas motifs pattern them. Units are easy to identify because they are demarcated as segments. There are also sequences that have, or will be given, specific names, like title sequences. The most noticeable serial units are episodes, which measure our viewing experience of these works. In contrast, motifs are dispersed across a show and create patterns that connect the units. They are grouped relative to three general creative aspects: the production design, the performances, and the characterisation of images and sounds.

Repetition and *variation* are the first relations (or principles of composition) between units and motifs to be addressed. They are treated in tandem in the third chapter because of their close connection, given that variation emerges from established repetition. There are different extents to repetition: it may follow strict norms; it may involve the loose, instead of the exact, recurrence of elements; and finally, it may be adopted from a prior series in a remake. Variations have distinct appearances: they may adhere to a set form while giving it a new expression; they may be odd, going beyond ingrained repetitions; and lastly, they may be associated with a clear narrative arc.

Exception and *progression* are also discussed together in the fourth chapter since they both require a long view of these serial works. The former, in order to be recognised as a deviation from the regular patterns of repetition and variation. The latter, in order to be understood in its many dimensions as the series advances. The bases for aesthetic exception are diverse and attach it to or detached it from the overall narrative structure of the show. Consequently, it has an arbitrary or motivated relation to this structure. In addition, the seasonal bookends of series, premieres and finales, may also be a basis for exception. Progression encompasses exception as

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23. This aim unveils the epistemic foundation of the thesis. The position that I espouse is moderate realism: not that there are universal concepts in the mind and universal things in nature in strict correspondence, as extreme realism champions, but that there are universal concepts that faithfully represent the general nature of particular things. Moderate realism reconciles the different characteristics of external objects (particularity) with the intellectual representations of these objects (universality). It explains why science, even though creating abstract notions based on its discoveries, is valid *about* the world.

well as repetition and variation. It entails organising operations that arrange and relate the serial pieces according to certain principles — such as the principle of development.

Each of these concepts is further detailed, using illustrative examples from numerous shows. Only the section on progression uses a single series as case study, *Carnivàle* (2003-5), because this is the overarching principle that incorporates all the others. Every one of these examples is instrumental in the understanding of how series are aesthetically composed. The use, for the most part, of American contemporary series generates continuity and unity between chapters. The high output and production resources of the American television industry has generated an immense aesthetic diversity. These programmes are also popular, a quality that makes it easier to find fitting and recognisable examples within them. They are distributed worldwide and therefore their discussion reflects, not just American television culture, but also other national television cultures.

Furthermore, even tough this study focuses on the aesthetic properties of series, it is also informed by the history and industrial practices of television. This thesis has been written in a post-broadcast era[24] when works of television are no longer distributed simply via terrestrial broadcast, but also through cable, satellite, pay-per-view, digital recordings, packaged media, and the Internet to be played-out on television screens, computer monitors and other displays. Because of this multiplication of accesses and copies, contemporary television culture has seen the rise of avid fans who scrutinise and interpret the programmes they love in detail, opting for concentrated viewing.[25] Other viewers, who cannot be described as fans, also buy box sets, keep episodes recorded, and revisit series. Once more, American television is exemplary in how it reflects these changes. In the process that lead television to this point, series became more aesthetically diverse and daring. This is the historical narrative that John Caldwell traces by concentrating on production and style, linking institutional practices with aesthetics in the American context.[26] The

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24. For an in-depth reflection on this transition, see Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson, eds., *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

25. See Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

26. See John Thornton Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 1995) and the later "Convergence Television: Aggregating Form and Repurposing Content in the Culture of Conglomeration", in *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 41-74.

history and practices of television provide a background for the concepts developed here, grounding them, and at times elucidating how artistic and commercial decisions blend.

It is not the purpose of this investigation to attempt a description of the essential features of all television fiction series. The intention is not to claim that these aesthetic elements and relationships are found in every programme of this kind. Series use them or forgo them — which is exactly why some are more suitable examples than others to investigate a given concept. The goal of this thesis is then to present and introduce these general critical terms and explore them. Its main purpose is to unravel how series renew its serial style, moment by moment, episode by episode, season by season.

Above all, as the evoked opening seconds of episodes from *The Shield* and *Nip/Tuck* show, these programmes are starting points to raise questions and to arrive at theoretical considerations. An inductive and descriptive approach such as this makes theory more concrete and less abstract. Throughout, this text will rely on series not merely as examples for a conceptual framework, but as instances that have suggested this framework. Evoking moments and calling attention to details of series in each chapter is therefore a way of grounding the theoretical work, and its inferences of general concepts from particular cases, in active and attentive viewing. In this sense, it is as if this text is written from the point of view of a television spectator — an interested and curious spectator, eager to grasp the aesthetic attributes of television fiction series.

Chapter One:

Aesthetics in Sequence

Nate Fisher (Peter Krause) has accidentally taken ecstasy and sees his deceased father Nathaniel (Richard Jenkins) playing Chinese checkers with a white man in a black suit and a black woman in a white dress. The man is Death. The woman is Life. Jane Feuer mentions this moment from "In the Game" (2.01) to argue that *Six Feet Under* (2001-5) makes reference to art films and art cinema tropes to establish its quality status.[1] In this case, the reference is the chess game between a medieval knight and Death in Ingmar Bergman's *Det sjunde inseglet* (*The Seventh Seal*, 1957). The trope is what she calls the "dream diegesis", sequences in which the frontier between dream and reality is ambiguous. The concept of quality television is a construct and, as Feuer contends, HBO is paradigmatic in this respect. "It's Not TV. It's HBO.", the slogan of this American premium television channel that broadcasted *Six Feet Under* and other acclaimed dramas like *The Sopranos* (1999-2007) is indicative of the marketing strategy of the channel.

This way of promoting and selling their programmes as distinctive within the television landscape indirectly communicates that HBO produces series that are more akin to films. David Chase, the creator of *The Sopranos*, once conveyed this idea directly when he said that the goal of his crew was to make every episode as a little movie.[2] Vincent Canby expands on this notion, stating that

> *Berlin Alexanderplatz* [1980], *The Singing Detective* [1986] and *The Sopranos* are something more than mini-series. Packed with characters and events of Dickensian dimension and color, their time and place observed with satiric exactitude, each has the kind of cohesive dramatic arc that defines a work complete unto itself. No matter what they are labeled or what they become, they are not open-ended series, or even mini-series.

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1. Jane Feuer, "HBO and the Concept of Quality TV", in *Quality TV: Contemporary American Television and Beyond*, ed. Janet McCabe and Kim Akass (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), p. 151.

2. James L. Longworth, *TV Creators: Conversations with America's Top Producers of Television Drama* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), p. 35.

They are megamovies.

That is, they are films on a scale imagined by the big-thinking, obsessive, fatally unrealistic Erich von Stroheim when, in 1924, he shot *Greed*, virtually a page-by-page adaptation of Frank Norris's Zola-esque novel, *McTeague*.[3]

Canby sets side by side very different works. He is right to point out that they share characteristics like a long narrative and multiple characters, characteristics that can be thought of as novelistic. Nonetheless, their production, structure, and release are much different. Fassbinder's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* is a telefilm in 14 chapters that was subsequently released in theatres. Potter's *The Singing Detective* was produced as a mini-series in six episodes.[4] Stroheim's *Greed* was designed as a movie in two parts, but this longer version is lost. Fassbinder's telefilm, Potter's mini-series, and Stroheim's movie were all planned ahead with a predetermined end in sight, something that rarely happens in the making of television series. Most episodes of television series follow Aristotelian principles of narrative with a beginning, a middle, and an end, forming a whole that is causally linked.[5] Yet the series as a chain of instalments planned as singular episodes as well as particular sets of episodes (or seasons) is often temporarily incomplete — and sometimes permanently incomplete when a series is cancelled mid-season or non-renewed for a new season.

An additional example illuminates other specific characteristics of television series. The Hungarian film *Sátántangó* (1994) lasts more than seven hours and is divided into twelve chapters. It was produced to be seen in a single and prolonged watching experience, one that makes the viewer feel the duration of its long takes in contemplation. The film has been screened

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3. Vincent Canby, "From the Humble Mini-Series Comes the Magnificent Megamovie", *The New York Times*, 31 Oct. 1999, http://www.nytimes.com/1999/10/31/arts/from-the-humble-mini-series-comes-the-magnificent-megamovie.html?pagewanted=all/, pars. 10-12.

4. It is perhaps useful to clarify the difference between a telefilm in parts and a mini-series in episodes. Telefilms are *divided into parts* while mini-series are *constituted by episodes*. In other words, long telefilms are divided into parts for specific programming or release purposes while mini-series are conceived in episodes. Two works by Ingmar Bergman exemplify this difference. *Fanny och Alexander* (*Fanny and Alexander*, 1982), a 312-minute telefilm, was divided into four parts when it aired for the first time on SVT. It was afterwards released as a one-part telefilm. *Scener ur ett äktenskap* (*Scenes from a Marriage*, 1973) was conceived as a mini-series of six episodes of around 50 minutes each. Shorter versions of both were produced for their cinema release as single works: *Fanny och Alexander* was cut down to 188 minutes and *Scener ur ett äktenskap* to 168.

5. See Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. S. H. Butcher (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1997), sect. 1, part VII.

in two parts in film theatres[6] and it was released on DVD in three discs.[7] Watching *Sátántangó* in the theatre or at home is a discontinuous experience: the reel of film needs to be changed, the disc has to be swapped. Yet this discontinuity is pragmatic instead of structural, because the whole printed film does not fit into a single reel, because its digital copy loses too much definition if it is too compressed. In contrast, watching television series is always a discontinuous experience, but this discontinuity is structural. In a series, there is always a gap between its episodes and a break between its seasons. Series are routinely broadcast as single episodes and then released on DVD box sets in separate discs. The completeness and wholeness of a series is tentative for an ongoing programme and has relied on a succession of decisions that could be planned beforehand for a finished show. Since the development of a series spans years, the production conditions change and the series changes with them — the Writers Guild of America strike in 2007 and 2008, for instance, ultimately forced productions to shut down, which resulted in shorter seasons, in general with less seven episodes than usual.

The Sopranos is a case in point. Throughout the first four years, between 1999 and 2002, Chase insisted that the series would end after five seasons. In 2003, the creator of the series had admitted that the fifth season could have more than the customary 13 episodes to "tie up loose ends" — but Brad Grey, one of the producers, later added that "there will be a full fifth season and a slightly shorter sixth year, with 10 episodes".[8] The shorter sixth year later became the longest and final season of the show with 21 episodes. The progression of a series is made of intents like Chase's that are always revised and transformed and that shape the narrative and the aesthetics of series. A series is not produced as a single work like a telefilm, a mini-series, or a movie are; it is developed. The planning of a series is never definitive, but provisional, open to change.

Approaches to episodes of television series as short movies[9] are inadequate because they disregard these differences. Episodes and movies have formal elements and operations in common

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6. For instance, the film was shown in Lisbon on 27 September 1997 in two parts, the first in the afternoon, and the second at night, as part of a complete retrospective of Béla Tarr's works organised by the Portuguese Cinematheque.

7. Both the British release in 2006 (by Artificial Eye) and the American release in 2008 (by Facets) present *Sátántangó* in three DVDs. The latter edition also contains a fourth disc with extras.

8. Gary Susman, "Another Whack", *Entertainment Weekly*, 18 Jun. 2003, http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,459339,00.html, par. 1.

9. See Glen Creeber, *Serial Television: Big Drama on the Small Screen* (London: BFI, 2004), p. 10.

like mise en scène and editing because they are both art works of the motion pictures. However, these commonalities do not make television series into "megamovies", that is, longer or extended movies that are broken into parts, as Canby suggests. Robin Nelson points out that the scholars who work within this framework and see episodes as short films fail to notice the individuality of television series. He claims that what is distinctive about "high-end" television fictions today is their "capacity to sustain, and develop, visual style and narrative complexity over significant spans of time".[10] Nelson's focus is on series with high production values, but his claim can be extended to encompass other television serial fictions. Regarding series as huge movies is overlooking how television series are made and planned sequentially, bit by bit, stringing pieces without a certain or fixed image of the whole. Movies, even when they are subjected to imponderables that prompt changes in planning, are produced as a complete work, with a determined end in sight.

This chapter introduces the central idea that thinking through the aesthetics of television fiction series implies considering it as an *aesthetics in sequence*. The aesthetic relations within series and the structure that they entail are imparted to us in an order that is not determined in advance, but decided in due course. Of course, we tend to look for constant patterns of unity when confronted with a finished work like *The Sopranos*, comprised of six seasons and 86 episodes. But it is apparent to us that the last season is longer than the previous five. And this irregularity is only one visible instance of how patterns varied and evolved within the series throughout time. The show also shifted in tone, at times letting symbolic elements take the place of what make up the everyday of the Soprano family life, the ordinary things that the series captures so attentively during the first seasons. Tony Soprano's (James Gandolfini) first dream appears in "Meadowlands" (1.04), when he sees close friends and relatives in his psychiatrist's office — it ends with the revelation that, instead of speaking to Dr. Melfi (Lorraine Bracco), he is talking to and finally confronting his mother, Livia (Nancy Marchand). Later, after occasional dreams in the second and fourth seasons, an episode of the fifth season, "The Test Dream" (5.11), is structured around a long dream sequence with living and deceased characters in settings from the present and from his childhood. The sixth season includes several oneiric moments, after Tony

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10. Robin Nelson, "The Impact of New Products on Television Studies", *Critical Studies in Television*: "TV Reflections", Nov. 2008, http://www.criticalstudiesintelevision.com/index.php?siid=7533, par. 3.

had been shot by Uncle Junior and had been left in a coma. In "Join the Club" (6.02) and "Mayham" (6.03) he sees himself as a travelling salesman with the wallet and briefcase of a man named Kevin Finnerty, who he resembles and who people keep mistaking him for. This reshaping of the mood and role of dream sequences, from those that emerge from the present to those that revisit the past to those that introduce an alternative reality, progressively alters the style of the series from time to time. It does not mean however that the series lacks a clear design.[11] It means that the kind of aesthetic patterns that we find in a movie, an individual work, are established and reworked in a series over time and through the relations of separate works — episodes, seasons. The memory of the aesthetic qualities of past episodes and seasons is crucial for us to make sense of how new pieces fit into the series. And we expect future episodes to introduce other variables. Elements that may seem out of place in a given episode or season may be later reworked if the serial progression continues or left hanging if that process is interrupted.

To argue for the characterisation of the aesthetics of television series as an evolving, sequential process, the following sections consider some crucial issues. These issues surface, in implicit or explicit form as dichotomies, whenever the aesthetic dimension of television, or of television series, is the research topic. The first dichotomy is between cinema and television, two media that have often been contrasted, as if some essential features distinguish them. As Chase's and Canby's words demonstrate, cinema and television have also been likened in recent times. There are good grounds to claim that they have more in common than not because they share elements like editing, but that does not entail that cinematic and televisual works cannot, or should not, be differentiated. This differentiation can, and should indeed be made because it elucidates why we see them as different media today. Yet it does not have to depend on identifying essential features, but rather in recognising the specific history and practices of each medium. Thus defining television this way also involves a more comprehensive understanding of the idea of medium; one that goes beyond the assumption that it refers only to the materials and techniques used by artists to create an art work.

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11. In fact, there is a progression in Tony's dream sequences. The sequences are first rare and later predominant. They first surface from the character's current daily life and later present an alternative reality that he inhabits. Tony is progressively confirmed as the centre of the series to the point that his subjectivity and his inner world take central stage in the series through the narrative on his (mistaken) identity as Kevin Finnerty.

After this definition of televisual works, the second dichotomy is already located within the particular field of television studies. It is between text and context or between the textual and contextual approaches to these works. These two approaches are measured against each other in research that concentrates on programmes rather than on institutional or historical aspects. Studies on the aesthetic features of series and other types of telecasts are usually classified as textual, since the contextual study of these works revolves around the contextualisation of their production and reception. Contextual elements like the scheduling of programmes may be considered relevant to the topic of television aesthetics given that they determine the range of possible creative choices — for example, the duration of episodes. Yet aesthetic analysis as an examination of the formal structure and design of a televisual work is not the same as contextual analysis — even if the latter may help explain some of the reasons for these formal characteristics. Aesthetic analysis is also different from textual analysis, which sees works as texts, composed of signs that can be decoded so that we access the meanings or messages that they relay. Yet the aesthetic dimension of a work is not related with the process of decoding, but with the aesthetic experience of the work, that is, the discrimination of its aesthetic properties.

This outline makes clear that the purpose of this chapter is to define a specific object of study and to present a certain approach to it. The object is television programmes, in general, and television fiction series, in particular. The approach is aesthetic analysis. In the end, the conjunction of this defined object and approach leads to a fresh look at the sequential structure of the aesthetic of series. It is the elements and relations of this aesthetic sequentiality that the next chapters will describe and probe.

1. Cinema and Television

Cinema and television have often been compared and contrasted — most notably by John Ellis.[12] There seems to be a cleavage between the two that becomes immediately apparent when the subject is aesthetics. Ellis's book, *Visible Fictions*, was first published in 1982, but it is still

12. See John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema Television Video*, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 1992).

widely cited as a foundational work in the comparative study of the formal characteristics of cinema and broadcast television.[13] It opts for an essentialist approach that concentrates on the differences between cinema and television instead of their similarities — even though these similarities include elements like mise en scène and cinematography. Its aim is to point out the essential attributes and forms of each medium. Ellis presents three main points about television aesthetics: the image is stripped down, with visual information kept to a minimum;[14] rapid cutting produces variation in order to engage the audience's interest;[15] sound gives most of the relevant narrative details.[16]

According to him, these are the central features of broadcast television images and sounds. He tends to consider that most programmes have similar characteristics. Yet television produces different programmes, some of them without artistic goals (quiz shows, news bulletins) and therefore usually with a lesser investment in generating aesthetic interest. Many contemporary television series, which do have such goals, disprove that the characteristics that Ellis points out are essential. Take the first episode of *Desperate Housewives* (2004-) as an example. Mary Alice's (Brenda Strong) voice-over invites us to attend to her voice, but also to see what she is referring to, since her descriptions are not very specific. She describes the day of her suicide as a normal day. She says she made breakfast for her family and we see her bringing waffles to a table with fruit, eggs, toast, bacon, coffee and juice. She says she performed her chores and we see her turning on the washing machine. She says she completed her projects and we see her painting a metal garden chair. She says she ran her errands and we see her picking up clothes from the dry cleaner. She does all this in a relaxed manner, with an assurance that comes from repeating these activities. Likewise, her home is perfectly neat, a neatness that she admires and adores before shooting herself in the head — something that we see as a reflection on a family portrait in a photo frame (fig. 1a). All these details are narratively important and can only be accessed by

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13. See David Morley's essay "Television: Not So Much a Visual Medium, More Like Visible Object", in *Visual Culture*, ed. Chris Jenks (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 170-89; or David McQueen's textbook *Television: A Media Student's Guide* (London: Hodder Arnold, 1998), p. 7. Ellis's work is seen as seminal in Michael Hammond and Lucy Mazdon, eds., *The Contemporary Television Series* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p. 9. There are many other examples that attest to the persistent influence of *Visible Fictions*.

14. Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, p. 130.

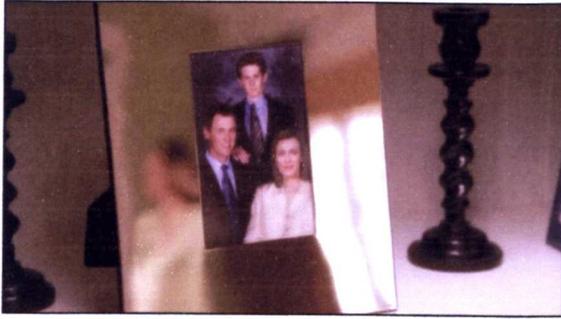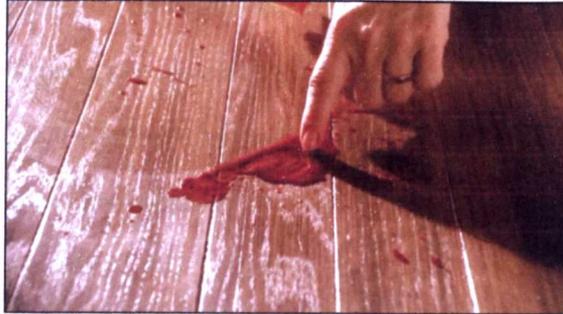15. Ibid., p. 131.

16. Ibid., p. 129.

Fig. 1a.

Fig. 1b.

Desperate Housewives, "Pilot" (1.01).

paying attention to the images. Moreover, the series is visually playful. The shot that follows the suicide shows the tomato juice that her neighbour, Martha Huber (Christine Estabrook), has spilled on her kitchen counter (fig. 1b), to playfully evoke Mary Alice's blood.

For Ellis, television aesthetics is the antithesis of cinema aesthetics. This *a priori* theoretical assumption leads him to force the contrast between the two, making general claims that, as we have seen, do not withstand empirical scrutiny. He sees cinema and television as, not just distinct, but essentially opposite forms. As stated by him, for instance, cinema images are richly detailed whereas television images are serviceable and minimal because, contrary to cinema, sound predominates over the image. A sequence like that one from *Desperate Housewives* contradicts this. Furthermore, the pleasures that this series engenders include the viewing of favourite female stars like Eva Longoria — the first desperate housewife that we see, jogging. Ellis denies that there are stars in television as they are in cinema, because the first lacks the "photo-effect" of the second and "presents itself as an immediate presence, except when it is borrowing the cinema with transmissions that are labelled 'films'".[17] This is a telling, dismissive comparison that disregards how television fiction series and films produce exactly the same unfolding narrative effect in which actors have stable fictional identities. Karen Lury further disputes the claim about the absence of photo effect, writing that

> The pro-filmic moment is as much a part of television as it is of film, so that what is represented in two-dimensions on screen is also a demonstration that there was something (three dimensional, solid) *there* once, or even, since television is still at times live, something there now.[18]

Visible Fictions is dated, but we should not belittle its importance and forget its context — and, as we shall see, Ellis continued to defend its basic arguments. For fifty years, since the 1930s, television seemed more or less stable in what it offered in terms of image and sound experience. It was therefore plausible to assume that these characteristics would remain

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17. Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, p. 106.
18. Karen Lury, "Television Performance: Being, Acting and 'Corpsing'", *New Formations*, no. 27 (1995), pp. 117-18.

basically the same. It was plausible to assume this, but it was also perhaps too hasty. Cinema and television are both the result of technical advancement, each involving complex machinery and equipment. The artistic possibilities of each form arise from the existing technology and are only realised through the intentional use of their technology to create, and then distribute, works of cinema and television. Technical evolution shapes, but does not define their aesthetics. Arguably, the television that Ellis is talking about exists now only as a memory. It was sharply different, technologically and aesthetically, from the contemporary television experience and, as the next section will make clear, this difference will increase in the near future.

The underlying assumption of the book is that the technical framework of television had stalled and *determined* its aesthetics. On the contrary, television aesthetics is not limited by technology, instead technology and aspects like the management of production define the conditions within which televisual works are created. Such works can therefore go against established conventions, rejecting the usual way in which these conditions are used. This is what Alan Clarke did in his short telefilm *Elephant* (1989), made in the same decade when *Visible Fictions* was first published and before the publication of the revised version of the volume in 1992. The dialogue is minimal. In this depiction of eighteen murders, the salient sounds are footsteps and gun shots. The camera follows these men in long tracking shots until they discharge their firearms on someone. Faithful to his project, Ellis would probably say that this is not a "typical use"[19] of television technology. It is not. But the theoretical study of television aesthetics has to be able to accommodate and account for instances like this. Moreover, when Ellis wrote his book there was already a record of pivotal technological changes in the history of television that proved that the evolution of its technology had not stalled. One such change was the introduction of colour television that began in the United States in the 1950s and arrived to the United Kingdom in 1967.[20] Ellis does not acknowledge this change in television production and broadcast — yet, curiously, he comments on the

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19. Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, p. 13.
20. The first programme in colour broadcast in Britain was the Wimbledon coverage on 1 July 1967 on BBC2. The launch of the full colour service of the channel happened in the same year on 2 December.

changes in the colour processes used in cinema in the early 1950s, from Technicolor to Eastman-color.[21]

Ellis's considerations on television conventions such as the regular use of close-ups[22] should therefore give us pause. Similarly, Peter Lehman and William Luhr also point out that television series "include longer takes, more close-ups and fewer long shots than films, techniques that save time and money while ensuring narrative clarity and visual impact on the small screen".[23] But a more nuanced perspective is needed, based on historical and empirical evidence. Early television relied on close shots because of the smallness and lack of sharpness of the screens — but with the kind of large, sharp screens prevalent today, long shots are not as rare. Furthermore, the joint influence of television, cinema, and video is not taken into account in Lehman and Luhr's summary. The rise of popularity of television in the 1950s contributed to the drop of movie attendance in the two following decades. Film theatres and screens became smaller and popular movies started to rely more on close-ups to shoot conversations. In addition, the broadcast of films on television grew into a crucial source of revenue for the film industry. To avoid black bars at the top and bottom of the image, widescreen films had to be cropped to fit the almost quadrangular proportions of television screens (4:3). Filmmakers began to compose shots that could be cut without losing too much visual information. This meant concentrating the action in an area similar to the television screen ratio and employing more shots of a single actor.[24] Today, in an era when television screens are in widescreen (16:9), widescreen films are shown in their original aspect ratio. It is older films in full frame that now have to fill the current screens.

To appreciate the contribution of *Visible Fictions*, we have to situate it conceptually and historically as this section has done. Theoretical research around television aesthetics cannot

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21. Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, p. 12.
22. Ibid., p. 131. Ellis argues that a close-up in cinema creates an effect of distance and unattainability. In contrast, a television close-up generates a sense of equality and intimacy, because it "produces a face that approximates to normal size".
23. Peter Lehman and William Luhr, *Thinking About Movies: Watching, Questioning, Enjoying* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. 237. For another mention of the more regular use of the close-up in television, see Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, p. 131.
24. See David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 8th edn. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), pp. 43-44. For a comprehensive essay on this topic, see Steve Neale, "Widescreen Composition in the Age of Television", in *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Neale and Murray Smith (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 130-41.

ignore Ellis's work. It has, on the contrary, to integrate it, question it, work from it. It may be argued that the book could have gained from situating itself in this manner, since it ends up not simply revealing characteristic uses of particular elements in the aesthetics of cinema and television in (or up to) a certain time, but making general and broad statements about their essential features. That is why philosopher Noël Carroll mentions Ellis's book as an example of an essentialist approach to aesthetics, the kind of theoretical work that focuses on medium-specific features rather than on specific uses of elements of art forms.[25] It is this latter approach that Carroll sees as more fruitful. It is also this approach that this thesis favours, employing it to systematise the formal elements and arrangements of television fiction series — a systematisation that displays the aesthetic diversity of these works and that is, from the outset, open to expansion and revision.

Yet a crucial question remains. If Ellis's contrasting generalisations about cinema and television aesthetics lessen the usefulness of his contribution, then how can we distinguish the two? This interrogation points towards an underlying, more pertinent, question: why is this distinction so important? An answer to this second question was already hinted at in the beginning of this section. The more immediate reply is that it is important to ascertain what makes television aesthetics different from cinema aesthetics because some television programmes — fiction series, in particular — share many elements with films: mise en scène, cinematography, editing, sound, and special effects. In other words, these commonalities make them seem too similar, yet we discuss them and see them as different forms without being able to pinpoint where this difference lies. Therefore, a more thoughtful response is that investigating this dividing line can lead us to a clearer definition of the aesthetics of television series. Reading that "Broadcast TV has areas which tend towards the cinematic, especially the areas of serious drama or of various kinds of TV film"[26] with this in mind, reveals what is neglected in claims like this. The distinction to be made is not between the cinematic and the televisual, but between cinematic and televisual works.

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25. Noël Carroll, *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 263.
26. Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, p. 129.

2. Televisual Works

As we have seen, the ontological differences that are usually pointed out between the aesthetics of cinema and television are not very persuasive. That is the reason why Noël Carroll argues against such ontological distinctions between television and cinema.[27] His list of frequently cited differences between the two is mostly based — though without acknowledgement — on John Ellis's work. Carroll's remarks centre on the already mentioned putative features of television, but also glances at three other aspects related to aesthetics that should be discussed more thoroughly. These aspects are sometimes seen as clearly differentiating the televisual from the cinematic experience.

First, the *production* of television programmes is often thought of as using video instead of film and therefore of producing poorly detailed images. DVD copies of old series seem to confirm this idea. Yet the poor definition of the images of old series is due to the low quality of the transfers that did not preserve the original image resolution. Over the past thirty years, the production of television fiction has been developing technologically. John Thornton Caldwell points out that one of the devices that have undoubtedly contributed to this evolution is the Rank-Cintel machines for film-to-tape high quality transfers.[28] The truth is that most American fiction series are and have been shot on film and then transferred to video. Of course not all of them use 35 mm film, the most common film stock used in cinema. Some, like *The O.C.* (2003-7), use 16 mm film to reduce the production costs of camera and sound equipment, laboratory processing, and transfer to video. Shows on pay — *True Blood* (2008-) on HBO — and non-pay channels — *Ugly Betty* (2006-10) on ABC — are shot on 35 mm and transferred to high-definition digital video. Additionally, high-definition today can be achieved without relying on film negatives as sources. Consider *Dollhouse* (2009-10). The first season of *Dollhouse* was shot on Super 35 film stock and the second was filmed with a high-end digital camcorder with the same resolution — even if the motion of video images is not as smooth as

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27. Carroll, "TV and Film: A Philosophical Perspective", in *Engaging the Moving Image*, pp. 265-80 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).
28. John Thornton Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 1995), p. 78.

that of film images. Similar cameras have been used in recent movie productions like *Sin City* (2005).

Second, the *device* utilised to watch programmes, the television set, is usually described as a box with a small and low definition screen. This is a dated description in the age of high definition television that has a resolution up to six times higher than that of standard television.[29] The signals broadcast and received no longer consist of compressed analog data and have been replaced by digital data that can now reach the television set uncompressed. Flat panel displays are the contemporary equipment available to view these images in optimum conditions and take full advantage of their detail. These flat screens, with increasingly large dimensions,[30] call for the rethinking of the informal expression "the small screen" as a synonym for television. Certainly most households do not have the biggest flat television sets because they are too big and too expensive. But displays with a diagonal length of 45-inches, a medium size, are now being sold as regular and affordable equipment, replacing the smaller and thick cathode ray tube sets of the past. Home theatre systems provide the same high definition for audio with crystalline and vivid sounds that come from surround loudspeakers.

John Corner concedes all this, yet he takes Ellis's *Visible Fictions* as a reference to point out that "screen size persists as an important distinction between cinematic and televisual image" and that "[e]ven allowing for the new large screen systems, most television is watched on screens which are many times smaller than those of local cinemas".[31] Corner later refers to *the scale of television*,[32] an expression that he does not develop and which is key if not taken simply as another way of saying "the dimension of television". Indeed, the idea of scale, of relative size, can be employed to revisit Ellis's earlier argument, an old argument in new clothes. For this discussion to be accurate, the size of the image cannot be seen as absolute, as the measurement of the width and height of cinema and television screens. Instead, it has to be interpreted as relative

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29. Standard definition television (SDTV) has a resolution of 480x720 lines for the NTSC encoding system (0.34 million points) or 576x720 lines for PAL/SECAM encoding systems (0.41 million points) and a 4:3 (1.33:1) ratio. High definition television (HDTV) has two kinds of resolution. The lowest has 1280x720 lines (0.92 million points). The highest has 1920x1080 lines (2.07 million points). Both have a 16:9 (1.78:1) ratio.

30. The biggest current flat screen is by Japanese Sharp and it measures 108 inches diagonally. There has been intense competition between the major manufactures to see which one can produce the largest screen.

31. John Corner, *Critical Ideas in Television Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 25.

32. Ibid., p. 26.

— as relative to the audience. Cinema screens are also watched from various distances: some spectators like to sit on the first row while others like to sit at the back. If we factor in the proximity of the audience to the current large television screens then the distinction disappears. For example, the kind of visually immersive experience that we can have with a cinema screen in which our field of vision (or most of it) is filled by the screen can be easily achieved with a medium size flat screen.

Third, the *response* to television is thought to be the glance instead of the gaze, distracted instead of rapt attention.[33] Yet the fact that equipment like the one described above is being produced and sold disproves this idea, since they present images and sounds that captivate the eyes and the ears. Glances would be indifferent to high definition. They would, certainly, make such resolution and crispness superfluous. It is true that some television programmes do not demand much concentration and even encourage casual viewing, like newscasts, which report informative content that is ephemeral. Yet, in contemporary television, programmes like fiction series ask for a different type of engagement with the particularities of actors, characters, stories, and narrative worlds, and also with the visual and aural details of series. That is why spectators re-watch series on their recorders, on reruns, and on DVD. Some fans even invest time in analysing sequences moment by moment and in compiling data in dedicated web sites. Caldwell challenged the "glance response" with the claim that there had been a change in the visual economy of television that resulted in the creation of a complex and distinctive look for each series.[34] He claims that this visual intricacy and distinctiveness demands a more sustained and concentrated attention. In 2006, Ellis has responded to this challenge accepting Caldwell's conclusions, but adding that he is not concentrating on the single programme.[35] Even so, this too is problematic. Even if we are not definitely in a post-broadcast era, the fact is that the evolution of television watching tends towards fragmentation through the individual selection of single programmes. And it also seems contradictory to maintain that television elicits the glance while accepting that many of its programmes elicit the gaze.

33. Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, p. 128.
34. See Caldwell, *Televisuality*.
35. Ellis, "Defining the Medium: TV Form and Aesthetics", in *Tele-visions: An Introduction to Studying Television*, ed. Glen Creeber (London: BFI, 2006), p. 18.

In conclusion, essential distinctions between television and cinema do not hold. They are predicated on technical aspects that are not immutable, but in permanent, though not always constant, change. Carroll speaks of the history of both as a single process towards an all-encompassing notion of the *moving image*. However, throughout his essay, he keeps referring to *television* and *film* as different categories even after he has proven that there is nothing essentially different about them — therefore accepting their current use.[36] Elsewhere, Carroll makes us realise why expressions like *cinematic style* and *televisual style* are theoretically imprecise. As he eloquently puts it, what counts as cinematic, for example, "is often stylistically extremely divergent. The photographic realist will count a Lumière actualité as very cinematic while a montagist will not."[37] A montagist will surely count *Bronenosets Potyomkin* (*Battleship Potemkin*, 1925) as very cinematic.

Carroll was here replying to Murray Smith, who argues that forgetting the medium[38] leads to a kind of "medium eliminativism". Carroll makes a good point about the vagueness of the expression "cinematic". Nevertheless, this vagueness is historically sanctioned because it is historically rooted and therefore the expression does not have to be used as if pointing towards a set or sets of medium-specific aesthetic regulations. This is one of Smith's arguments for its usefulness. He concludes

> that features of the medium (or the artform, for that matter) could be judged to be characteristic simply by virtue of tradition — that is, as a matter of historically-validated practice [...]. So the word "cinematic" *need* not imply anything like a "law" of the medium being observed, but might instead suggest a stylist practice being emulated.[39]

Retrieving and salvaging this word not as a noun, the *televisual*, or a quality, *televisual* style, but as an adjective, is a way of accounting for the aesthetic singularity of television (specifically of its

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36. This is not a criticism that can be levelled against Carroll's paper because its topic is not this usage. Yet such utilisation is undeniably revealing and allows us to reclaim the word "televisual".

37. Carroll, "Engaging Critics", *Film Studies: An International Review*, no. 8 (2006), p. 163.

38. See Carroll, "Forget the Medium!", in *Engaging the Moving Image*, pp. 1-9.

39. Murray Smith, "My Dinner with Noël; or, Can We Forget the Medium?", *Film Studies: An International Review*, no. 8 (2006), p. 146.

fiction series) while rejecting essentialism. This involves a historically contingent and situated

approach that grants the usefulness of the term *televisual* as a vague descriptive adjective. "Vague"

because it does not describe or prescribe the limits of what is to count as televisual. It instead

identifies the works created within a system of production and distribution with a specific

history of development. It is televisual what is made for television, even if its avenues of

distribution have expanded — now including the Internet, for example. Carroll may prove to be

right in the long run, but that is ultimately an educated guess. Such a prediction is relevant to

counter an essentialist approach to a general television aesthetics, but it is irrelevant to the

particular aesthetics of television fictions. This second topic is more about concrete works than

abstract concepts, more about taxonomy than ontology. Approaching this topic involves

therefore that we do not disregard how we *still* differentiate between cinema and television as

media with aesthetic possibilities and above all that we echo what Stanley Cavell writes about

film: that these possibilities are not deduced or given, but are discovered.[40] That is, they cannot

be determined in advance, *a priori*, from an ontological analysis of the art form. Only instances

of the art form can show us this potential, *a posteriori*.

As televisual works, fiction series display the discovery of serial ways of organising and

articulating images and sounds that correspond to a particular utilisation of the medium or media

of television. A medium in this sense is an evolving set of practices, not a specific group of

materials. Fiction series are particular works; they are art works. Joseph Margolis's distinction

between "physical medium" and "artistic medium" is therefore useful for this discussion.[41] The first

encompasses the materials of art works, what we perceive through the senses. The second, the most

relevant for aesthetics, include the purposeful work of these materials that give them their final

form and composition. The artistic medium comprises the uses, actions, choices of art, that the art

work *embodies*. In David Davies's words, "it is that to which [...] an aesthetic object must be related

in order for our appreciation to be artistic and not merely aesthetic in a narrow sense".[42] This

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40. Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, enl. edn. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 32.
41. Joseph Margolis, *Art and Philosophy* (Atlantic Heights, NJ: Humanities Press, 1980), pp. 41-42.
42. Davis Davies, "Medium in Art", in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 183.

points towards a way of distinguishing between the two forms, cinema and television, that avoids medium-specificity — not depending on identifying essential features unique to the medium of each form; features that are construed as a law of use that restricts the range of legitimate uses of the medium. On the contrary, the notion of artistic medium leaves the medium indefinite, admitting of other possibilities.

This discussion around the concept of medium has been conducted almost has if television were an art form, but unlike cinema, it may not be. Film and other audio-visual media are used for non-artistic purposes like conveying information. Yet we do not call these productions *works of cinema*, but *newsreels* or *educational films*. In this sense, "cinema" already indicates an artistic use of film and other media. Kristin Thompson assumes that something similar occurs in television, because she considers it to be an art form in her study of storytelling in film and television.[43] But she is thinking of only a slice of the total of television productions, the portion that is at the centre of this thesis: fiction series. Thompson surely would not count *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* (1998-) as art. The British quiz show is not produced with an artistic intention nor is it viewed as if it has one. This does not make it "inferior". Art is not a status that all things aspire to, but a category that identifies certain works that are connected with other similar earlier works. It is this historical narrative of connections[44] that allows us to identify art works. Following a classificatory, non-evaluative approach to art, Carroll easily accepts a series like *M*A*S*H* (1972-83) as an instance of art, or mass art to be precise, because it "may be contemplated in terms of the expressive relation of form to content".[45] Of course, just because television fiction series are regarded as art does not mean that television is an art form. Since there are many programmes that are not art, television should be defined instead simply as a form with artistic possibilities, a form that can generate art works.

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43. Thompson, *Storytelling in Film and Television* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 2. For a pioneering study that puts forward the same idea, see Horace Newcomb, *TV: The Most Popular Art* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1974).

44. See Carroll, "Identifying Art", in *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 75-100.

Other philosophers have proposed similar and even more developed historical definitions of art, most notably Jerrold Levinson. His definition includes the condition that works be intended to be regarded as works of art like past works are and were. I have alluded earlier to this artistic intentionality. See Levinson, "The Irreducible Historicality of the Concept of Art", in *Contemplating Art: Essays in Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 13-26.

45. Carroll, *A Philosophy of Mass Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 197.

Fig. 2a.

Fig. 2b.

Twin Peaks, "Episode Three".

Fig. 3.

Twin Peaks, "Episode Two" (1.2).

Fig. 4.

Twin Peaks, "Episode Twenty-Nine" (2.22).

Twin Peaks (1990-91) can serve as illustration of the artistic potential of television, a potential connected with the practices and history of television. The series is a surrealist rework of a genre inherited from radio that historically became one of the most popular television genres, the soap opera. This is signalled in the series with the fictional soap *Invitation to Love* that is shown throughout the first season. The soap even parallels the more bizarre elements of *Twin Peaks*. In "Episode Three" (1.3), Leland Palmer (Ray Wise), the father of Laura Palmer whose murder is at the heart of the show, is watching the credit sequence of *Invitation to Love* that credits one actress as playing two distinct characters (fig. 2a). Right after, Maddy Ferguson, Laura's cousin, appears in front of Leland and is introduced into the series (fig. 2b). Maddy, a dark-haired girl with unflattering huge glasses, is rendered by the same Sheryl Lee who interpreted the role of the blonde-haired Laura who was admired for her beauty. More than simple self-reflexivity, this scene uses the memory of television, the knowledge of a soap-opera trope, to frame a dramatic event: the confrontation of a father with an uncanny image of his dead daughter.

The series uses familiar conventions like the whodunit plot and distorts them creating an ambivalent parody that juxtaposes the serious and the absurd in a surrealist manner. It is true that the series "attempted to transfer the style and sensibilities of 'art cinema' onto the small screen"[46] and it is consistent with the rest of Lynch's cinematic oeuvre. That said, *Twin Peaks* is also, and foremost, a work that dialogues with the heritage of television. To bring this dialogue to fruition the contribution of the man who shares the credits with Lynch, Mark Frost, was crucial. Frost had worked for four years on *Hill Street Blues* (1981-87), an influential show because of its multi-layered rendering. An aesthetic example of this is the sequential depiction of the red room. It first appears in a dream that Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) has at the end of "Episode Two" (1.2). He ends up seated across Laura Palmer and the man from another place (fig. 3). While this brief first depiction is mostly static, through the series it becomes longer and more dynamic. In the last episode of the series, "Episode Twenty-Nine" (2.22), the room is featured prominently and it is part of a spatial maze. Agent Cooper walks across a corridor only to find a different room every time he enters it (fig. 4). There is a progression from the first

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46. Creeber, *Serial Television*, p. 56.

images of the red room to the last, which is the slow unveiling of a mysterious place and of its role in the fiction.

This undetermined development, indeterminable in advance, injects mystery into the creation of a series. This is an aspect to which Lynch responded. More generally, he ended up seeing the televisual circumstances of the project not as artistic limitations but as particular conditions for the making of art in television that he had to work with and that he could even eagerly and decisively explore. As Linda Ruth Williams explains

> Lynch's commitment to the project seems to have been ambivalently televisual. He hated the interruption of commercials every twelve minutes, resisted the 1:33 ratio with which he had to work, and — as a director committed to deploying powerful sound formations — had difficulties producing the haunting aural qualities he wanted. But through the laments [...], he was also surprised at the artistic freedom he was given.[47]

James Monaco contends that because television "is much less intense than cinema (it gives us less visual and audio information), action and spectacle come off more poorly than in the movie theatre. And because it is measurably less intimate than live theatre, it can't deal as well with the high drama of ideas and emotions."[48] Later, he adds that the open-end nature of series prevents them from their full potential as character studies and narrative works. Yet the potential of series lies exactly in the way they can develop and refine previous pieces. In aesthetic terms, this means, for instance, that a repetition in a series becomes more expressive because it becomes a custom. It is not just something that creates a pattern in a work like in cinema, but something that becomes habitual after many repetitions and is expected in the works to come. A series, a work made of works, can therefore explore this cumulative effect to underline key moments more expressively. The final credits of "Episode Two", the instalment that, as analysed earlier, introduces the red room and the Man from Another Place (Michael J. Anderson), are presented

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47. Linda Ruth Williams, "*Twin Peaks*: David Lynch and the Serial-Thriller Soap", in *The Contemporary Television Series*, ed. Michael Hammond and Lucy Mazdon (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p. 45.
48. James Monaco, *How to Read a Film: Movies, Media, Multimedia*, 3rd edn. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 488.
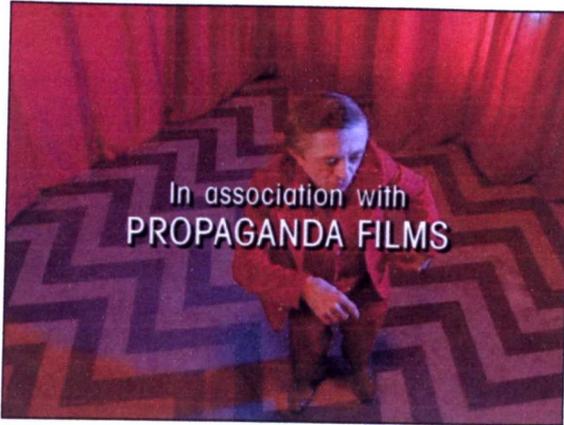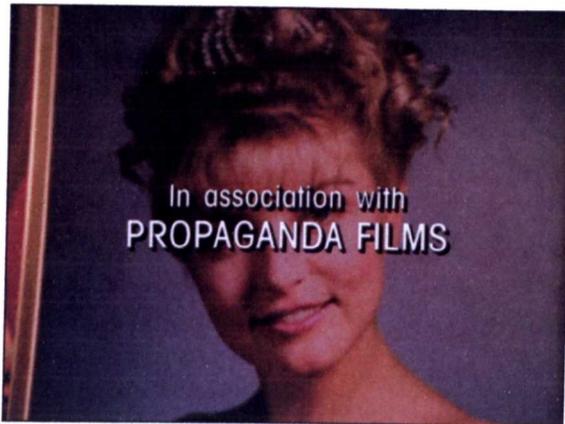
Fig. 5.

Twin Peaks, "Episode Two" (1.2).

Fig. 6.

Twin Peaks, "Pilot" (1.1).

over an overhead shot of the Man dancing to his music theme (fig. 5). In all the other episodes, including the "Pilot" (fig. 6), the credits are presented over Laura Palmer's promotional photo. This anomaly highlights the significance of the episode and the otherworldly red room — a significance and otherworldliness that are only completely grasped later, well after this second episode, when the pattern is more ingrained.

Media convergence may efface the boundaries between cinema, television, and video in the future, but it will not erase their history. If this time comes, television will continue to exist as a medium of the past and we will say that *Twin Peaks* is what was once called a televisual work of art. It is the aesthetics of these works that this thesis aims at analysing. So the question becomes what approaches does television studies have to analyse their aesthetic structure. Next, we shall turn to the prevalent textual and contextual approaches in search of an answer.

3. Text and Context

As a field of research, television studies encompasses different analytical approaches to distinct aspects of television. Institutional analysis opts for a political and social take on television, in interaction with economic and cultural factors, and focuses on industrial practices, policies and regulation. Historical analysis chooses a perspective built around the history of the development of television and relies on archival research and statements from people that worked in or engaged with the television of the past. These two approaches do not necessarily concentrate on televisual works. Some of the research in these areas does not mention them and even when it does the emphasis is not on the programmes as a research topic, but on their causes (the institution that generates them) and their effects (the history that they construct).

There are two other approaches that do take programmes as their object of study: *textual analysis* and what we may call *contextual analysis*. This makes them good candidates to be used as methodologies to analyse the aesthetic properties of programmes. Textual analysis combines critical methods from semiotics, cultural studies, and narrative theory to examine the connection between the subject matter and the formal options of particular programmes. Contextual

analysis uses methodology common in sociology, ethnography, and anthropology to analyse elements that contribute to the audience's response and production of meaning. The former is more qualitative, producing critical readings of the programmes. The latter is more quantitative, resulting in conclusions based on empirical elements and data from surveys, interviews, and other primary sources.

The boundaries between these approaches are not so clear-cut as this account may suggest. They often overlap and merge in research projects — investigating, for example, the cultural impact of a particular programme may demand the fusion of historical, textual, and contextual analysis. Their evident differences were magnified for the sake of clarity. And this magnification revealed that the two candidates for approaches for the aesthetic study of televisual works are the last two, the only ones that revolve around the programmes themselves.

Textual analysis is an approach that came from linguistics and then from literary and cultural studies. It therefore extrapolates from language, from what we properly call "language": the verbal system of communication. It is interested in the articulation between forms and contents, appearance and meaning, expression and substance, signifier and signified in signs, any signifying entities, to produce representations that are comprehensible through and subordinated ultimately by language. Consequently, there are numerous theoretical frameworks — Marxism, postmodernism, psychoanalysis, among others — that have used textual analysis to conduct their critical work on subjects like ideology, narration, class, or gender. *Textual* comes from *text* and its use is widespread in television studies. It is also used in film studies albeit much less frequently today, persisting mainly in the field of cultural studies. The expression *film text* has been put aside for more precise terms that designate the relations of film elements and their arrangement like *film form* and *film style*, or simply its types like *short film* or *animated film*.

"Text" — what exactly is meant by this word? Phil Wickham gives this answer:

The term "texts" is sometimes considered an academic pretension, used when "programme" or "show" would do just as well. I use those words too, but "text" can be a useful term. A

"text" is the object of study; in television this can be a programme, a series, an episode, a clip, an advert or a promotional link. We can read meaning into all these forms just like we can in a book or a film.[49]

The term is useful insofar as it does not simply indicate works or forms, but works and forms that we interpret, things in which or through which we find meaning. It is here that the vagueness of the term lies, since it can be applied to anything that signifies.[50] At the same time, if "text" is simply the object of study then there is no reason not employ one of the more accurate names that he lists right after. We can read meaning into episodes and adverts, but they remain distinct forms. Using a term that erases this distinction seems misguided. Yet Wickham's explanation in the introduction of a textbook exemplifies how this loose use of the word is common in television studies.

Given that this definition does not stress the direct link between the word and its meaning, the term is also to be comprehended as an analogy. Programmes are texts because they are interwoven works with different and interlaced sets of references and systems of signification. "Text" denotes "tissue", two words with the same etymology. This is the contemporary concept of text, which extended "the domain of the text [...] from its traditionally delimitated space of written discourse to that of any object whatsoever — written or spoken, aesthetic or otherwise".[51] In this broadest sense, the term refers "to entities of *any* code".[52] Behind the expansion of the meaning of text is therefore the influence of linguistics and semiotics, the study of language and the study of signs. As James Peterson points out, because semiotics sees codes, the sets of conventions of a communication system, as the engine of meaning, semiotic analysis tends to concentrate on highly conventional, rule-affirming art,[53] or on the more conventional

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49. Phil Wickham, *Understanding Television Texts* (London: BFI, 2007), p. x.
50. The text is not a definite object, whereas the work is concrete — hence my insistence on the use of the second term. See Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text", in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), pp. 155–64.
51. Jeffrey R. Di Leo, "Text", in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, vol. 4, ed. Michael Kelly (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 372.
52. Ibid., p. 373.
53. James Peterson, "Is a Cognitive Approach to the Avant-garde Cinema Perverse?", in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, ed. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), p. 112.

aspects of art works, we may add. This analysis leaves out aesthetic aspects that are not interpreted based on a learnt code, but on an inferencial basis — like the interconnected qualities of the visual composition of series that can only be understood *in relation*. Since the foundational code for textual analysis is language, establishing a semantics and syntax of images/ sounds [54] and a correspondence between audio-visual compositions and words is typical of this kind of analysis. The background to this equivalence comes from the idea that language *subordinates* other signs. Note that this is not to state that we use language to discuss visual and aural signs — a commonsensical statement — but to argue that ultimately the latter belongs to the all-embracing group of the verbal. This was hypothesised by the French semiotician Roland Barthes when he writes that "we must admit the possibility of reversing Saussure's proposition some day: linguistics is not a part, even if privileged, of the general science of signs, it is semiology that is a part of linguistics".[55]

Let us consider one application of these ideas in television studies. After summarising the various traditions in textual analysis within television studies, Glen Creeber declares that one of the major differences between the structuralist and post-structuralist approach is that the latter is less prescriptive.[56] The divergence lies in the understanding of *meaning*. Post-structuralism accepts polysemy — that images and sounds have essentially multiple meanings depending on the reception context. In this way, post-structuralism eschews the accusations of constructing an ideal spectator and neglecting the active role of audiences in the interpretation of programmes. Post-structuralism opened a space for the integration and consideration of that role and it is presented as the latest stage of development of textual analysis after the classical tradition — primarily concerned with cultural value — and structuralism. In the following pages, Creeber presents a shot by shot analysis as a case study and includes a two-column table that summarises television

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54. For a thorough critical analysis of this analogy, see Gregory Currie, "The Long Goodbye: The Imaginary Language of Film" [1993], in *Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures: An Anthology*, ed. Noël Carroll and Jinhee Choi (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 91-99. Currie argues that unlike words, moving pictures do not communicate via an arbitrary relation between them and the referent, what was photographed, but are "naturally generative [of meanings] in virtue of their similarity to real things" (p. 96). He adds that there are no rules of grammar to learn in order to make sense of an edited sequence.

55. Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology* [1964], trans. Annette Levers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), p. 11.

56. Creeber, ed., *Tele-visions: An Introduction to Studying Television* (London: BFI, 2006), p. 38.

techniques and their potential effects, with this kind of correlation: non-diegetic music or sound *equals* dramatic and emotional. The author states that the table is reductionistic and oversimplified, yet it is presented as a kind of dictionary, adapted from Selby and Cowdery's introduction to television studies.[57] Shying away from the determinism of the table, he states what is in his view one of the greatest problems of textual analysis: "its apparent willingness to predetermine and categorise all meanings for all viewers".[58]

Creeber suggests that the remit of textual analysis is simply to disclose how meaning is being manipulated and not to determine what that meaning is, supposedly because this latter aim is prescriptive — but the list clearly ascribes meanings and effects to techniques. There are countless examples of uses of these techniques that intentionally produce other potential effects or generate different meanings — for example, non-diegetic sound may not be emotional, voice-over narration may be apathetic and flat as in *Dexter* (2006-). These are oversimplifications based on unsupported assumptions. We can grant that non-diegetic music or sound is *often* used to produce a dramatic and emotional effect — the work of presenting television as a form with conventions, leaving room for and calling attention to the exceptions.[59] Yet is it not the purpose of analysis, the sort of shot-by-shot analysis that is Creeber's aim, to consider stylistic elements *in context* and *in relation*, to make *distinctions* between works, and to address their *singularity?* Generalisations, assumptions, and glossaries about the meaning of stylistic elements lead to the disregard of the differences between television aesthetics and language, fostering instead the idea of a correspondence between the two. Taking this normative basis as a starting point for stylistic analysis makes us unmindful of the specific circumstances in which techniques are employed. This kind of analysis should be aware of conventions, of course, but it should start with description, that is, with the attentive observation of the work followed by an account of its aesthetic elements and arrangement.

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57. Keith Selby and Ron Cowdery, *How to Study Television* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995).
58. Creeber, *Tele-visions*, p. 43.
59. Cf. Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*, which does this kind of work exemplarily within film studies. In the section on the analysis of film style, they argue that we should
  avoid reading isolated elements atomistically, taking them out of context. [...] There is no dictionary to which you can turn to look up the meaning of a specific stylistic element. Instead, the analyst must scrutinize the whole film, the patterns of techniques in it, and the specific effects of film form. (p. 308)

Fig. 7.

All in the Family, "Cousin Maude's Visit" (2.12).

Fig. 8.

All in the Family, "Henry's Farewell" (4.06).

Yet expressions like "inter-textual" seem useful for analytical purposes. A network of series created by Norman Lear sprung from *All in the Family* (1971-79). *Maude* (1972-78) and *The Jeffersons* (1975-85), the two major spin-offs, both feature characters who appear first in the original show. Maude (Bea Arthur) first appears on "Cousin Maude's Visit" (2.12) as Edith Bunker's (Jean Stapleton) cousin (fig. 7). The African-American Jeffersons, Louise (Isabel Sanford) and George (Sherman Hemsley), first appear as a couple (fig. 8) in "Henry's Farewell" (4.06) — although Louise Jefferson had already appeared in a number of episodes from "Lionel Moves Into the Neighborhood" (1.08) on. *All in the Family* had two other continuations: *Archie Bunker's Place* (1979-83), which kept Archie (Carroll O'Connor) as the main character, and *704 Hauser* (1994) about the Cumberbatches, the family that moved into Archie's old home. To complicate these narrative connections, some spin-offs also had spin-offs: *Gloria* (1982-83) originated from *Archie Bunker's Place*, and *Good Times* (1974-79) and *Hanging In* (1979) from *Maude*. It may look as if describing the connections between these eight series as *inter-textual* is the only possibility. Yet, as television comedies and audio-visual works of fiction, these series use multiple systems of expression and communication beyond the verbal. There is another, more accurate, option. We could simply characterise their connections as *inter-referential* — in the same way that we say that a film is self-referential when it makes reference to itself.

Television programmes incorporate language but are not texts. Additionally, programmes add up to a group that encompasses many forms and kinds. Using the same word to cover different works is analytically imprecise. It is also unnecessary since we can signal this difference, which is also an aesthetic difference, through the use of distinct words — infomercials, chat shows, drama series, and others. Arguing for a more restricted use of the word "text" preserves these important distinctions. Nevertheless, we may also take this word as an analogy for an intricate structure made from a number of connected items. Textual analysis made with this non-descriptive, analogical use in mind provides valuable insights into the ideological discourses that surround programmes. It also has the advantage of translating theoretically the place and characteristics of these works in a "technological world that

reinscribes" them "into an economy of production and consumption, and does not value uniqueness".[60]

It is unsurprising that textual analysis has been criticised within television studies, considering how these studies are rooted in cultural sociology. This critique usually has little to do with the theoretical issues raised above, as this excerpt from a reference guide demonstrates:

> Television study that restricts itself to textual analysis has been criticised, first for neglecting an account of who or what produced the text and in what social, historical and political circumstances, second, for ignoring the question of how audiences read texts. For example, a focus on the text as a solitary unit will not take account of a network's concern to capture and shape an audience's viewing over an evening or longer (scheduling). Neither will it incorporate the audience's experience of viewing, which might include channel surfing and "doing other things" while watching the television. Accordingly, the bulk of text-led work in television studies shows, at the least, an awareness of production contexts and active audiences.[61]

This is not just a rejection of textual analysis, but also a defence of contextual analysis. Contextual analysis has certainly produced studies that accurately describe the reception of a specific programme by a particular audience. The problem with this methodology when applied to aesthetics is that it is ultimately uninterested in the aesthetic properties of the programmes. Its interest lies in the *measurable effects* of these properties. Following similar research strategies in sociology, this kind of analysis usually assumes that there is a stable context of interaction between audience and work — a primary or even original context. Yet today there are multiple, and sometimes competing, reception contexts created by reruns and dedicated channels, DVDs and other formats, interaction television, the Internet, and the international market. Perhaps we can talk about an *intended context* then — the particular context for which series are made even though they may be multiple contexts in which they are available. However, most contemporary American television series are not produced with a single intended context in mind. They are

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60. Di Leo, "Text", p. 374.
61. Bernadette and Neil Casey, Ben Calvert, Liam French, and Justin Lewis, *Television Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 246-47.

Fig. 9.

Gossip Girl, "Poison Ivy" (1.03).

released in multiple platforms and accompanied by additional information and documentaries that widen the viewing experience of a show.[62] The subtitles of the DVD box sets of *Lost* (2004-10) are in this respect revealing: *The Extended Experience, The Unexplored Experience, The Expanded Experience.* When we realise this, the circumstances of the audience become more uncertain and the contexts of reception more difficult to pinpoint.

The multiplication of contexts does not mean that the context in which series are viewed cannot be studied. It can, and with productive results, if this context is specified. *Gossip Girl* (2007-), a teen drama set in the world of the Manhattan elite, gathered very low ratings when it first aired in Britain. The series had been a moderate and irregular success in the United States. Landmarks of New York City feature prominently in the series — the climatic confrontation between the two protagonists in "Poison Ivy" (1.03) is set in Central Park, for example (fig. 9). Was it too American or even too tied to the Big Apple? There are contextual reasons that explain the British reception. The show aired on ITV2, a channel where teen series are not common. As a result, the television station did not know how to market and schedule the programme for its young target audience: the promos did not highlight the adolescent elements of the drama and it aired late at night instead of in the afternoon. After two seasons on ITV2, the show moved to MTV One and to a more sensible schedule.

However, the passage quoted above, taken from a critical guide of reference in television studies, takes for granted that broadcast is the main way of watching a television series; hence the mention of scheduling and channel surfing. Yet consider the case of *The Black Donnellys*, which was released in different ways throughout the course of 2007. NBC only aired six out of the 13 episodes of the series, from 26 February to 2 April, owing to declining ratings. The remaining episodes were released online in high definition in April and May, including one, "God Is a Comedian" (1.03), that the network had skipped over due to concerns about violent content. The complete series was later released on DVD in September. Throughout these different contexts, even though the access of the audience to the aesthetic properties of the series changed, these properties remained the same. In other words, in the right conditions we can reach an

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62. See, e.g., Henry Jenkins, "Television Goes Multiplatform", *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*, 8 Sept. 2006, http://www.henryjenkins.org/2006/09/television_goes_multiplatform.html.
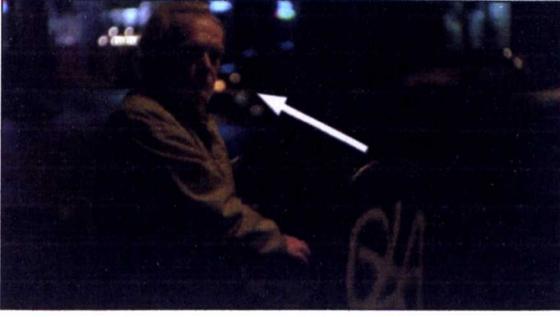
Fig. 10.

The Black Donnellys, "The Only Thing Sure" (1.07).

agreement on the sensory elements of the show by careful observation and later we can also agree

on the aesthetic properties, or the descriptive aesthetic content, of these elements — that a

particular visual composition is *emphatic*, for example.[63] A moment from the beginning of "The

Only Thing Sure" (1.07) can illustrate this empirical thinking. As usual, the episode opens with

Joey "Ice Cream" (Keith Nobbs), a narrator who corrects himself so many times as to become

unreliable, succinctly explaining what happened in the previous episodes. He is in jail and is a

childhood friend of the four Irish-American Donnelly brothers who are involved with organised

crime. At one moment he says: "Did I mention that Jenny Reilly's dad's been forgetting things?"

Jenny (Olivia Wilde) is another childhood friend who remained close friends with one of the

brothers. While Joey asks this question, we see Jenny's father putting the money from their diner

in a mailbox instead of the bank depository (fig. 10). It is night, the light is minimal, the pitch-

black invades most of the image. We can barely distinguish the face of the confused man and the

edges of the mailbox. Selective focus further visualises the forgetful or inattentive condition of

the character turning the background into a blur of lights. Like in the other segments of Joey's

recapitulation, a pleonastic white arrow is added to the shot pointing to the person or object that

the verbose narrator is talking about. This analysis of an instance from *The Black Donnellys*

shows how we can discuss the sensory and aesthetic properties of a series, relying on attentive

observation and careful discrimination.

Contextual and, ultimately, textual analysis lack interest in aesthetic attributes such as these.

A context may eventually create less than ideal conditions for the perception of these attributes.

Other contexts, like the repeated viewing of quality copies, may enhance our perception of

them. Yet they do not alter the aesthetic properties of televisual works. Therefore, the aesthetics

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63. For a vigorous defence of this philosophical position, see Jerrold Levinson, "Aesthetic Properties, Evaluative
Force, and Differences of Sensibility". In *Aesthetic Concepts: Essays after Sibley*, ed. Emily Brady and Levinson (Oxford:
Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 61-88.
      Levinson argues that aesthetic properties are objective insofar as they are contingent and their detection rely on
a "stable intersubjective convergence in judgement among qualified perceivers" (p. 80). His argument is germane to
this thesis and to its approach because it also distinguishes between a descriptive and an evaluative take on aesthetic
properties. Saying that a particular visual composition is *emphatic* is distinct from arguing about value, about the
achievements or failings of such an emphasis. It is this distinction that he articulates with caution:
      More generally, we can say that there is in regard to a given object almost always a descriptive aesthetic content
      such that ideal judgers who would not apply to the object all and only the same aesthetic predicates — because
      they have, by assumption, different evaluative reactions or attitudes towards that content — can still agree on
      what that content is. We should not, furthermore, rule out that there might be such aesthetic content even
      when no suitably neutral terms are available to evince the agreement on it that there may be. (p. 66)

of fiction series can be fruitfully and rigorously analysed as televisual works, out of the broadcasting context, which is only one of many contexts where we can watch them. This does not entail that an analysis of this kind should forgo the specific conditions in which these works are produced. The obligatory breaks for advertisements in non-subscription channels, for example, have a substantial influence in the rhythm and structure of episodes. Just like moviemakers, the creators of television series work simultaneously for more than one reception context, taking into account that a series is usually broadcast but also distributed and viewed in other ways.

The previous criticism of textual and contextual analysis was not general. It stemmed from a specific perspective and a specific problem, from an aesthetic perspective and the problem of what approach can be adopted to analyse the aesthetics of programmes (in particular, of fiction series). There is no doubt that the analyses conducted following these approaches are valuable. Textual analysis can provide insights into the ideological framework of a programme, shedding light on how formal choices lead to particular ideological representations — the depiction of race, for example. Contextual analysis can show how programmes are promoted and discussed, and how this promotion and discussion is related with how they are viewed and understood. Yet they tend to regard the aesthetic properties of programmes as a means to some other end. They are either seen as instrumental in textual representation or as a factor in audience perception and reception. So the kind of analysis that is needed is one that concentrates upon aesthetics, the aesthetics of television programmes. We may call it simply *aesthetic analysis*.

4. Aesthetic Analysis

The use of new digital technology to manipulate and create images sets cinema and television apart, claims John Ellis. He sketches the opposition this way: "Cinema uses the new potential to make ever more realistic, yet impossible, images. Television uses it to make constantly changing collages of images. In doing so, television has discovered a means of enhancing its particular

social aesthetic."[64] This is a deterministic way of thinking about media, which sees every new instance as a confirmation of the intrinsic features of a medium. Ellis highlights the use of this technology in television news (for example, in weather forecast simulations) and contrasts it with the use of special visual effects to create realistic dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park* (1993). "Digital image manipulation allows television to combine images; it allows cinema to continue to present a spectacle of reality,"[65] he claims. To counter this generalisation, we need only to recall that some series employ digital visual effects in ways that are similar to their use in *Jurassic Park*. One of these shows is *Heroes* (2006-10).

In a recent blog post, David Bordwell looks briefly at the exaggerated visual style of films based on, or clearly influenced by, super-hero comics. Motion is altered. Perspective is distorted. Some shots are extremely low or high angled. Bordwell focuses on recent examples and argues against zeitgeist readings of the increase of super-hero movies after 9/11,[66] instead favouring a palimpsestic understanding of their style that discloses visible traces of other artforms. He contends that the images of these films are evocative of "[c]omic book panels, those graphically dynamic compositions that keep us turning the pages. In fact, we call such effects 'cartoonish'."[67] Focusing on *Heroes*, the popular drama series from NBC about a group of ordinary people with superhuman abilities, allows a scrutiny of the links between its imagery and that of films and comic books. This examination will serve as illustration of the kind of work on television series that can issue from aesthetic analysis, an approach not so much interested in the communicational facet of television as in the representational, expressive, formal, or experiential aspects[68] of its art works. At the same time, this stylistic analysis that will concentrate on salient visual elements of the show aims to demonstrate the faults of an essentialist view of television aesthetics. Instead of accepting that there are

64. Ellis, "*Speed*, Film and Television: Media Moving Apart", in *Big Picture, Small Screen: The Relations Between Film and Television*, ed. John Hill and Martin McLoone (Luton: University of Luton Press, 1996), p. 107.

65. Ibid., p. 107.

66. Bordwell, "Superheros for Sale", *Observations on Film Art and "Film Art"*, 16 Aug. 2008, http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/?p=2713, pars. 17-22.

67. Ibid., par. 50.

68. This is a summary of the most discussed aesthetic aspects of art, which have been and will be considered together or separately all through this thesis. For a penetrating discussion on each one of these aspects, see Carroll, *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999).

ontological differences between television and film, this section relies on the historically contingent nature of television. That is to say, television is seen as a form with a particular history of technical and aesthetic development, a history that is not determined by an essence but is the product of multiple factors and influences. The visual style of *Heroes* is exemplary from this point of view because it is "impure" to a great degree. It is this "impurity" that makes the series an illustrative example of how television fiction series, as televisual works, integrate diverse references.[69]

This show is a product of the technological changes in the production of television fiction over the past thirty years. John Thornton Caldwell points out six devices that have been paramount in this change: (1) the *video-assist*, a video camera mounted alongside the camera that allows technicians and artists to adjust the shot based on the information gathered from a monitor; (2) *motion control* equipment like mountings and robotic or motorised contrivances that produce smooth, controlled camera movements; (3) *electronic nonlinear editing*, which allows random access to the footage; (4) *digital effects* that broaden the range of imaging possibilities; (5) *Tabular-* or *T-grain film stocks*, with flatter crystals in the emulsion that make them expose more easily to dim light, increasing resolution and decreasing granularity; (6) the already mentioned *Rank-Cintel equipments* for transcribing film into video tapes and data formats in high-definition.[70] It is worth enumerating and detailing these technologies to make clear how they can be seen at work in series like *Heroes*. They have been developed and used both in cinema and television production, a fact that by itself goes against any arguments that the two are essentially different because they are technologically different. For Caldwell, these innovations are the historical roots of the stylistic exhibitionism that governed the television of the 1980s and 1990s and that he terms *televisuality* — an expression that also gives title to the book.[71] According to him, televisuality oscillates between two modes: the videographic and the cinematic. The former involves electronic images, captured or

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69. This idea of impurity or mixture can be traced, for example, to André Bazin's essay on cinema adaptations of works of literature. See Bazin, "In Defense of Mixed Cinema", in *What Is Cinema?*, vol. 1, trans. Hugh Gray, intr. Dudley Andrew and Jean Renoir (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 53-75.

70. Caldwell, *Televisuality*, p. 78.

71. Ibid.

created, simply processed or complexly manipulated, and it has been more associated with television. The cinematic

> refers, obviously, to a film look in television. Exhibitionist television in the 1980s meant more than shooting on film, however, since many nondescript shows have been shot on film since the early 1950s. Rather, cinematic values brought to television spectacle, high-production values, and feature-style cinematography.[72]

The cinematic seems to be less technical and more stylistic than the videographic — and therefore more vague, since cinema allows many looks and styles that do not fit in with Caldwell's definition. There is a more precise way to approach the connection between television and other media. Presuppositions apart, the relationship between television and cinema is one of mutual contamination. This becomes clear when we realise how television has used the aforementioned technologies to produce programmes that forgo live broadcast. An essentialist would declare that this way television loses its essential, defining characteristic, the possibility of transmitting images of events at their time of occurrence. Indeed, theorists such as Umberto Eco have identified live broadcasts as the most characteristic and unique aspect of television.[73] However, it is more lucid instead to acknowledge that the ideas about what televisual works are, within a specific system of production and means of distribution, changed and diversified. High-definition television broadcasts have been steadily increasing since the mid-nineties — exactly when Caldwell published his book. Today, television series are released on DVD and Blu-ray Disc. The sharpness of their images and sounds and of those of their cinema counterparts is basically indistinguishable. Yet we must avoid seeing this evolution and diversification as a radical, unexpected alteration. In later writings, Caldwell rightly argues that media mixing is not

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72. Caldwell, *Televisuality*, p. 12.
73. See Umberto Eco, "Chance and Plot: Television and Aesthetics", in *The Open Work* [1976], trans. Anna Cancogni, intr. David Robey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 107. Eco also connects live transmissions with improvisation (p. 109) and therefore with the openness of life — live television can be said to organise the chance of life into "a cluster of possibilities" (p. 116). His words take for granted that live television is planned, but never scripted. Yet live episodes from scripted series demonstrate that this assumption is false — "Ambush" (4.01) from the medical drama *ER* (1994-2009) and the entire second season of the sitcom *Roc* (1991-94) are just two examples.

Fig. 11.

Fig. 12.

Heroes, "Company Man" (1.17).

Fig. 13.

Heroes, "Don't Look Back" (1.02).

determined by the technological shift to the digital, but is symptomatic of more fundamental logics present throughout television history. This use of digital technologies confirms the importance of aesthetic influences of other art forms and media in television creativity. These technologies "merely served to accelerate and legitimate these well-practised industrial strategies".[74]

Heroes exemplifies this technical sophistication and aesthetic intricacy of present-day television fiction series. See, for instance, how post-production special effects give an arresting, expressive visual form to the dazzling abilities of the characters. Technological sophistication lures the audience with the promise of something amazingly new — just like superhero movies. The episode "Company Man" (1.17) displays the aesthetic intricacy of the series. It employs black and white and deep focus cinematography in the flashbacks of Noah Bennet's (Jack Coleman) personal history within The Company, cramming the screen with objects and visualising the grimness and messiness of his drama (fig. 11). It also uses low-angle framing, for example, after Matt Parkman (Greg Grunberg) shoots Claire Bennet (Hayden Panettiere), to emphasise the position of the other characters towering over her lying body in the foreground (fig. 12). Images like these inherit an awareness from the history of cinema about the significance of mise en scène and framing.

A feature that makes this series especially relevant for the study of its relations with comics is its serial nature. The first film adaptations of comic books were film serials like *Adventures of Captain Marvel* (1941). Yet, for reasons that range from changes in production to alterations in exhibition, films have forgone this structure for less planned, non-periodical franchises like *Spider-Man* (2002, 2004, 2007). In contrast, *Heroes* is divided into volumes and these into chapters, just like a graphic novel. This division is somehow independent from the usual season-episode structure of television series — the first and the second seasons correspond to the first and second volumes (*Genesis* and *Generations*), but the current third season comprises the third and four volumes (*Villains* and *Fugitives*). Moreover, the show makes the connections with comic

74. Caldwell, "Convergence Television: Aggregating Form and Repurposing Content in the Culture of Conglomeration", in *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 68.
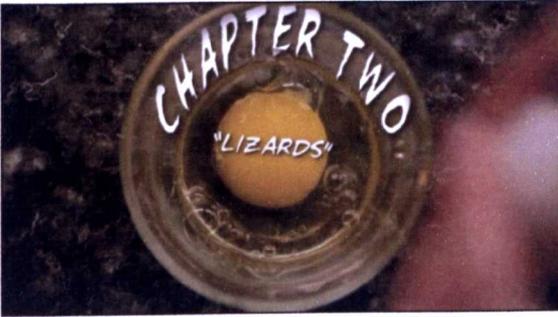
Fig. 13.

Heroes, "Don't Look Back" (1.02).

Fig. 14.

Heroes, "Lizards" (2.02).

books visually evident. Comics become key narrative elements — Issac Mendez's (Santiago Cabrera) drawings, paintings, and the comic series *9th Wonders!* that features prominently in "Don't Look Back" (1.02) (fig. 13), provide information about future events because they record his precognitive visions. They are also an aesthetic inspiration — the typeface used in captions and credits imitates traditional hand-rendered comic book letters, as in the beginning of "Lizards" (2.02) where *Chapter Two* is roundly inscribed inside a glass and the name of the episode over the egg at the bottom of the glass (fig. 14). However, there are subtler stylistic influences in the show.

Comics were established as a mass art form in the late 19th and early 20th century, a time when film itself was just starting. From comic strips to comic books, they consist of sequences of panels that are usually narrative. In this sequential form, we are invited to read the dialogue or narration, to follow the drawings or scan the page, and we comprehend the story being told and the significance of the verbal and visual details by inference. David Carrier explains that "comics are like realist novels: a few odd transitions are possible only because we are accustomed to reading the body of the text as straightforward narrative. What we often infer from transitions are causal connections."[75] Usually, each page contains multiple drawings that lack real movement and, consequently, the potential visual continuity of motion pictures. For a comic to work narratively, it has to allow the reader to comprehend the "causal connections" that Carrier mentions — between *discontinuous images*. The principles of image composition and linkage that comics need to follow to ensure narrative continuity are therefore loose — as long as they avoid "such large gaps as to make the action seem jumpy."[76]

Film-making rules are more strict or, at least, typically more strictly followed. In "The Butterfly Effect" (3.02), a conversation between Angela Petrelli (Cristine Rose) and Elle Bishop (Kristen Bell) is filmed and edited using shots and reverse shots from just one side of the axis of action, the imaginary line that passes through the actresses. This basic rule of film-making preserves spatial continuity on screen. Nevertheless, *Heroes* often disregards the 180° system and disobeys this rule — sometimes within a scene that has previously abided by it. Later in the

75. David Carrier, *The Aesthetics of Comics* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2001), pp. 51, 53.
76. Ibid., p. 53.

Fig. 15a.

Fig. 15b.

Fig. 15c.
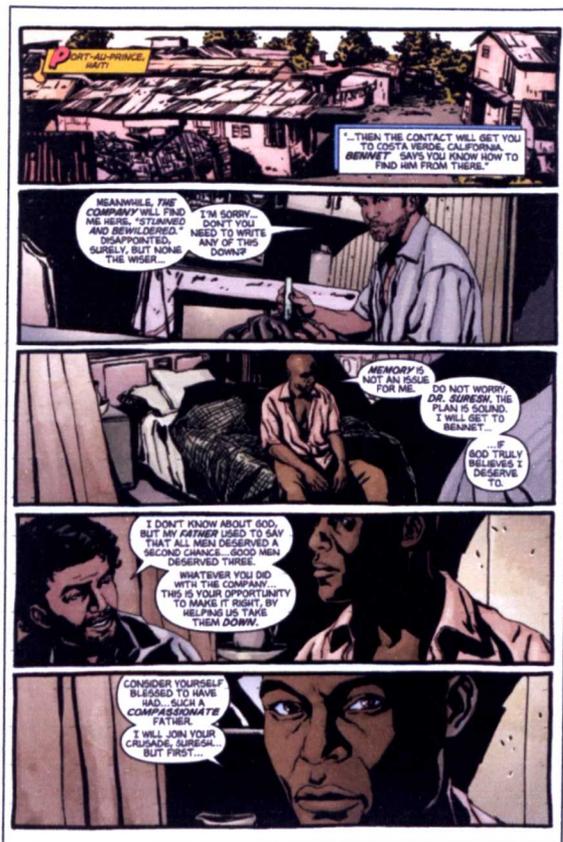
Heroes, "The Butterfly Effect" (3.02).

Fig. 16.

Heroes, "The Crossroads" (web comic).

conversation, Angela turns to the sedated Sylar (Zachary Quinto), faces the camera, and dispenses with Elle's services, seen in profile in the background (fig. 15a). This planimetric composition is followed by a close-up of Elle (fig. 15b) and then by another one of Angela, in profile (fig. 15c). Crossing the line of action introduces inconsistencies in the relative positions within the frame. The moment is not that disorienting only because Angela and Elle are immobile. The perspective changes 90° and then 180° in geometrical fashion, emphasising the contrast between the perpendicular eye-lines. The spatial discontinuity between images suggestively conveys the estrangement of the characters.

This sequencing of images as connected yet independent comes from the aesthetics of comics. "The Crossroads", written by Joe Kelly and drawn by Michael Gaydos,[77] is one of the short web comics that develops further the narrative and characters of *Heroes*, and it opens with a series of five long horizontal frames (fig. 16). Four of them are of a dialogue between the Haitian and Mohinder whose rendering contains two jumps across the axis of action; between the first and second images and between the second and the third. The position of the characters within the room is unclear, but despite it, links are easily established between the images based on their sequential composition and narrative content. Of course, any expectation that a comic book would comply with the 180° rule is unfounded. Readers are used to the discontinuity of comic books. The same cannot be said about television viewers and series. Even so, unexpectedly, *Heroes* explores this possibility from time to time — exactly because comics have deeply influenced its style.

There may be other possible factors that explain the unusual framing and editing choices of *Heroes*. Maybe they are not really choices. That is, maybe the film-making is unsystematic, perhaps even careless. Therefore when the series does not follow conventional rules like eye-line matches, which rely on the directionality of a character's look to match it with what the character is looking at in the next shot, it is not intentional. Yet the series has provided ample evidence that this is not the case. From the very first scene, images have been memorable and are carefully composed to produce a haunting effect: Peter Petrelli (Milo Ventimiglia) dropping from

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77. Joe Kelly (story) and Michael Gaydos (art), *Heroes*: "The Crossroads", chap. 53, *NBC.com*, 2 Oct. 2007, http://www.nbc.com/heroes/novels/novels_display.shtml?novel=53.

Fig. 17.

Heroes, "Genesis" (1.01).

a high city rooftop is shown in a bird's-eye shot that foreshortens the height of the building, flattening the perspective to visually convey the absence of danger and suggest that he is able to fly (fig. 17). The other images mentioned in the previous pages are all striking in their inventiveness. This painstaking compositional work is sustained rather than sporadic in the series. Its shots repeatedly look for the same graphic freedom that we see in the drawings of comics and they try to achieve the same astonishing effect.

This is not to suggest that comics, films, and television series are identical forms. As Robert C. Harvey points out, "cartooning is not the same as filmmaking".[78] He argues that the narrative in moving pictures is measured in time, whereas in comics, it is measured in space.[79] Certainly, the fact that pictures move makes the duration of this motion key in the depiction of actions. Yet, as we have seen, visual framing is equally important for making an action comprehensible and expressive. Harvey rightly notes that another difference is that films are usually audio-visual whereas comics are visual, which means that the latter have to convey the narrative information by purely visual means. Television series are also normally audio-visual works. However, we do not have to belittle the use of sound in *Heroes* — think, for instance, of the contribution that geneticist Mohinder Suresh's (Sendhil Ramamurthy) voice-over narration makes to set general narrative themes — to argue that its images are even more emphatic. This emphasis is not dissociable from the declared aesthetic influence of comics on the series. The brief aesthetic analysis of *Heroes* conducted here, which highlighted its manifest visual connection with comics, shows how this kind of analysis can be a productive approach for the study of the aesthetic properties of series.

5. Sequential Form

Series have been defined in the previous pages as televisual works with aesthetic properties that are sequentially established and that can be analysed with precision. These works have a history

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78. See Robert C. Harvey, *The Art of the Comic Book: An Aesthetic History* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), pp. 173-91.

79. Ibid., p. 176.

that informs their diverse characteristics in the present. The existence and persistence of these

sequential narrative forms in television has been preceded by the historically recorded interest and

investment of the American film industry in serials in the beginning of the 20th century. The film

historian Ben Singer gives three reasons for this.[80] One reason was the commercial logic behind it,

since serials were already a popular form in magazines and newspapers. Another reason was that

for the studios it amounted to an alternative to the production of feature films. A further reason

was that producers saw the advertising of serials as more efficient because they had longer runs

than single motion pictures. Works in series, either tending toward the serial or the episodic, have

persisted in popular culture until today. In television, they meet the needs of broadcasters for

programmes to fill their continual schedule. Fiction series are advantageous because their

continuity fits this frequent transmission. The television industry manages its resources carefully.

Series are a way of cutting costs in the production of several hours of fiction and of making good

use of recurrent scenic elements. A series with high ratings generates revenue with little promotion

thanks to a faithful viewership.

   Much like the film serials that Singer studies, American television series emerge within a form,

television, with a specific technical and aesthetic course of development. It is fruitful then to reflect

further on the historical relationship between technology and aesthetics to elucidate the situation of

the contemporary series used as examples in the bulk of the thesis. Historical development is not to

be taken as progress towards a rejection or acceptation of what is thought to be the aesthetic

essence, and therefore the artistic potential, of these art works. This is a teleological interpretation

of the history of television style: the decline of live television (and of the sense of liveness in fiction

programmes), for instance, is either comparable to how realist cinema adulterated the purity of

expressionist and montagist film or to how it revealed the photographic nature of cinema as a

recording of reality.[81] As with these two takes on the history of film, there is a tendency to see the

history of television as revealing the essence of televisual properties that are either acknowledged

and refined or rejected and defiled. In another instance of this approach, Glen Creeber comments

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   80. Ben Singer, "Serial Melodrama and Narrative Gesellschaft", *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 37 (1996), pp. 73-74.
   81. See Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997). The first view is what he calls the Standard Version (pp. 12-45), the second what he dubs the Dialectical Program (pp. 46-82).

on the demise of the single play and the rise of long-form drama arguing that the former did not

"play to the strengths and inherent possibilities of the medium".[82]

Historical development can be taken simply as a sequence of stages and threads in a changing situation. This idea maintains the historical truth that at a moment there are continuities and ruptures. History is then the result of a complex interplay between technological, economic, or cultural factors and the particular choices that television artists and technicians make. Yet the histories of television style and technology, with trends that are specific to periods and places, are often conflated into a single narrative with a linear evolution from a primitive age to today, from a crude to an elaborated style. This is the same as saying that a film like D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916), made without the sound and colour technologies that became common years later, is stylistically rudimentary because of technical constraints. Jason Mittell tentatively hypothesises that television probably does not reward close attention to visual qualities like film does and ascribes this to the purported limitations of television. He seems to be thinking of early television because, in the end, he asks if contemporary television "has finally cast off the shackles of assumed aesthetic inferiority and casual dismissal that plagued its first 50 years".[83]

Looking at an old series from the 1950s may be fruitful. It demonstrates that what are sometimes described as technical constraints are, in truth, *technical conditions*, the precise conditions in which stylistic choices are made. *I Love Lucy* (1951-57) was filmed live in front of a studio audience, but not broadcast live. It used three 35 mm cameras located in a curve between the set and the audience. This mode of production called the multiple-camera set-up, which Jeremy G. Butler calls *multiple-camera proscenium schema* because of its theatrical quality,[84] captures the action simultaneously from different angles and the footage is later edited — some contemporary sitcoms like *Two and a Half Men* (2003-) are still produced this way. The

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82. Creeber, *Serial Television*, p. 2.

83. Jason Mittell, "Stylistic Analysis and the Limits of TV?", *Just TV*, 16 Nov. 2006, http://justtv.wordpress.com/2006/11/14/stylistic-analysis-and-the-limits-of-tv/, par. 5. For a reply to Mittell's questions and reflections from another television scholar, with similarities with my argument, see Michael Z. Newman, "Television's Visual Appeal", 18 Dec. 2006, http://zigzigger.blogspot.com/2006/12/televisions-visual-appeal.html.

84. *See* Jeremy G. Butler, *Television Style* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 176-95. "Proscenium" is short for "proscenium arch", the arch framing the opening between the stage and the auditorium in theatre. Butler traces the history of the use of the mutiple-camera proscenium schema that is relevant to my discussion, especially to my comparisons between early and contemporary sitcoms.

Fig. 18a.

Fig. 18b.

Fig. 18c.

I Love Lucy, "Lucy Does a TV Commercial" (1.30).

cameras adopted more fixed positions in the 1950s giving *I Love Lucy* a more theatrical framing and making present the studio audience through the laugh track. In one of the most celebrated episodes, "Lucy Does a TV Commercial" (1.30), Lucy (Lucille Ball) is hired to do a commercial for Vitameatavegamin, a tonic composed of vitamins, meat, vegetables, minerals, and a not-so-small measure of alcohol. Repeating the sales pitch and drinking spoons of the product make her progressively drunker as the director stops the rehearsal to give new directions. In multiple-camera series, actors rarely turn their backs to the real or supposed audience because the cameras do not cross the frontal limit of the set and therefore cannot get reverse-shots. However, the director and his personal assistant adopt this position in this scene, in the foreground, while Lucy pitches the product (fig. 18a). These long shots cut to a medium close-up of Lucy (fig. 18b). Reframed wide shots are used when the director goes to the platform to talk with Lucy and is joined by a technical assistant (fig. 18c) — just like in a previous conversation between the director, Lucy, and her husband, Ricky Ricardo (Desi Arnaz).

The style of the show may be primitive from a technical perspective, if we attend to elements like lighting. Yet it also seems almost experimental by present standards: shot/reverse-shots are rare, the editing rhythm is slow, and wide shots are abundant, usually as two-shots, not just to establish the scene, but to film conversations (fig. 18c).[85] Specifically, this scene is staged so as not to distract from Lucy's performance. The director is present in the image when he is seated, but is ultimately in the position of the audience: we hear him speak and comment as we hear the audience laughing, but we do not see his facial reaction. Another technique used to concentrate our attention on the protagonist is the axial cut. It is not a straight axial cut because there is a slight, barely noticeable, shift to the left, but the cut takes us from a long shot to a closer view of the part of that shot where Lucy is located (figs. 18a-b). Multiple-camera set-ups today usually employ more than three cameras and the angles of variation between them have widened. Current sitcoms rarely use axial cuts because they prefer to change camera position between cuts to introduce a clear visual diversification. The

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85. In comparison, *Two and a Half Men* opts for the *intensified continuity* so common in present day television, which intensifies traditional continuity tactics like preserving the axis of action and eye-line matching, relying on singles rather than ensemble framing and quicker cutting. See Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 121-89.

use of this simple technique in the scene coupled with a staging that privileges Lucy's actions over the visual reactions of other characters, puts her performance at the heart of the programme.

Analysis of other episodes of the series would allow us to understand the repetitive, varied, exceptional, and progressive patterning of this interest in Lucille Ball's versatility and in Lucy's performance for other characters, for the camera, for the audience, that is an interest in the act of performing itself. The intelligible form discernible in the composition of the pieces of series can be examined in instances from other places besides America as well as from other periods besides today (as the analysis of *I Love Lucy* exemplifies). As stated before, this thesis uses contemporary American series to illustrate these different continuous patterns mainly because they are widely known and are readily available, which makes them persuasive examples.

Horace Newcomb talks about this form built in sequence as an "artistic probability" that according to him television fiction often disregards, but that it can explore through the repetition of characters or simply through a continued narrative as in soap-operas.[86] Yet this continuity is not merely narrative as Newcomb suggests, but aesthetic as well. To make the distinction between these two continuities clearer, consider how in series with self-contained episodes where characters "have no memory", "cannot change in response to events", and "have no history",[87] the presentation of these characters often changes, from the wardrobe to the make-up. Despite this, a regular viewer is able to recognise them and their world. This *narrative continuity* may not involve narrative development (in the sense of *evolution*), but it is part of the aesthetic continuity that links the episodes even when they do not develop the story or the characters. Self-contained episodes restart narratively, but not from scratch, since they rely on the recognition of the characteristics of a fictional world and of the traits of its inhabitants. Of course, series in which episodes are narratively connected can introduce elements, integrate them, and develop them in a more consequential way for the overall form of the series. The analysis of *Heroes* and its creative rework on visual references from comics showed how this type

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86. Newcomb, *TV*, p. 254.
87. Ibid., pp. 253-54.

of televisual work, the fiction series, has a sequential form, a successive system of relations between its parts. When aesthetic analysis is applied more broadly, it reveals different kinds of pieces (units or motifs) and various possible relations between them (repetition, variation, exception, and progression) — the pieces and relations that the next chapters will categorise.

Chapter Two:

Units and Motifs

Fade in to a neon-lit and wet motel. Through the window curtains of a room, we distinguish the

shadows of a man and a woman having sex. "I'm never getting married. You want an absolute?

Well, there you go. Veronica Mars, spinster..." are the first words that we hear from an intimate

and direct voice-over. It is a confident voice for an adolescent. It belongs to the high school girl

who is working as private investigator and watching the adultery taking place from the parking

lot. In this pilot episode, the voice-over used in the beginning is more commentary than

narration, providing more personal remarks than sheer information. It becomes a structural

element of *Veronica Mars* (2004-7), a recognisable motif.

The pilot also introduces a credit sequence, later changed for the third season when the

series moved from UPN to the WB and Veronica went to college. The sequence displays the

pop style of the show and is in tune with the high school setting of the first two seasons,

showing images of the protagonists and complementing them with drawings on scraps of ruled

paper. The pop sensibility of the credits is on display in the visual use of notebook paper, an

everyday material for a student, and especially in the iconic sketches, representative of each

character, that appear below the actors' names. Two examples suffice to explain the role of these

drawings. Kristen Bell plays the title character and her sketch shows a couple kissing through a

window, echoing the opening scene at the motel; she is thus presented as an investigator. Percy

Daggs III is the following actor; he plays Wallace Fennel and a chalk outline presents him as

Veronica's helper, the investigator's assistant. The sequence credited other leading actors and

presented the main characters that they portray through distinctive pencilled pictures. This list

of actors and characters changed throughout the first two seasons, but the credit sequence that

presented and characterised them remained a building block of every episode, a noticeable unit.

This chapter focuses on units like the credit sequence of *Veronica Mars* and motifs like

Veronica's voice-over. Units and motifs like these are basic aesthetic elements into which

television fiction series can be broken down. After the preliminary work of the previous chapter, the core work of this thesis begins thus with the detailed examination of these fundamental elements. Later chapters will develop from here and concentrate on the structural connections between these elements.

Units are salient and distinct elements that are easily individuated because of this saliency and distinctness. However, this individuation should not be confused with isolation or give rise to decontextualisation. Taking units in isolation and out of context disregards their multiple functions *within* the system of connected units to which they belong. The key units under examination in this chapter are for that reason different types of *linked* elements: *segments*, the units into which a series may be divided in general; *sequences*, the regular units found in episodes, of which the opening credits of *Veronica Mars* are an example; and *episodes*, the basic units of a show.

The general concept of segment allows us to explore the way series are divided or, more precisely, segmented. The idea of segmentation has been applied to broadcast television with the implication that its segments have a regular duration of around five minutes.[1] A more attentive look reveals that, even though television production takes into account factors like commercial breaks, the duration of segments is more flexible and it has an organic relation with the aesthetic aim of the series.

Episodes are constituted by different kinds of sequences. The narrative sequences of an episode present a succession of actions and consequences occurring in time and space,[2] but within this chain some of them are marked out: the *teaser and tag sequences*, the first because it is shown before the *title sequence*, the second because it is shown during the closing credits. Besides these three kinds, some series use *transitional sequences* between narrative sequences. All these sequences have particular aesthetic characteristics according to their functions in specific series

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1. See John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema Television Video*, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 112.

2. Cf. David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), pp. 49-50. Behind my description of narrative is Bordwell's. He distinguishes between "fabula" (or story) and "syuzhet" (or plot), but for him narrative is a *chain of events in cause-effect relationship occurring in time and space*. I find that *events in cause and effect relationships*, although conceptually correct, sounds too mechanical and it does not capture the human agency that drives narrative works. *Actions* and *consequences* captures this agency while maintaining the causal relationship that Bordwell sees as central in narrative.

and genres — the teaser sequence of the pilot of *Veronica Mars*, for example, introduces crucial visual and aural elements of the series, images that pastiche other detective fictions and Veronica's juvenile yet assertive voice.

The aesthetic identity of the show is presented in the beginning of the series and then refined or even altered, but this refinement or alteration is always *in relation to* the inaugural episode. The importance of this initial episode, that is commonly the pilot, shows how crucial the notion of episode as a structuring unit is. In this sense, episodes can be considered the most obvious units of series. Ordinary conversations about a particular series often revolve around them as a way of defining more clearly what we are talking about. We often ask if someone saw a specific episode, maybe one that aired the day before or a favourite. And, since the advent of box-set releases of series, we also discuss complete seasons, that is, groupings of episodes.

The opening section on units is about the definition of segments, episodes, and sequences, and their structural functions in a series. The ensuing section is similar in its purposes, but its focus shifts to motifs. This shift is a change from dividing elements, units, to unifying ones, motifs. Motifs are distinctive features, dominant ideas, recurring aesthetic elements whose patterns that can be immediately or gradually identified. They are sometimes given form as units, but they lack the delimited aspect of units and are instead dispersed across a show, uniting its parts. A motif can take many forms while preserving the same underlying idea. Veronica Mars's witty voice-over commentaries, for instance, take various shapes. It is a highly subjective voice-over that makes observations about the present, gives details of her inner life, and sometimes confines itself strictly to the specifics of a case — with consistent expressive variations in intonation. Her first words, only partially quoted in my opening paragraph, amount to a long cynical comment that links marriage with adultery while also calling attention to her hurry because she has a "Calculus exam" in "four... hours". Other instances of this inquisitive voice-over take a different form. In "Cheatty Cheatty Bang Bang" (2.03), a confused Veronica criticises her assistant's love interest in a girl. "What did you mean?", he asks her. Then she repeats the question as if she is detaching herself from the scene and becoming an external

observer: "What *did* you mean?", she asks again in voice-over. Motifs like this patterned diegetic voice from *Veronica Mars* are *sound motifs*.

There are other types of motifs that have to do with other aesthetic elements. Production design motifs, or simply *design motifs*, are connected with the designed building components of the fictional world, physically in production and virtually in post-production. *Performance motifs* are related with performance as the depiction, the characterisation, and the form given to the characters on screen. Finally, *image motifs* are associated with the visual composition and texture of a series; just like sound motifs are associated with how a show is aurally composed and textured. Within a series, these elements work together and it is sometimes difficult to isolate them — but this categorisation helps us to distinguish between them. This is why the components of mise en scène, which join together all filmed elements, are spread across these three groups. Décor, costume, and prop motifs belong to the first. Makeup and acting motifs are included in the second. Lighting and staging motifs (apart from those pertaining to performance) are part of the third.

Looking at units and motifs is the first step to understand how series are aesthetically composed. The work of Franco Moretti draws attention to the constant renewal of the composition of formal elements in literary genres which has interesting parallels with television series. He develops a model for literary history that is summarised this way: "From individual cases to series; from series to cycles, and then to genres as their morphological embodiment."[3] Moretti's model and terminology has less to do with scales — from small to large scale, from individual cases to genres — and more with concepts. The adaptation of this conceptual model to television shows fruitfully reveals fundamental aspects of the aesthetic arrangement of these works. "Individual cases" are units, mainly episodes, which can be, and often are, detached from the whole without losing their connection with it. "Series", in Moretti's body of terms, are "composed of homogeneous objects"[4] and that is what these programmes are, composed as they are by episodes with consistent aesthetic characteristics. It is clear that this consistency is not a

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3. Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 17. Moretti is here studying British novelistic genres, between the second half of 18th century and the beginning of the 20th century.
    4. Ibid., p. 25.

uniform but a *developing consistency*, as new elements are integrated into the aesthetic guidelines of the series. "Cycles" are runs of literary series that use motifs and create patterns throughout time, just like seasons are rounds of a number of episodes that become a regular pattern, year after year. The episodes of a particular season are homogeneous in a way that episodes from different seasons are not — but, as Moretti explains, a formal category is needed to establish homogeneity. In his study this category is genre. In this thesis, it is series. The concept of series and of genre are sometimes conceptually likened given how genres are categories of artistic composition, where the members of each category share formal, stylistic, or thematic similarities.

One crucial and noticeable difference between the works of literature that Moretti is studying and the episodes of a television series is the lack of narrative connection of the former — they have different characters, different worlds, and different story-lines. Yet these books have a formal link. There is a similar link between episodes in a series. Moretti's genre is the equivalent of a series as a formal framework that allows us to think through the aesthetic relations of episodes. Mirroring Moretti's idea, we can say that throughout the run of a television series new forms replace old forms, forms that lost their significance or impact. As complex composites of pieces, series are made and watched sequentially. Their salient elements, units and motifs, are reworked, recombined, and replaced throughout their years of production.

1. Serial Units

Numerous scenes in *Dream On* (1990-95) are inter-cut with brief clips from old television shows. The overanxious protagonist, Martin Tupper (Brian Benben), has watched too many hours of television and moments from these programmes come to his mind as he copes with divorce and with the joys and nuisances of life. Director John Landis had secured the permission from Universal Studios to use material from their television archives and these clips metaphorically convey Tupper's reactions, feelings, and thoughts. Since the scenes are in colour and the old clips are in black and white, the reused footage creates blocks within the series that are signalled as distinct and separable units.

To understand the function of these units, we may use the *syntagm* and the *paradigm* as theoretical concepts because they are often employed to discuss the structure of television series. Glen Creeber, for instance, states that paradigmatic complexity is prevalent in series.[5] Unpacking this statement means going back to Robert C. Allen's work on the soap opera, from which Creeber draws on. Because of their continuous narrative, serialised instead of episodic,[6] soaps are seen as templates for serial drama on television. By contrast, some remarks on them may therefore be illuminating about less open or potentially unending fiction series. Allen writes that American daytime soap operas "trade an investment in syntagmatic determinacy (the eventual direction of the overall plotline) for one in paradigmatic complexity (how particular events effect the complex network of character relationships)".[7] Syntagms and paradigms are concepts that come from linguistics and they are here employed by analogy as a way of discriminating between two facets of serial structures. First, like the words in the sentence, "Martin Tupper dreams", serial units are arranged together, joined in a sequence that establishes a *syntagmatic relationship*. Second, like every word in that sentence, a serial unit is chosen to play a particular role and creates a *paradigmatic relationship* with alternative units — "dreams" has this relation with substitute words like "fantasises" or "muses", which possess a different form and meaning.

It was argued in the previous chapter that this kind of analogy has evident limitations — and that it is even misguided if taken as exact. Series are not texts. They are not made of paragraphs, sentences, and ultimately words, elements whose meaning is, at a basic level, independent from syntax and can be found in a dictionary. In contrast, the function and meaning of serial units is always dependent on their arrangement and context. Yet the differences between words and images, and grammatical and serial structures, do not imply that units do not have relationships that are *similar* to syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships. They have, even if the syntax and semantics of words have no correspondence in the arrangement and meaning of images and sounds. The point is that serial units resemble syntagms because they are

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5. Glen Creeber, *Serial Television: Big Drama on the Small Screen* (London: BFI, 2004), p. 4.

6. In the context of this discussion on the soap opera, "serialised" is used according to the traditional distinction between series and serials. It does not mean simply *arranged in a series*, as it usually does throughout this thesis, but *narratively continuous* as opposed to "episodic" (*narratively discontinuous*).

7. Robert C. Allen, *To Be Continued: Soap Operas Around the World* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 7-8.

joined in sequences and paradigms because they are *chosen from various possibilities for precise purposes.* Reducing the analogy to this theoretical meaning allows us to forgo the linguistic terms and also avoid any commitment to the notion that series are a great syntagmatic chain in Christian Metz's sense.[8] The impulse of this French theorist to categorise these syntagms is comparable to the classificatory effort of this thesis, yet the framework for each classification differs since Metz's work relies on semiotics and semiotic codes[9] and not on aesthetics and aesthetic properties. His work on segmentation greatly influenced semiotically inclined film theory. Yet what will be proposed in the next section regarding the segmentation of television series is grounded on the structural (and psychological) role that segments play in aesthetic experience, without any need to draw on semiotic theory.

Attempts have been made to identify the smallest unit of film in an totalising way, namely as the shot, the continuous strip of film from one take, or as visual techniques like dissolves or wipes.[10] The units analysed ahead are not minimal units like these, but simply pieces of television series that are salient and that are separable because of their saliency. These serial units into which the complex whole of a series may be divided are diverse and do not exhaust the components of series. They can be split into three major types, from the general, non-specific *segments* to the particular, distinct *sequences* and then to *episodes*, the measuring units of series.

1.1. Segments

John Ellis has contrasted the notion of *segment* with that of *flow* coined by Raymond Williams.[11] According to Williams, television programmes, previews, and adverts run in a single, uninterrupted current across the day or part of the day and are perceived as such. The flow of

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8. See Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema* [1968/73], trans. M. Taylor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 108-46. Metz explains that the "Grand Syntagmatique" is the systematisation "of the codified orderings of various kinds used in film" (p. 119).

9. Ibid., pp. 108-46.

10. Metz, "Some Points in the Semiotics of the Cinema", in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, 6th edn., ed. Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen, and Leo Braudy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 71.

11. See Raymond Williams, *Television, Technology and Cultural Form* [1974], 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 77-121.

programming and the audience's perception of it are ways of discerning the difference between television and cinema. Ellis proposes a different description: broadcast television does not flow as much as it is segmented in "small sequential units of images and sounds whose maximum duration seems to be around five minutes".[12] Broadcast television is not the focus of this research, but television series are broadcast and become part of the segmented flow that Ellis identifies. Series are sometimes adjusted to fit the specific duration of slots, which are different in the US and the UK. As he explains in another context,

> The pattern of slots based on 30 minutes is practically universal in scheduled broadcast TV: it provides the basic block of the schedule. But the precise duration of the programmes that fit those slots varies according to the practices of different broadcasting markets. The US network primetime slot is around 44 minutes; the UK commercial network slot is around 51 minutes; for the BBC it is more like 56 minutes. The difference is the permitted level of commercials (and in the case of the BBC, the lack of commercials).[13]

This information is accurate, yet the trimming of series to fit into slots is not widespread. It only happens, for example, when some British series are broadcast in America.[14] The differences between the UK commercial slot and the BBC slot suggest that segments of around five-minutes are indeed structural in television programming and therefore in television production, but there is a difference of about seven minutes between the US prime-time slot and the UK commercial slot. Since fiction series are part of the segmented broadcasting flow, they must have segments with a maximum of five minutes that Ellis claims are prevalent. We will see that this is not the case. The time slots for which series are produced determine the total run-time of its episode — in the US, around 44 minutes (22 for sitcoms) in non-pay channels like NBC, and about 53 minutes (29 for sitcoms) in pay channels like HBO. In addition, the type of slots influence the division and

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12. Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, p. 112.
13. Ellis, "Television Production", in *The Television Studies Reader*, ed. Robert C. Allen and Annette Hill (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 277.
14. "Some", because this is not always so. *Extras* (2005-7), a co-production between the BBC and HBO, aired without alteration because, like the British Public broadcaster, HBO also does not have commercial breaks, for instance. "Christmas Special" was even shown first on HBO, whereas the first two seasons were originally televised on BBC Two.

structure of the episode. This is clear in the context of non-pay channels where they are interrupted by commercial breaks. All this is true, but it does not follow that the duration of segments within an episode, the parts into which an episode may be divided in agreement with its composition, is more or less uniform. In fact, this duration varies to a great extent.

Duration is a slice of time, the period that something lasts or in which something occurs. Time is a central topic in the study of narrative in its two facets as narrated time and time of narration, the time of the story told and the time of the telling of the story. Because of this latter aspect, *time* also has a phenomenological and aesthetic dimension, not just narrative, as an *experienced and shaped duration* — an experience and shape that are connected with particular production decisions and with general programming practices. This is the reason why segmentation is such an important aspect of the aesthetics of these programmes. To conclude on their diverse segmentation we can consider the most common form of episode on American television: the 44-minute episode with interruptions for commercials. This is the usual structure of these episodes: the first section of around 15 minutes includes a teaser before the credits, the remaining time is divided into three sections of more or less ten minutes.

The first part of the structure introduces, in economic and anticipatory fashion, not only the story but also the style of the episode. The second has to do with the fact that there are usually three commercial breaks throughout the broadcast of the episode. The run-time of each of the four sections is rarely five minutes, it is however usually a multiple of five. Yet this does not mean that the segmentation of the sections has any relation with five-minute segments. As Kristin Thompson points out,[15] Ellis does not separate programmes from commercials when he makes this claim. Segmentation is for him a alternative way of understanding and defining the form of the television broadcast: segments seem to be simply *blocks of broadcast*. Later, he turns to programmes, and specifically to series,[16] but does not specify either the duration or the features of these segments. Ellis seems to be aware of how diverse their duration is and can be, but this awareness is not stated or substantiated. With regards to their features, he simply

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15. Kristin Thompson, *Storytelling in Film and Television* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 145, n. 16.
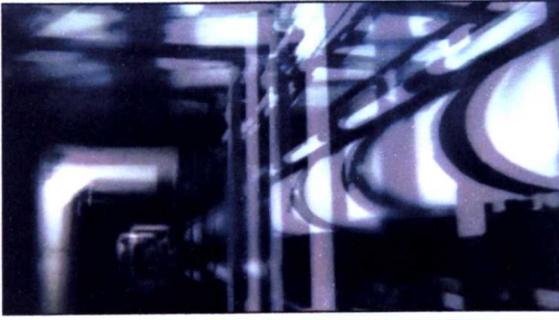16. Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, pp. 122-26.

Fig. 1a.

Fig. 1b.

Prison Break, "Allen" (1.02).

Fig. 2.

Brothers & Sisters, "Patriarchy" (1.01).

declares that segments are demarcated and are "internally coherent pieces of [...] fictional [...] material".[17] It is more fruitful to give clear evidence of the diversity of segments within series and to elucidate exactly what we mean by segmentation.

As hinted before, television productions take time slots and commercial breaks into account, which means these circumstances affect the segmentation of series to a certain degree. Segmentation is also a practice that is connected with the specific aesthetic qualities of a show. Like fiction films, the episodes of a series are segmented into *scenes* according to changes in time, place, or narrative events.[18] Ellis seems to be thinking about this last level of segmentation when he states that "[t]he segment is a relatively self-contained scene which conveys an incident, a mood or a particular meaning."[19] Aesthetic elements demarcate and shape these changes over time. We may distinguish *sections*[20] as the sizeable and clearly separate parts that correspond to the blocks of programming separated by commercials. And then consider the general four-section structure of 15 minutes plus three times ten minutes, where there are noteworthy differences in the way series announce or do not announce the three intermissions for advertisements. *Prison Break* (2005-9) and *Brothers & Sisters* (2006-), two prime time dramas, both employ a one-second separator before each intermission, but the former cuts quickly between fast zooms in multiple confined spaces (figs. 1a-b) whereas the latter uses the more customary black screen. The four sections of the episodes of these series are also segmented in very different ways. Scenes of less than a minute are frequent in the fast-paced *Prison Break* in order to create suspense and increase expectation. Scenes of more than two minutes are common in the slower *Brothers & Sisters*, when the characters gather for a family meal and have long conversations and arguments (fig. 2). These instances are evidence of how diverse, and at times contrasting, the segmentation within fiction series is — a diversity that is only multiplied with other examples.

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17. Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, p. 122. I have omitted the other four kinds of segments that Ellis mentions — dramatic, instructional, exhortatory, and documentary — because they are superfluous to my discussion.

18. See Bordwell, *Narration in Fiction Film*, p. 158. Time, place, or narrative events, each one takes prominence in defining the unity of a scene — for instance, a scene may involve crosscutting between actions happening at the same time but in different places.

19. Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, p. 148.

20. It is worth mentioning that the use of a term like *section* instead of *act* stresses how the focus of this thesis is on aesthetics (and style) instead of on narrative (and storytelling). Nevertheless, as stated before, throughout the chapters these aspects remain connected since the object of study is television fiction series.

Segments are the evident units of an episode. It is usual for them to be combined into what has been described as sections, detached parts that fit closely with other parts, forming a complete episode. Segmentation divides episodes following clear changes between scenes or gaps between sections. This way of defining serial segments specifies Ellis's idea and widens it. We may even regard it as a different concept, closer to that of *fragment*, which for Jason Jacobs is "something complete in itself and yet implying a larger whole".[21] Jacobs also takes this general, overarching notion as encompassing scenes, title sequences, and episodes — different types of units. "Fragment" conveys separateness and unconnectedness, it suggests pieces broken off accidentally or randomly. This suits Jacobs, because he is interested in how the audience is confronted with the constant incompleteness of what is being shown: bits that appear as complete and worthy of our attention or perhaps even deserving of our contemplation. He states that

> conceptualizing single shows as fragments signals the tension between the single episode and the rest. The boundaries of each episode are clearly marked and yet also blurred by the recognition, internalized by the episode itself, of interruption by the contingencies of the commercial broadcast environment, as well as of the story arcs beyond and behind it.[22]

This is then between Ellis's position, from which series are only part of television broadcast, and my perspective that sees series as works that air on television, but are also distributed and released in other forms. For Jacobs, a serial fragment is a fragment *from* a series, while serial segments as defined here are segments *of* a series. That is, there is the same possibility of disconnection between segments as there is between fragments, yet the first are connected pieces that are separated along salient lines of division. In contrast, "fragment" expresses a strong sense of breakage that sounds at odds with a straightforward separation. This is acceptable only if we recall that Jacobs is considering series within the limited broadcast context, where the totality of a series is elusive. Yet even in that context series are perceived as constructed piece by piece,

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21. Jason Jacobs, "Issues of Judgement and Value in TV", *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 4, no. 4 (2001): p. 435.
22. Ibid., p. 444.

segment by segment. There are series like *Prison Break* that give a fragmentary impression, but they are segmented not fragmented. It is in fact their segmentation that allows us to notice their fragmentary quality. In this sense, segmentation is an operation that realises the practice of serialisation. Of course, we can talk about a fragment or fragments extracted from series. However, we cannot talk about series as composed of fragments without compromising, and in a way rejecting, the notion of seriality and serial structure.

Noticeable units like scenes produce a succession of changes and break down the episode into segments. Segmentation in this sense has to do with the structure of an episode of a series, a structure that close analysis is able to reconstruct and consequently to make clear. This is not to be confused with Ellis's idea of segment that has to do with the structure of television broadcasting. John Corner rightly points out that this idea was suggestive in the 1980s, but it is "now inappropriate to the range of narrative visualisations which current television, with its changed technology and methods of production, displays".[23] Corner appears to be pointing towards the kind of critical analysis developed in the previous pages. However, he does not distinguish between programmes and television broadcast, the primary way of distributing them but ultimately only one of many. Fiction series can be considered in the context of different methods of distribution, but this thesis focuses on the televisual works themselves apart from these methods. The segment is useful as a concept because it allows us to articulate the parts of a series with its serial whole, from scenes to episodes, seasons, and series. Segmentation has hence two distinct forms that structure the aesthetics of series: *continuous segmentation* in a specific single episode and *gapped segmentation* in a particular season or entire series. For now, my focus has been on the first, but the second form of segmentation will be crucial for the discussion ahead around episodes. The notion of gapped segmentation calls attention to an aspect mentioned at the end of the previous chapter: the aesthetic connection between separate units of a series like episodes, which exists even in the absence of narrative continuity.

Segment is an umbrella term that underlines the connectedness of units in series yet it is insufficient to distinguish between. Something similar can be said about the more specific *scene*.

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23. John Corner, *Critical Ideas in Television Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 54.

Scenes, defined by their narrative unity, are the most conspicuous kind of segment in an episode yet they are but one kind. The *sections* that fit the blocks of programming are usually demarcated in different ways as we have seen in the case of *Prison Break* — this clear demarcation does not vanish when series are watched on DVD, without commercials between sections. In addition to scenes and sections, there is a typology of *sequences* that, as we shall see, are not necessarily narrative.[24]

1.2. Sequences

A sequence is a distinct unit that may be composed of a single shot, which is a succession of frames, and may lack the spatial or temporal unity of a scene, at times combining different scenes. A recurring example is the montage sequence, a segment that condenses a narrative or compresses the passage of time into a succession of emblematic, and usually brief, shots or scenes. A lot of episodes of fiction series open with *title sequences*. According to Jonathan Gray,[25] these sequences perform numerous functions: they often establish the fictional world, credit the cast and other artists and technicians, and introduce the images, themes, music, or simply the tone of the show. These sequences are not always credit sequences, but they always present the name of the series, which is why it is more accurate to think of them as title sequences.[26] Gray calls attention to how these images and the theme songs that accompany them come to be reminders of the shows, also underlying the cyclical aspect of series. Other scholars like John Corner have described the capacity of these sequences to condense and convey the essence of the identity of a series.[27]

Some title sequences remain the same throughout the seasons of a series, like the serene and balmy titles of the medical drama *Private Practice* (2007-) where the name appears from a burst of light in a golden and sunny landscape. If these sequences become a "ritual gatekeeper and

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24. "Narrative" is here used in Nöel Carroll's precise and narrow sense: as involving at least two events and/or states of affairs in temporal and causal relation. See Carroll, "On the Narrative Connection", in *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 118-33.

25. Jonathan Gray, "Introducing Television", *Flow* 4, no. 3 (2006), http://www.flowtv.org/?p=218/, par. 2.

26. When the title sequence does not include credits, they usually run during the first scenes that follow the sequence. Short and condensed title sequences are now common in series aired on non-pay channels because they leave more slot time for commercials.

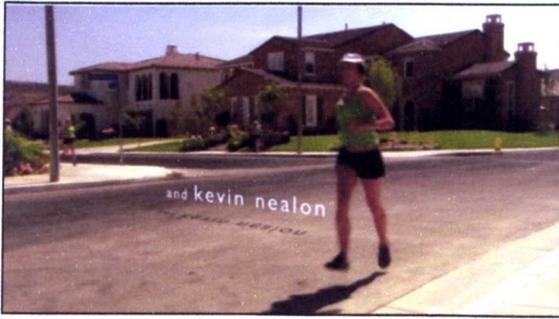27. Corner, *Critical Ideas in Television Studies*, p. 32.

Fig. 3a.

Fig. 3b.

Weeds, "You Can't Miss the Bear" (1.01).

Fig. 4.

Weeds, "Lady's a Charm" (4.02).

greeter, not only to the narrative and characters within, but to the entire narrative universe"[28] as Gray states, then they can also display the changes of the series over the years — updating the sequence with images from a new season or accommodating modifications in the cast are common practices.[29] They may also incorporate variation while following the same recognisable idea. During the first three seasons of *Weeds* (2005-), the title sequence remained visually similar. It showed the opulent neighbourhood of Agrestic as a place where everyone's lives are identical. Right from "You Can't Miss the Bear" (1.01), this was expressed through the cloning of persons who do the same thing, such as several copies of a woman seen jogging (fig. 3a). The sequence ended with the title carved in the concrete pavement accompanied and a growing shadow of a cannabis leaf (fig. 3b). Perhaps to introduce an odd element — just like the protagonist, Nancy (Mary-Louise Parker), a widowed housewife who sells weed in a picturesque community — the song "Little Boxes" was presented in a new version in every episode covering a multitude of music styles. In the fourth season, Nancy's family and friends move to California near the border with Mexico and the title sequence became a title shot. This shot is different for every episode, but its choice does not have the same element of oddness or arbitrariness of the cover versions of the title song. Instead, the shot is composed of central or peripheral visual elements that will be shown later in that episode and that integrate the title ("Weeds") and the creator ("Created by Jenji Kohan") of the series. The first one, for "Lady's a Charm" (4.02), shows the checkpoints of the Mexican border that Nancy will cross later on for her first delivery from Tijuana. The title and creator are integrated into the shot as large road signs (fig. 4). Title sequences do not have to be exactly (or almost) the same to create familiarity. Much like the episodes of a series, these sequences evoke patterns and connections that only regular viewers can fully grasp. Jonathan Gray does not call these units *title sequences*, but instead *intro sequences*.[30] Yet the first term is more accurate because in many cases the introductory sequence of an episode is not this kind of sequence, but a *teaser sequence*.[31]

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28. Gray, "Introducing Television", par. 9.
29. For an instance of a detailed analysis of these changes across a whole series see David Kociemba, "'Actually, It Explains a *Lot*': Reading the Opening Title Sequences of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*", *Slayage* 22 (2006), http://www.slayageonline.com/essays/slayage22/Kociemba.html/. Kociemba also analyses how title sequences are sometimes altered to reflect the exceptionality of some episodes — what I shall call *exception* in Chapter Four.
30. See Gray, "Introducing Television".
31. *Cold open* is an alternatively term for these sequences that is now widely used in the industry.

Fig. 5.

House M.D., "Epic Fail" (6.02).

In general, teasers precede the titles and introduce the narrative and aesthetic peculiarities of episodes. The second title sequence from *Weeds* demonstrates that these teaser sequences are able to be specific to episodes and not just to seasons, using images from a new episode rather than from a new season. Yet teaser sequences do not provide the name, authorship, or credits of the show, they acquaint us with the particular storytelling and stylistic aspects of an episode. They entice us into watching the rest. This is why some use surprising and unexpected elements to catch our attention. It is usual for *House M.D.* (2004-) to open with sequences with unknown characters: they will be the patients with mysterious diseases that Dr. House (Hugh Laurie) and his team will treat during the remainder of the episode. It is also characteristic of these sequences to have a style at variance with the regular style of the show, adopted when the action moves to the hospital right after the title sequence. This regular style includes, for instance, the "walk and talk" technique and the management of reflective silence and heightened sound. Seamless Steadicam movements capture conversations between the busy doctors while they walk. Silence repeatedly frames the deep thought and concentration needed to solve the rare clinical case. A mass of sound is used in reoccurring emergency situations that highlight the urgency of finding a solution to the case. On the other hand, teasers are often constructed to confound the viewer. For example, "Epic Fail" (6.02) opens with intriguing images from a video game (fig. 5). This virtual world is later paralleled by the horrific and insistent hallucinations of the game designer, who requires immediate medical care.

Tag sequences are the other bookend of episodes: where the teaser is an opening sequence, the tag is a closing sequence. They are more common in sitcoms. These brief sequences continue a story line of the episode, but "that story line has usually already been resolved at the end of the last act".[32] This is the precise meaning of "tag" in the context of television fiction: a sequence that is attached to the bulk of the episode. This is the reason why most of these sequences are shown while the final credits roll, either on one side of the screen or over the sequence. Tag sequences rely on an established and, for the most part, closed narrative. So what stands out in them has more to do with aesthetics, with the reiteration of a situation using the same form or a

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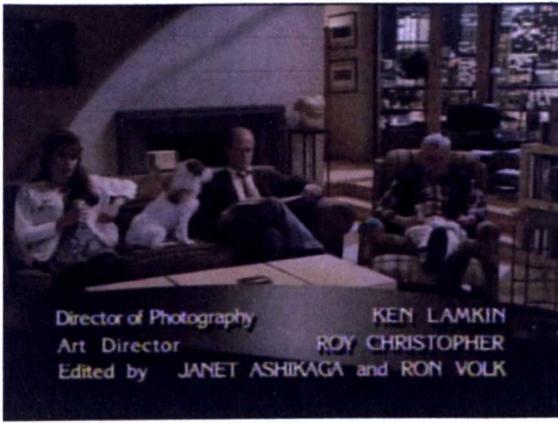32. Evan S. Smith, *Writing Television Sitcoms* (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1999), p. 100.
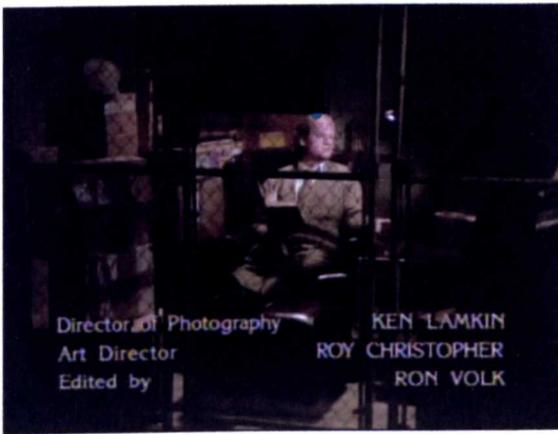
Fig. 6.

Frasier, "The Good Son" (1.01).

Fig. 7.

Frasier, "Space Quest" (1.02).

Fig. 8a.

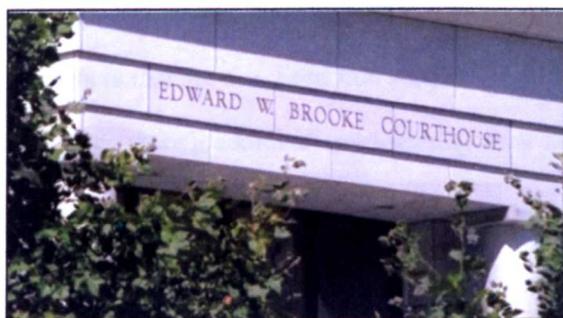Fig. 8b.

EDWARD W. BROOKE COURTHOUSE

Fig. 8c.

Fig. 8d.

Boston Legal, "Head Cases" (1.01).

new form. *Frasier* (1993-2004) illustrates well the two ways in which tags reiterate situations. The reiteration using the same form occurs in "The Good Son" (1.01) with the return of a running gag of the dog Eddie staring at and frightening Frasier. The psychiatrist had just moved back to his hometown, Seattle, and his injured, old father Martin moves into the apartment with his canine companion. In the tag sequence, Martin and Daphne, the home care worker hired to look after Martin, are watching television while Eddie gazes at Frasier as he tries to read a book (fig. 6). The reiteration using a new form can be found in "Space Quest" (1.02) with a gag that works as a punch line to Frasier's desperate attempts to find some peace that would allow him to read a book. The tag sequence shows him finally tranquil, reading inside his storage room (fig. 7), away from the interruptions caused by Eddie, Martin, and Daphne.

Teaser and tag sequences are as a rule produced from detailed written material, but there are sequences that are not. Even title sequences are usually based on preliminary descriptive notes. However, there is a kind of sequence that does not depend on such screenplay specifications. These sequences are inserted during the editing process and are put together from stock footage filmed or created for the show. They are quite common, especially in shows from non-pay channels. Such shows use these sequences as separators — in most cases of the main body of the episode, which does not include the teaser or the tag. These *transitional sequences* are therefore employed as transitions between, and sometimes within, the sections of an episode. They can be described as non-narrative, but not "a-narrative", that is, they are not narrative but contain elements from, or connected with, the narrative. Their imagery is a direct and insistent means of setting the tone for the series — and it is, for the most part, either related with the location or with a theme of the fiction. Locational transitional sequences are frequent in series set in well-known urban landscapes. Since the first episode, "Head Cases" (1.01), *Boston Legal* (2004-8) was regularly punctuated by short montages of shots of the setting, the city of Boston, with rapid camera movements and zooms (figs. 8a-b) and harsh white flashes (figs. 8c-d). The editing cuts were paced to the jiggly music and conveyed an improvisational mood, a sort of looseness that permeated the show, also reflected in its sudden shifts between drama and comedy. Thematic transitional sequences can be build from various sources, from filmed material to digital animation, which can be combined.
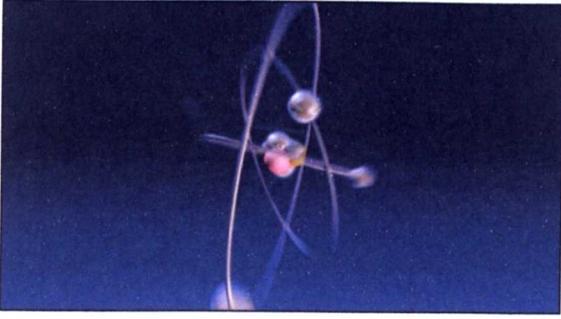
Fig. 9.

The Big Bang Theory, "Pilot" (1.01).

The separator in *Prison Break* mentioned before uses filmed material and so does the sequence of still black-and-white images, akin to surveillance photos, that anticipate upcoming scenes in *NCIS: Los Angeles* (2009-). *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-), a sitcom about an experimental physicist and a theoretical physicist with a waitress as neighbour, opts for digital animation and inter-cuts some of the scenes with colourful animations of atoms (fig. 9). Of course, series employ other transitional devices between scenes like establishing shots — even those programmes that forgo transitional sequences like the ones described above. Yet these do not amount to units, the pieces into which the complex whole of an episode may be divided. As with other units, transitional sequences involve the constant restatement of their structural function. They are not to be confused with occasional or unique solutions.

There are other sequences that become serial units. Some are specific to a series and therefore there is no general term to classify them. Each case is singular. For instance, the imagined montages from old television programmes that reflect the protagonist's inner life in *Dream On* are, in the context of the series, clear units that can be called *fantasy sequences*. There are also *"previously on..." sequences* that start off episodes in some series presenting a summary of previous narrative information relevant to the understanding of that episode. Ben Singer calls attention to the fact that serial structures are often overlapping, "the 'next' episode briefly retraces the immediate situation leading up to the cliffhanger".[33] These sequences are also a way to retrace particular narrative links, but it is usual for them to outline less linear, immediate connections. The establishment of these narrative relations between episodes relies on the analysed range of sequences. More than simple familiarity with a narrative universe and an aesthetic structure, seriality creates expectation, a belief that something will be the case in the future. As we have seen, this "something" may incorporate the idea of difference (as in the example from *Weeds*) or similarity (as in the instance from *Boston Legal*) across episodes. Episode after episode, series establish their regularities and signal their irregularities. In other words, we trace these patterns from episodes, from their comparison. Episodes may thus be regarded as the units from which we make sense of the whole series and, as such, they need to be examined in detail.

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33. Ben Singer, "Serial Melodrama and Narrative *Gesellschaft*", *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 37 (1996), pp. 73-74.

1.3. Episodes

The episode is the most basic unit of a television series, the unit that we use to think about these works: a series is a *series of episodes*. This thinking is dependent on a concept of episode that we take for granted and yet defining what episodes are is not easy. It is perhaps easier to start from what they are not. They are not instalments. Episodes may be comprised of more than one instalment and be made of *n*-parts. Two-part episodes are common whereas three-part ones are rarer. *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip* (2006-7) supplies examples of both types during its short one-year run: "Nevada Day", Parts I (1.07) and II (1.08), and later "K&R", Parts I (1.19), II (1.20), and III (1.21). So we can say that an episode is a unit because of its narrative and aesthetic integrality and oneness.

Episodes-in-parts contrast with single episodes, but when series are more serial than episodic, rejecting the hybridity common in contemporary television, other distinctions have to be made. John Corner reminds us that besides the continuous serial runs of soap operas, series can also be divided into short-run serials.[34] The original *Doctor Who* (1965-89) is an example. It presented several short-run serials within the same season with as many as 12 parts in "The Daleks' Master Plan" of the third season. For this serial, individual instalments were still given different titles, but this practice was abandoned in the last two serials of the season. The next seasons, from the fourth to the twenty-sixth, were composed of short-run serials with untitled instalments, just like episodes-in-parts usually are. The new series of *Doctor Who* (2005-) has followed the current hybrid trend and combines single episodes with episodes-in-parts to create season arcs.

It follows that *seasons*, as grouped episodes, become units themselves.[35] Behind this term is the industrial practice of producing groups of episodes for a fixed period of time, in a year or across two years, when they are broadcast. In the United States, episodes are either spread from September until May of the next year with a hiatus during Christmas and New Year or they air without long pauses between September and December or January and May. In general, the

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34. Corner, *Critical Ideas in Television Studies*, p. 58.
35. "Season" is an expression more used in the United States than in the United Kingdom, where a set of episodes is often called "series". I opt for the first term because the second can lead to confusion over "series" in this sense and "series" as the programme.

seasons of British series are shorter than those of American shows. In Britain, seasons have 10 to 13 episodes — sitcoms usually have six. In America, they usually have 20 to 27 episodes on non-pay channels, including sitcoms. On premium American channels, seasons tend to have a number of episodes similar to those of British series. These differences are important. Even when their total run-time is not in fact shorter, briefer seasons seem shorter because they have less episodes. It is here that the centrality of the notion of episode is confirmed, a notion that marks the viewing process of the series, episode after episode. The episode is therefore a measure that allows us to realise where we are in relation to the whole, even if this whole is provisional (when it is possible or confirmed that the series will return for a new season). Hence, shorter series seem more graspable given that a higher number of episodes generates more gaps and begs for the introduction of new elements in an effort to capture or sustain attention. This results in the potential increase of changes and variety in aesthetic patterns of series.

We detect these shifts and make sense of this diversity when we are acquainted with the regular patterns of a series. Season or mid-season premieres can reshape these patterns — indeed, any episode can — but there is an episode that serves as a template: *the pilot*. The pilot programme, as "a sample episode of a television show, acts as a model for new programming which may be chosen by networks for the following fall's schedule".[36] Pilots are produced to sell series to television networks and, if bought, they generally become premieres of new shows. As K. C. D'Alessandro explains, this is a lengthy and complicated process:

> Producers screen finished pilots for network representatives; if the show receives favorable opinions, it will be shown to a test audience, which comments on its qualities. Based on screenings and other criteria, a network decides whether to purchase the series intact, or change cast, location, premise, or other elements.[37]

A lot of times, the initial pilot episode does not air because a new episode has to be produced with slight changes. In the case of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), 20th Century Fox

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36. K. C. D'Alessandro, "Pilot Programs", in *Encyclopedia of Television*, vol. 3, ed. Horace Newcomb (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997), p. 1768.
37. Ibid., p. 1769.

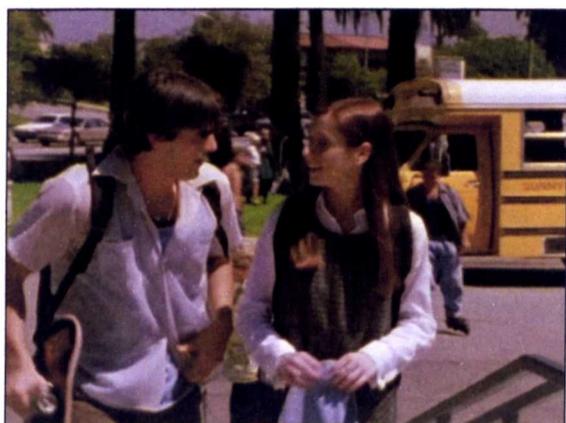Fig. 10.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer, "Original Pilot".

Fig. 11.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer, "Welcome to the Hellmouth" (1.01).

initially produced a 30-minute episode to pitch the series to potential broadcasters. This is what is called a *demo*, a pilot produced with less money. It is shorter in length, its post-production work is limited, and it relies on existing sets, furniture, costumes, and props. Demos are more advantageous to producers and creators because although they present the premise of the show and its tone, they are regarded as sketches, rough versions that can be altered. In the original pilot, Willow Rosenberg is played by Riff Regan. She was later replaced by Alyson Hannigan for the official first episode, "Welcome to the Hellmouth" (1.01) and throughout the seven seasons of the show. A secondary role was also recast — Ken Lerner replaced Stephen Tobolowsky as Principal Flutie, the director of Buffy's (Sarah Michelle Gellar) new high school — but Willow's is more striking. Not just because she was one of the main characters of the show, but also for the fact that the two actresses portray the character differently. This is evidenced in the contrasting interactions between Willow and her best friend Xander (Nicholas Brendon), who will both become Buffy's sidekicks. In the original episode, Willow and Xander's first conversation takes place in the courtyard of the school and revolves around the boy's need of help in mathematics (fig. 10). Rosenberg plays Willow as shy, but it is a shyness that makes her remote, closed into herself, as her smiley yet restrained face shows — there is a distance between them. In "Welcome to the Hellmouth", Xander goes against a rail when he is arriving at school on his skateboard and is distracted by the new high-school student, Buffy. Willow crosses paths with him when he is lying on the steps. After he gets up, they exchange the same words about his problems with math, but their rapport is evident (fig. 11). Hannigan plays her as timid but affectionate, with her cheerfulness expressing the joy of finding him. She lacks the stiffness of the previous Willow and is at ease around him, even in this situation that is much more casual, and embarrassing for him, than the one in the original pilot. In spite of these changes, the first episode of the series recreates the main aesthetic features that were already present in the demo and that became structural in the series: the theatricality of the mise en scène, the visual sign-posting, the layering of meanings, the elaborate dialogues.[38]

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38. For an analysis of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* along these lines, see Deborah Thomas, "Reading Buffy", *Close-Up*, no. 1 (2005), pp. 167-244.

However, not all first episodes are unaltered or altered pilot episodes. Some series are produced or ordered by networks, especially premium channels like HBO and public services like the BBC, without being subjected to screening tests and commercial trials. According to the original sense of "pilot" as an adjective, meaning an initial experiment or a preliminary test, these first episodes of these series are not pilot episodes. However, the use of the word has transcended this strict sense. It is now common to use it as a noun: "the pilot" instead of "the pilot episode". This designation indicates that this first episode is taken as a template, as something that drives the series. In other words, the *pilot episode* is a kind of origin, which is why it is at times referred as the *original episode*, the one that outlines the basic aesthetic features to be developed throughout the series. Even when there is no pilot, in the exact sense of the word, the identifying characteristics of the series are introduced in the first episode. Subsequent episodes are compared with this first and then between themselves, keeping in mind the boundaries of distinct series and, within them, different seasons. This creates gaps between episodes and seasons and as a result generates the already mentioned gapped segmentation of series.

It is because of these boundaries that Kristin Thompson proposes a three-level model, episode-season-series, to approach the narrative structure of television series. According to her series "are structured in ways that become apparent only if we take the long view".[39] This model takes into account how we watch series and how they circulate: episodes are released one by one, seasons or entire series are sold as box-sets. As much as this seems sound, it is also inadequate as a representation of the structural complexity of series — and even inaccurate if taken as a comprehensive account. The three levels exist but their limits can be blurred. Series are divided into seasons because of broadcasting and production schedules. Seasons are thus planned, if not entirely, at least continuously. This is why it is usual for episodes from the same season to share more narrative and aesthetic characteristics than episodes from different seasons. Yet some episodes bridge seasons and their parts have stronger connections than some episodes within a

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39. Thompson, *Storytelling in Film and Television*, p. x. For an application of this model in the study of a single series, see F. A. Holliday II, "The Long View: Three Levels of Narration in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*" (PhD thesis, University of Kansas, 2005).
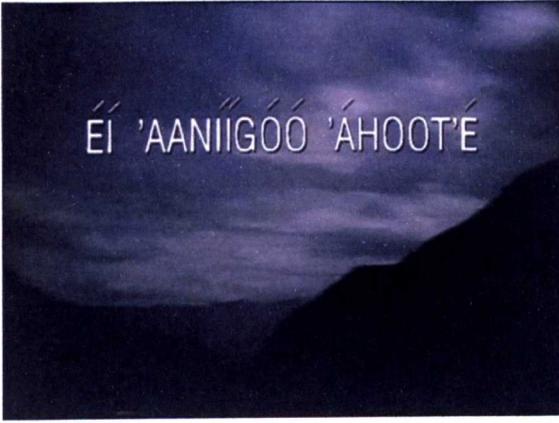
Fig. 12.

The X Files, "Anasazi (1)" (2.25).

particular season. The second, third, and sixth seasons of *The X Files* (1993-2002) end with the phrase "to be continued". "Anasazi (1)" (2.25) is followed by "The Blessing Way (2)" (3.01) and "Paper Clip (3)" (3.02), three instalments marked by the evocative sayings and visual culture of the Navajo people. These standard strata, episode, season, series, need therefore to be complemented with something that will allow us to designate these dynamic connections within and across each stratum of units. The prefixes "intra-" (*inside*) and "inter-" (*among* or *between*) can serve as this complement.[40] The Navajo sayings and culture in the three episodes from the second and the third seasons of *The X Files* are then inter-episode as well as inter-season elements. The unique tag-line that closes the title sequence in "Anasazi (1)" — "Éí 'Aaníígóó 'Áhoot'é", Navajo for the habitual "The truth is out there" (fig. 12) — is an intra-episode element. Such elements can be patterned and give rise to motifs, which are more conceptual and less structural than units. Where units are building blocks into which a series is divided, motifs are components that unify a series and are dispersed across its many parts.

2. Patterned Motifs

The spaces in *The West Wing* (1999-2006) gravitate around the Oval Office, a room with the weight of a symbol where the outside rush comes to a halt. In the president's office, the constant, fast, eye-level camera movements that accompany the busy everyday of the West Wing of the White House give way to fixed camera positions or slow camera movements — sometimes combined with high-angle shots that show the Seal of the President of the United States. The chamber symbolises an immense power that begs for responsibility, calm reflection, and careful consideration. Visual motifs like these are structuring aesthetic elements that establish and maintain the identity of a television show.

Motifs can be divided into three basic types, directly connected with the following groups of aesthetic elements: design, performance, and image and sound. These groups correspond in

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40. Rick Altman uses a similar terminology (intra- and inter-generic processes) to escape the compartmentalised way in which theorists have discussed genre. See Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 113-14.

some way to different stages of production[41] and are therefore ingrained in the creative and technical progression of the series.

Production design or simply design motifs pertain to features of components usually designed and built during the development phase (costumes, sets, furniture, and props). They may also be inserted after principal photography, in the case of computer-generated imagery, commonly shortened as CGI.

Performance motifs cover aspects of the actions of performers captured during the shoot (expressions, gestures, postures, and intonations) and their interaction with each other, as well as with settings and objects. Performance connotes the creative ability to transform and reinvent quotidian bearing and conduct. It is more encompassing than acting, which James Naremore restrictively defines as "the transposition of everyday behaviour into a theatrical realm".[42]

Image or sound motifs are those crystallised in specific combinations of aural and visual elements resulting from decisions made in production (like camera positions) and in post-production (such as editing effects). The above example from *The West Wing* is an image motif, since it concerns the *shooting style* associated with the office of the president of the United States and employed throughout the series.

Briefly thinking about television genres is useful as a means to understand the functions that motifs typically play. Fiction series share characteristics that allow us to put them into distinct generic groupings or genres. In similar fashion, motifs often become something akin to conventions of a series. They define a set of procedures used and re-used in the making of a series, establishing an aesthetic usage and practice that is *singular of a series* and that *singularises a*

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41. See Craig Collie, *The Business of TV Production* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Collie divides the production of a television programme in four stages: (1) development, (2) pre-production, (3) production, and (4) post-production (pp. 90-92). I ignore the first in this examination of motifs since it only involves the preparation of documents, the conduction of research, and/or writing of scripts. *Development* lays the ground for the subsequent, interrelated three stages that Collie sums up as "planning ... shooting ... editing" (p. 92). It is worth calling attention to the fact that in the development stage, the proposal document, used to raise finance for the production, is

> the basis of a program "bible" if it is a series. Here, aspects of the production, such as character, writing and production style, are defined to ensure consistency over a series with different writers, directors and editors for the different episodes. (p. 90)

This would be crucial information if this study were about how the stylistic guidelines of a fiction television series emerge, rather than a description and analysis of these guidelines. Thus, this is relevant yet secondary information.

42. James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 21.

series. Analysing the design motifs in *Battlestar Galactica* (2003-9), the performance motifs in *Friends* (1994-2004), and the image and sound motifs in CBS police procedurals like *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (2000-), reveals elements that individualise these programmes within popular television genres — science fiction, situation comedy, and police procedural, respectively. Motifs are not "generic norms and conventions [...] recognised and shared not only by theorists themselves, but also by audiences, readers and viewers",[43] but they are patterned and distinctive elements of specific programmes. Noticing instances of each one of the three types of motifs may depend or not on the frequent viewing of the series. Intra-episode motifs are recognisable by a casual or occasional viewer, whereas inter-episode and inter-season motifs are more difficult to recognise because they require a memory of the series. As it will become clear, these different levels of recognition complicate the role of *singularisation* assigned to aesthetic motifs.

Besides these general similarities between serial motifs and generic conventions, there are particular reasons why these genres and these series are persuasive examples of this triad of motifs. Science fiction portrays an imagined tomorrow based on scientific and technological advances in which production design plays a fundamental part — in *Battlestar Galactica*, design blends different and contrasting elements to present an imaginary yet recognisable future. The essential component of sitcoms is the situation, a state of affairs or recurring context in which characters are mainly situated through performance — in *Friends*, these premises are developed to create an intimate ensemble comedy built around the idea of friendship. In police procedurals, the focus shifts from the outcome to the process of investigation — in this group of contemporary CBS crime procedurals, images and sounds make visible and audible the reasoning of investigators based on factual information and relevant evidence.

Hence, the analysis of these series has a narrow focus: it aims to illustrate specific uses of design, performance, and image and sound motifs. Specific, because, as described above, the conventions of these genres associate them in some way with these three kinds of motifs — science fiction with design, the sitcom with performance, and the police procedural with

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43. Steve Neale, "Studying Genre", in *Television Genre Book*, ed. Glen Creeber (London: BFI, 2001), p. 1.

image and sound motifs. It is worth making clear that these generic traits (and the ones mentioned in the sections on each motif) are not to be taken as immutable or essential, but as features that come to be seen as typical and generate assumptions and expectations in a particular time. The practices of producers, distributors, viewers, and critics activate, deactivate, and reconfigure these conventions, which are therefore historically and culturally contingent and open to change. It is worth clarifying this, but not expanding on it further since my focus is on aesthetics and not on discursive practices about aesthetic conventions. Pertinent to my discussion is the idea that the contingency and change of genres is dependent upon the inter-relation of multiple series — that is, that genres emerge as cultural categories through the foregrounding of particular features that themselves do not define the genre.[44] For this reason, an effort will be made to make reference to other shows of the same generic group to highlight the singularity of these examples and the diversity within the same generic category.

2.1. Design Motifs[45]

Science fiction is sometimes identified by, or reduced to, particular iconographic elements — for example, creatures from outer space. Vivian Sobchack singled out instead the *look* of the genre and persuasively argued that what connects these works "lies in the consistent and repetitious use not of *specific* images, but of *types* of images".[46] This visual typology mixes the unfamiliar and the familiar, the unknown and the known. It presents the strange as believable — leading Sobchack to conclude that science fictions strive "primarily for our belief, not our suspension of disbelief — and this is what distinguishes them from fantasy".[47]

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44. For a nuanced cultural approach to television genre on which these remarks draw on, see Jason Mittell, *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004). Mittell cogently argues that genre definitions are not grounded in formal elements, but instead the cultural use of genres draws upon these elements as the primary site of generic operations (p. 156).

45. For an expansion of the bulk of this section with an additional analysis of the handheld, dynamic camerawork in *Battlestar Galactica*, see Sérgio Dias Branco, "Sci-Fi Ghettos: *Battlestar Galactica* and Genre Aesthetics", in *Investigating "Battlestar Galactica": Flesh, Spirit, and Steel*, ed. Roz Kaveney and Jennifer Stoy (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), pp. 185-98.

46. Vivian Shobchack, *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film* [1980], 2nd edn. (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), p. 87 (original emphasis).

47. Ibid., p. 88.

Fig. 13.

Battlestar Galactica, "Miniseries".

The new *Battlestar Galactica*, a remake of the series with the same name (1978-79), may be likened to *Firefly* (2002-3), a programme that openly blends old and new, western and sci-fi, and Eastern and Western cultures. Since its inception, the re-imagined *Battlestar Galactica* has also combined alien and well-known elements, presenting a world in which this blend created a calculated ambiguity. The Cylons, machines that were once at war with their human creators, returned to annihilate humankind, forcing the survivors to flee to space. Cylons are now completely organic and indistinguishable from humans to the naked eye — only laboratory analysis can confirm their real identity. In the first scene of the show, one of these humanoid Cylons walks into the Armistice Station after two mechanical Cylon centurions (fig. 13). The contrast is striking. Contrary to the original series, where centurions were actors in outfits, these robots were entirely created by computer. In this sense, computer generated imagery is truly a part of the design process, an aspect of the conceptualising, planning, and building stages. It can extend, replicate, or mirror partial sets. It can also insert virtual elements that seem to interact with the properly physical elements, as in this case — elements that have to be integrated into the footage, paying painstaking attention to perspective, proportion, and lighting. Moreover, the opening scene of the series demonstrates how expressive digital components can be, giving visual and kinetic expression to the differences between mechanical and organic entities, machines and living matter. The design of the new centurions was not constrained by human physicality and motion, allowing the possibility of laying bare their mechanical composition and functioning. Contrastingly, the humanoid model takes the form of a tall blonde woman, later labelled "Number Six" or simply "Six" (Tricia Helfer), in its various incarnations. The human officer had been waiting for a Cylon representative for forty years, after the first war between Cylons and humans — her presence is as unexpected as her appearance. Her tight, red suit, with a long-sleeved coat and knee-length skirt, is at odds with the neutral dark colours of the space station. The series visually turns the imaginary into the real, robots into humans — which puts in question the assumption that Cylons are clearly and fundamentally different from humans.

Examples like these show how intentionally designed *Battlestar Galatica* is. A look into the control room of Galactica reveals other facets of its design motifs. It became conventional

Fig. 14.

Fig. 15.

Battlestar Galactica, "You Can't Go Home Again" (1.05).

in science fiction for commanding spaceships to have a centre of operations with a window opened to the vastness of space. Think of the bridge in the USS Enterprise in *Star Trek* (1966-69), a television and film series that became a template for science fiction in both media. Galactica is different. It has an intricate structure whose parts relate and function organically instead of merely hierarchically. The control room is embedded inside the ship instead of being on the leading edge of it.[48] As seen, for instance, in "You Can't Go Home Again" (1.05), the room is closed and angular (fig. 14). Its limits are well defined by subdued surfaces with, to all appearances, multiple layers of paint, conveying that this is an old war ship that continues operational after years of service and maintenance. Its spaces are clearly outlined by sharp corners and different floor heights. It is like an operating theatre with upper galleries from where people look down to Admiral William Adama (Edward James Olmos) who takes the role of teaching surgeon, always standing up, without a chair to rest, sometimes moving through the work stations.[49] The set creates a central, lower space from where Adama usually speaks and gives orders and, at the same time, allows him a mobility appropriate for his supervising functions. The human proportion, logic, and functionality of the design become apparent through the action and interaction of characters within the confines of the room.

Old objects dispersed all over the ship and particularly in this room also embody these qualities. Cases in point are the telephones from the 1940s that the military officers utilise to communicate, originally used in warships (fig. 15).[50] To talk the officers have to come to the wall, pick up one of these bulky phones, and crank it. However, it would be hasty to interpret the presence of such objects as *retro* design. Devices like these telephones are not meant to imitate styles from the past. They compose a world with a history, of which they are remains and evidence. That is why their existence is so thoroughly justified within the fiction: Adama participated in the first war against the Cylons and opted for not upgrading the ship and

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48. These observations are based on information and comments that Richard Hudolin, production designer of the series, has provided. See Hudolin, "Interview", *Future-Past.com*, 2003, http://future-past.com/interview/richardhudolin.php/, par. 18.

49. Ibid., par. 5.

50. See ibid.

Fig. 16a.

Fig. 16b.

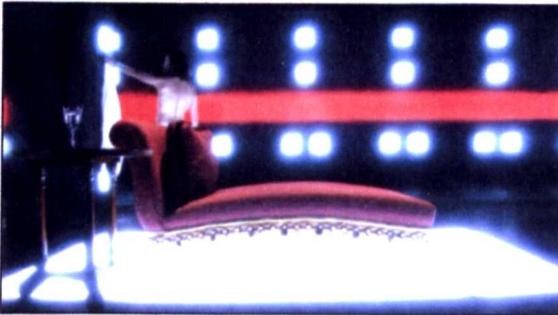*Battlestar Galactica*, "You Can't Go Home Again" (1.05).

Fig. 17.

Battlestar Galactica, "Collaborators" (3.05).

continues using outdated equipment that had proven reliable. Galactica was built in the beginning of the previous war. It is a veteran battlestar, the last of its kind still serving, and the only military vessel without integrated computer networks. Thanks to these unique characteristics, Galactica survives the attack that neutralises the defence system of the Twelve Colonies and destroys them in the miniseries. This narrative justification indicates that these non-futuristic elements are to be taken not as imitating the past, but as coming from it. As Charles Shiro Tashiro recalls, "Because the image of the future must rely on general, socially shared images in order to function, its appearance will inevitably be dated by the fashions and assumptions current during production."[51] *Battlestar Galactica* makes this process of visual design manifest, giving it a narrative logic and justification: there is something from the past in its imagined future.

Private spaces follow a similar design pattern. Bill Adama's lodging is filled with homelike furniture and objects that make it habitable, even cosy. In "You Can't Go Home Again", Admiral Adama and his son, Captain Leland Adama, discuss the ongoing search for Starbuck with President Laura Roslin (Mary McDonnell) and Executive Officer Saul Tigh (Michael Hogan). The walls have the same grey tone of the control room, but the lighting is now in warm browns and yellows instead of cold blues and greens (fig. 16a). The oil painting revealed behind Roslin (fig. 16b), the table lamps, the red rug, make up a personal and informal environment at variance with the straight, oblique and horizontal, lines of the architecture of the ship. This contrasts with the rooms of the Cylon basestar, first seen in "Collaborators" (3.05). There, the walls have an illuminated red band and bright circular lights, reminiscent of a Suprematist painting (fig. 17). The pure geometrical forms and the intense and diffused lighting imbue the space with an abstract quality. Unlike the chairs in Adama's lodging, the chaise-long looks like a decorative object, something almost stripped of its utility and positioned to be admired.

Other identifiable objects become at times a focus of attention in *Battlestar Galactica*. Tashiro posits that "[o]bjects exist independently of a story. In this state they have their own

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51. Charles Shiro Tashiro, *Pretty Pictures: Production Design and the History Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), p. 10.

Fig. 18.

Battlestar Galactica, "Litmus" (1.06).

Fig. 19.

Battlestar Galactica, "Home, Part 1" (2.06).

string of associations. Once placed in a narrative, objects and spaces acquire meaning [that is specific."[52] Commander Adama builds and paints a miniature boat in his cabin throughout the first and second seasons. It is a large model of a sailing vessel, square-rigged, and with several decks; but it is not a warship, because it lacks any openings for cannons. Using a warship would have reduced it to a small-scale replica of Galactica, the battleship that Adama commands. The miniature is crucial for itself, as a unique object, and not for its figurative and general meaning. Specifically, it is crucial because of the actions that Adama has to carry out to create it. This is readily confirmed when the context in which modelling appears in the series is taken into account. In "Litmus" (1.06), Adama is cutting and perfecting small pieces for the model while reprimanding Chief Tyrol (Aaron Douglas). Tyrol had abandoned his post, causing a serious breach of security. One of his subordinates took the blame and was consequently imprisoned. In this scene, the Chief tries to persuade the Admiral to release the detainee, but the reply that he gets is that he gave a poor example of leadership and organisation. Adama's work on the model, on the other hand, is patient and meticulous (fig. 18) — it underlines his entitlement, stemming from his commitment and not simply from his rank, to call attention to Tyrol's carelessness.

The construction of large models of sailing vessels is not exactly a hobby for Adama. He may do it for pleasure, but from what is shown he does not do it in his leisure time. In "Home, Part 1" (2.06), Adama confides in Lieutenant Anastasia Dualla (Kandyse McClure) about his son and Roslin and a recent shooting incident, while painting the boat. The fleet of refugees had been divided into two factions: one led by Roslin, the other by Adama. Dualla reminds him that parents, children, and friends are separated. Adama attempts to dismiss her, but she insists that it is time to heal the wounds. This heated discussion happens while Adama is finally finishing the model with paint. He sustains his attention to the totality of the work at hand, handling the paint brush with a relaxed assurance (fig. 19) — the kind of overall understanding that he is lacking as a leader. Once again, the motif of the boat is used to express aspects of Adama's character.

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52. Tashiro, *Pretty Pictures*, p. 9.

The blend of disparate features and components is customary in the science fiction genre. In *Battlestar Galactica*, design motifs have a distinctly expressive purpose. The design visual tone of the series — its character — is based on a mix that expresses and fosters ambivalence, mixed feelings, contradictory ideas about, for example, technology and humanity, the old and the new. The physical appearance of Cylon models, the location and configuration of the control room and its telephones, the furnishings of Adama's lodging, the decoration of the Cylon basestar, the miniature boat that Adama constructs, are aspects and elements that are contrasting and unexpected. This expressive function is but one of many that design motifs can fulfil. Sometimes these motifs are used to repeat forms within the fictional world — *Pushing Daisies* (2007-9), about a pie-maker who is able to bring life to the dead, multiplies circles in its design, from shots framed within ring-shaped foregrounds to fruit pies, from circular shapes in the background to round windows. Design motifs can have expressive, formal, narrative, or symbolic functions. But whether they express ideas or feelings, repeat forms, ground the narrative, or symbolise something else, they invariably pattern the diegetic universe and give it an aesthetic signature.

2.2. Performance Motifs

The aesthetic characteristics of typical sitcoms connect them with theatre — and, in addition, with early silent films — since they were usually performed and filmed before a studio audience and the fourth wall of the set is absent. Some typical sitcoms forgo the audience and substitute its laughter with a laugh track, but still use multiple cameras that simultaneously record the scene, maintaining the connection with the theatrical scheme. Atypical sitcoms like *Arrested Development* (2003-6) and *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (2000-) lack these characteristics. Even so, Jonathan Bignell and Jeremy Orlebar propose this summary:

> The genre of sitcom is a particular combination of elements such as scripted fictional
> narrative, self-conscious performance by actors, jokes and physical comedy, and studio

audience laughter. Focusing on performance discourages the audience from judging speech and behaviour according to the norms of everyday behaviour.[53]

Friends also opts for self-consciousness, diverse humour, studio filming, and stylisation — with the intent to develop an intimate ensemble comedy. *Friends* combines the disconnected arrangement of a series with the connected structure of serials, defying the idea that sitcoms resist or reject change, continually reiterating the same established state of things.[54] It makes full use of the immediacy of situation comedy and, simultaneously, develops the intimacy of a group of six friends. In this television show, the comic effects produced by the performers are often a collective result, as shared as the protagonists' lives and histories. This complex connection generates more understated performance motifs than, for instance, the ones that the stand-up comedy moments from an episode of *Seinfeld* (1990-98) epitomise.

"My friends *are* my family", tells Will to his brother in *Will & Grace* (1998-2006).[55] Joanne Morreale does not mention this sitcom, but she could have, when writing that "[n]ineties sitcoms based on a 'family' of friends, such as *Ellen* (1994-98), *Friends* (1994-[2004]), and *Seinfeld* (1990-98), emphasise the characters' anxiety and neurosis rather than camaraderie; the characters serve as much as signs of cultural dysfunction as points of identification".[56] This is accurate about *Seinfeld* — and indeed this sentence is part of the introduction and its aim is to introduce the last essay of the book, precisely about this sitcom. Jerry Seinfeld played Jerry, Michael Richards played Kramer, Jason Alexander played George, and Julia Louis-Dreyfus played Elaine, the group at the heart of the series, are socially dysfunctional. They seem to get together almost casually, less to bond and more to share their embarrassment and discomfort. Morreale's words are less accurate about *Friends* — and the homogeneity of her grouping is, in fact, debatable in its generalisation.

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53. Jonathan Bignell and Jeremy Orlebar, *The Television Handbook*, 3rd edn. (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 63-64.
54. For a scholarly work that takes this as a fundamental characteristic of the genre, criticising how it goes against traditional comedy, see David Grote, *The End of Comedy: The Sit-Com and the Comedic Tradition* (Hamden: Shoestring Press, 1983).
55. In "Moveable Feast" (4.09).
56. Joanne Morreale, ed., *Critiquing the Sitcom: A Reader* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003), pp. xviii-xix.

Fig. 20a.

Fig. 20b.

Friends, "The One with the Dozen Lasagnas" (1.12).

In the opening scene of "The One with the Dozen Lasagnas" (1.12), the band of friends

sings together in Central Perk, the coffee shop where they usually gather. This is a scene hard to

imagine in *Seinfeld*. Performance here is not just an individual rendering of a comedic role. This

is one of many examples of a private moment of communion, in which the characters use

humour to emphasise their ties and convey their attentiveness to each other. Ross (David

Schwimmer) begins humming the song and then, little by little, his friends join him (fig. 20a).

Simultaneously, they make eye and physical contact (fig. 20b), intuitively acknowledging the

presence of the others and their place within the group. They also share a cultural memory, in

this case specifically televisual: this is the theme song from *The Odd Couple* (1970-75), the

popular sitcom broadcast on ABC and based on the play by Neil Simon. The song that Ross

then tries to get them to sing without success is from *I Dream of Jeannie* (1965-70), another

sitcom, broadcast on NBC. This second show is about an astronaut who falls in love with a

female genie and it is singular because of its fantasy elements — perhaps a reference too *cultish*

for the rest of them. Nevertheless, Ross's second attempt is livelier; his voice is clear, loud, and

assertive. It is also abrupt. He suddenly raises his eyes from the newspaper and starts singing.

When his friends, via Chandler (Matthew Perry), declare "We're done." — note the plural — he

does not contest this reaction, his attention immediately and shyly returns to his crossword

puzzle. It is this kind of understanding and acceptance that demonstrates the interest of the

series in performance as an ensemble endeavour.

It is easy to identify the more recognisable aspects of the individual comic performances in

Friends — for example, catch phrases and comic routines, like Joey's (Matt LeBlanc) self-

assured "How you doin'?" or Ross's timid "hi". Obviously, each of these characters has a

different personality and their humour matches this irreducible difference. However, the simple

enumeration of these obvious and independent features disregards how the series approaches

performance as a joint enterprise. This is, after all, made explicit in the theme song "I'll Be

There for You". It is easy to imagine how much would have been lost if this bond was not at

the heart of the show, guiding its moments, giving resonance to its past. It is easy, because all

there is to do is watch *Joey* (2004-6). This spin-off of *Friends* banks on the audience's

recollection of the character, but moves Joey to LA where he finds new companions that erase the memory of his old friends — a contradictory idea. Memory is vital in *Friends* as is affinity or rapport.

The achievement of rapport is analysed and appreciated by Andrew Klevan — for instance, in relation to Laurel and Hardy in *The Music Box* (1932) and their need for variation and elaboration. He argues that

> This achievement [of rapport] may be found in many films other than those from the "Golden Age" of Hollywood, and the method of analysis should be useful beyond this particular context. [...] One quality, at least, connects the performances discussed here: the awareness and responsiveness to the aspects that surround them, and the *thoroughness* of their interaction.[57]

"The One Where No One's Ready" (3.02) is exemplary in many aspects, but primarily because it distils the essence of the sitcom. The comedy arises from a very simple situation set in a single place, Monica's apartment, and followed in real time: Ross arrives at the flat to take his friends to an important function and they are not yet dressed. This is an opportunity to observe how they are dependant on each other and how their individual behaviour influences the whole group. Klevan calls attention to the fact that the performances that explore rapport are usually part of a stylistic system that is not eager to develop the narrative, allowing performers to devote themselves to the diegetic world. This episode is exactly structured around the *delaying of narrative development* and therefore is particularly suitable to analyse the interactions between performers and their surroundings. It is possible to identify performance motifs associated with each character and with the way that they relate with what and whom surrounds them. These motifs are in evidence in this episode and can be confirmed in numerous others.

Chandler and Joey provide a good demonstration of the interior dynamics within the group. The others are aware of their connection, but often disregard their playful complicity, the

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57. Andrew Klevan, *Film Performance: From Achievement to Appreciation* (London: Wallflower, 2005), p. 104.

Fig. 21.

Fig. 22.

Fig. 23.

Friends, "The One Where No One's Ready" (3.02).

Fig. 24.

Friends, "The One Where No One's Ready" (3.02).

Fig. 25.

Friends, "The One with Frank Jr." (3.05).

kind of affinity that Klevan analyses in Laurel and Hardy — the way Ross takes their jockey quarrel seriously, illustrates how misunderstood they frequently are. These are characters that repeatedly look for an audience for their humour. Chandler comments that there is no one in the room to hear his retort to Joey, when the latter takes the cushions of the chair where the former wants to sit (fig. 21). Later, Joey announces his entrance as he shows the multiple layers of Chandler's clothes that he is wearing (fig. 22). Their search for spectators has, however, different reasons: Chandler needs an audience to mask his shyness, Joey because he wants to communicate his confidence. Yet the excessiveness of Chandler's facial expressions (fig. 23) and the expressiveness of Joey's bodily postures and movement (fig. 24) are similar in the way they aim to amuse each other with their private games.

The opening sequence of "The One with Frank Jr." (3.05) is another example of these forms of play between them that works like a silent gag from Laurel and Hardy. Chandler comes home to find Joey working with wood to build an entertainment unit. Then Chandler opens his bedroom door and trips on it. Surprised, but not angry, he peeks over the sawed bottom of the door, waiting for an explanation (fig. 25). Chandler responds rapidly to Joey's lack of skill with the power saw. He remains knelling in the right position to playfully act astonished, taking pleasure in Joey's always surprising silly actions, and waiting for Joey to engage with him.

Philosophers like Aristotle have provided an account of the nature of friendship that has become prevalent in philosophy. According to it, friendship involves three related conditions:[58] *mutual caring*, that has to do with valuing moments like the one when they sing in unison; *shared activities*, like the games that Chandler and Joey play; and *intimacy*. The intimate relationship of these characters is revealed in the main contexts of the series and of its performance: the two apartments, Monica and Rachel's and Joey and Chandler's, and the Central Perk's couch — two homes and a homely object in a semi-public space. These are places imaginatively used and reinvented to spark laughter with as many variations as the intricacies of their connection.

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58. Bennett Helm, "Friendship", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (2005), http:// plato.stanford.edu/entries/friendship/#1/, par. 18.
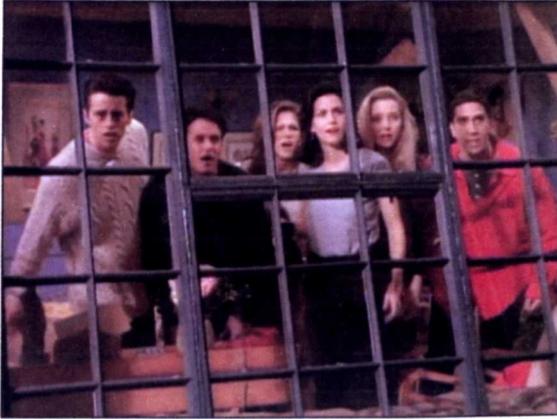
Fig. 26a.

Fig. 26b.

Friends, "The One with the Evil Orthodontist" (1.20).

Karen Lury writes that "[p]erhaps the most common set for the television sitcom is the domestic living room, a wide variety of sitcoms rely on a 'main room', usually a sitting room, with a couch, chairs and television where the characters can congregate."[59] She goes on to mention the useful, enumerative work of Jeremy G. Butler.[60] Conventionally, the sofa is directly or almost facing the audience in a way "reminiscent of a theatrical staging" and the sitcom has "characteristically, a closed set"[61] where the outside world is almost never shown. What is peculiar about *Friends* is how this closure mirrors the closeness of the characters. The limits of the set are displayed to reinforce the idea that they are a family with its own spaces. In the beginning of "The One with the Evil Orthodontist" (1.20) once again they notice the "Ugly Naked Guy" across the street — this time he has gravity boots. Monica calls for the rest of the gang (fig. 26a) and the next shot, from outside the apartment, shows them collectively looking beyond the limits of the frame (fig. 26b). It is a shot that is not followed by a reverse-shot. Additionally, they spot someone looking at them and feel invaded. This is an instance of how the off-screen space is recurrently used, especially during the first season, to delimit their areas, underline its frontiers, and therefore affirm their ties and unity. Maybe this is why the ending of the series was so fitting. They simply leave Monica's apartment, *together*, and then the camera captures the emptiness that the group's absence has left behind.

Brett Mills notes that "sitcom foregrounds performance more obviously than other forms".[62] In *Friends*, performance motifs make a significant contribution to the familiarisation with the characters and the complexities of their friendship. Their reciprocal understanding and conviviality, unique rapport and camaraderie, and closed interaction and intimacy, are revealed through subtle details of the actors' performance. Performance motifs may instead underline the separateness of characters, their awkwardness with each other, the lack of rapport between them, as in *Seinfeld*. In every fiction series, performances establish the characters and express their change through the way actors perform their roles — and motifs pattern how they react, behave, inhabit, and interact with the fictional world.

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59. Karen Lury, *Interpreting Television* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), p. 157.
60. For this listing of sitcom conventions, see Jeremy G. Butler, *Television: Critical Methods and Applications*, 2nd edn. (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002), pp. 95-102.
61. Lury, *Interpreting Television*, p. 157.
62. Brett Mills, *Television Sitcom* (London: BFI, 2005), p. 68.

Fig. 27a.

Fig. 27b.

Criminal Minds, "Extreme Aggressor" (1.01).

2.3. Image/Sound Motifs

CBS has broadcast a group of very successful and thus long-running police procedurals. This crime sub-genre concentrates on the backstage routines and internal procedures of police investigation and emerged in film after World War II.[63] Since the same network has aired *Criminal Minds* (2004-), *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, its two spinoffs *CSI: NY* (2004-) and *CSI: Miami* (2002-), *Numb3rs* (2004-10), and *Without a Trace* (2002-9), they compete with each other and have to possess distinctive features that single them out. There is undeniably a commercial rationale, or imperative, in this. Nevertheless, it would be hasty to dismiss the creativity of the solutions that set these series apart, based solely on this logic and these reasons. In truth, commercial and other types of constraints may enable creativity.[64] Image motifs (sometimes combined with sound motifs) play a key role in the differentiation between these series. Exactly because they are police procedurals, these motifs work in conjunction with narrative elements to find engaging ways to render inference, derived from the analysis of evidence and the pursuing of clear reasoning.[65]

The protagonists of *Criminal Minds* are a team of profilers from the FBI's Behavioral Analysis Unit (BAU). The focus of the series is on the criminal rather than the crime. Forensic evidence is secondary to signs that manifest the psyche of the unknown subject or "unsub". Understanding the actions and reactions of the offender is crucial to the group of federal agents — an instrumental means to a future arrest. In "Extreme Agressor" (1.01), special agent Jason Gideon (Mandy Patinkin) presents the profile to an audience of colleagues: the man they are looking for is white, in his mid-twenties, and is someone who would blend in and pass unnoticed. When Jason gives this last piece of information, the entrance of a man from the right is superimposed (fig. 27a) and the background changes slowly. The profiler then looks back, fleetingly crossing glances with the man in the street crowd (fig. 27b). Next, the new

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63. Gray Cavender and Sarah Keturah Deutsch, "*CSI* and Forensic Realism", *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2008), http://www.albany.edu/scj/jcjpc/vol15.html/, p. 35.

64. For a careful discussion and defence of this idea, see Berys Gaut and Paisley Livingston, eds., *The Creation of Art: New Essays in Philosophical Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), particularly Stein Haugom Olsen's "Culture, Convention, and Creativity" (pp. 192-207) and Noël Carroll's "Art, Creativity, and Tradition" (pp. 308-35).

65. Within the specific frame of reference of these series, these sequences become serial units. They can be described as *inference sequences* in the same way that the sequences in *Dream On* were described as *fantasy sequences* (see p. 90).
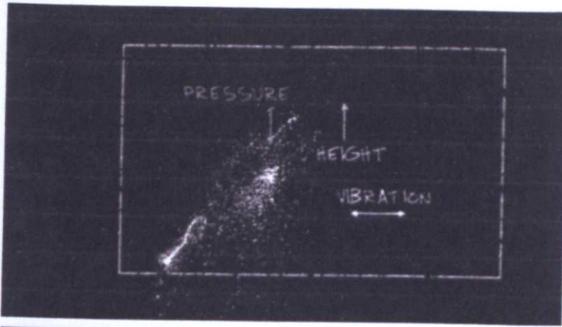
Fig. 28a.

Fig. 28b.

Numb3rs, "Pilot" (1.01).

background disappears with Jason already turned towards his listeners. This is the first of three background changes in this scene. The second shows the killer leaving the crime scene previously shown. The third is of a young boy at the funeral of one of his parents. This motif is used more than once in this episode — making it an intra-episode motif — but this is uncommon. The motif is repeatedly yet irregularly used throughout the first two seasons of *Criminal Minds* when some profiles are presented; it has become rare from the third season on. Some of the surrounding images inserted are more generic such as the first and third in this scene; others are more specific like the second. A few are illustrative and use well-known serial killers as examples. They became more sophisticated, in some cases allowing the agent to physically interact with the new surroundings. There is already a hint of this when the profiler and the man recognise each other's presence. Sound primarily serves the suggestive images either by complementing them with subtle musical changes (the prolonged chords over the busy street scene), by introducing ambient sounds (the water drops from the crime location), or by adding signalling audio effects (the screeching sounds heard when the boy at the funeral looks towards Jason). Common to these expository scenes is the way the detailed information suggests pictures to the presenter as well as the listener. In this sense, these changes of background can be interpreted as mind pictures.

In *Numb3rs*, a mathematician helps his brother, an FBI special agent, by applying analytical methods to current cases. In the first episode, Professor Charles Eppes (David Krumholtz) uses the sprinkler on the family house backyard to explain to his sibling Don how he can aid him to catch a killer. According to Charles, there is no mathematical way to predict where the drops will land; there are too many variables. The sprinkler is enclosed in an expanding rectangle followed by black-and-white, high-contrast, diagrammatic images and enhanced, isolated sounds of the scattered water drops, plus the names of variables like "pressure" and "vibration" (fig. 28a). Then the professor turns his head from the window and puts his open hand on the glass and explains that if they could not see the sprinkler it is mathematically possible to determine the point of origin from the knowledge of where the drops hit the ground (fig. 28b). Using the same method he can analyse what the crime sites have in common. He uses ordinary and concrete things to explain how his mathematical and abstract analysis can help. In contrast with *Criminal Minds*,

Fig. 29a.

Fig. 29b.

Fig. 29c.

Fig. 29d.

CSI: Crime Scene Investigation, "Pilot" (1.01).

this is a formal motif that appears in every episode of *Numb3rs*, at least once — and it is, for the most part, expounded by Professor Eppes. As a consultant, Professor Eppes has to make his aid understandable to others — to the FBI agents and to the audience. The function of these montages of stylised images (and sounds) and graphic imagery is exactly to make the professor's assistance vivid and intelligible. Following Karen Lury's evocative terminology, these are *images which demonstrate*. As she states, these images need not have "a close relationship to the 'real'. Other kinds of images — paintings, drawings, maps, graphs and computer models — are more akin to illustrations as they are used to make a variety of information more interesting or accessible."[66] Taking these images as demonstrations is more fitting than considering them as illustrations, because their function is to *validate* the mathematical approach and not simply to explain it by examples. These sequences, inter-episode (occasionally intra-episode) motifs, are not directly related with the crime or the criminal like in *Criminal Minds*. They explicate a conceptual method that assists the investigation.

CSI: Crime Scene Investigation focuses on the work of a group of Las Vegas forensic scientists. In the inaugural episode, Gil Grissom (William Petersen) joins the hands of a new female colleague. Her thumbs are up and he uses his to push them forward simulating how the victim would have pressed the trigger (fig. 29a). The camera plunges into the dead body (fig. 29b), rests (fig. 29c), and then makes the inverse movement showing the small chest wound that resulted from the shot (fig. 29d). This is what is called the "CSI shot", a close-up of the interior of a human body that shows the possible or actual cause of death. It was not invented for the show, but its frequent use in the series led to this designation. Just a year before the beginning of *CSI*, a similar shot was used in *Three Kings* (1999) to demonstrate the brutal damage that a fired bullet can do inside a human body. In the case of *CSI*, the shot is not demonstrative, but *exploratory*. Notice, for instance, how in this first CSI shot the gunshot is something in between an acousmatic and a visualised sound — in the former, the sound lacks a visible originating source; in the latter, the origin of the sound is situated on screen.[67] There is no gun in the scene

66. Lury, *Interpreting Television*, p. 19.
67. For a detailed description and examination of these terms, see Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* [1990], ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 71-73.

from *Three Kings*, but the camera rotates, rapidly following an imaginary *and* visible bullet. In *CSI*, the trajectory of the bullet coincides with the movement of the camera, therefore the source of the sound is not visible on screen — the camera does not follow the bullet, it takes its place. The gunshot is more properly a *virtual sound* — that is, one that arises from simulation, since the apprentice's hands imitate or stand for the gun. The sound is not really acousmatic or visualised: it has a visible yet imaginary source. This calls attention to make-believe as a key aspect of the sequence: the investigators imagine the gunshot as a way of exploring possibilities and ascertaining certainties. The CSI shot gives visual form to a thought experiment that proves that it could not have been a suicide — "The wound would look like this", says Grissom over the image of the imagined wound. This is what justifies the use of a second CSI shot that shows that it was murder: the shooter would have to have been farther away to produce the bigger contours of the actual wound, whose image closes the second CSI shot. The first shot tests a hypothesis, the second one illustrates a fact. Other CSI shots forgo virtual sounds, but preserve this exploratory impulse, invariably including sounds of perforations or lacerations — like the one heard when the camera as the bullet penetrates the chest. As Karen Lury writes, these

> sounds remain believable since they are tangible (and thus appear "truthful" at the level of sensation) even when the images they apparently support are fantastic or unbelievable (or as commonly occurs in earlier "reconstruction scenes" mistaken in their description of the event).[68]

In a detailed analysis of these shots, Weissman and Boyle claim that from "Anonymous" (1.08) onwards "a quick dissolve to white [...] marks the beginning and end of the 'CSI shot' and separates it from the fiction of the investigation".[69] The previous analysis shows however that these shots have been clearly marked as distinct from other shots since the beginning, even if not

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68. Lury, "*CSI* and Sound", in *Reading "CSI": Crime TV Under the Microscope*, ed. Michael Allen (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), p. 112.

69. Elke Weissmann and Karen Boyle, "Evidence of Things Unseen: The Pornographic Aesthetic and the Search for Truth in *CSI*", in *Reading "CSI": Crime TV Under the Microscope*, ed. Michael Allen (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), p. 96.

with white flashes book-ending them. Grasping CSI shots as visualisations of thought experiments is consistent with how the series is organised around laboratory tests. It also highlights the different usage of this motif in the other *CSIs*. *CSI: Miami* favours CSI shots of electronic and mechanical devices like computers and firearms — underlying a core interest in technology and its workings. *CSI: NY* opts for a less speculative and kinetic use of these shots — they become a means of documenting the findings of the detectives. It must be recalled, however, that CSI shots were never regular inter-episode, much less intra-episode, motifs and they have become rare as the three shows progressed. Since the beginning, the series had other ways of giving form to inference — notably, re-enactments, flashbacks, and superimpositions. Nonetheless, as the name points out, CSI shots became identifiable motifs of the series. In spite of their particularity, seeing these shots ultimately either as exploratory in *CSI*, as technological in *CSI: Miami*, or as documentary in *CSI: NY*, still defines the franchise as presenting narratives that focus on the disclosure of truth of the events and who is the perpetrator.[70] This narrative purpose differentiates *CSI* from *Without a Trace* — a difference clearly spotlighted in an inter-series two-part episode. The *CSI* instalment is called "Who and What" (8.06) and discloses the identity and crimes of a serial killer in Las Vegas. The *Without a Trace* follow-up "Where and Why" (6.06) continues the investigation, revealing the reasons why the killer run away with his son to New York. The titles of the episodes signal different narrative foci paralleled by salient aesthetic differences.

Without a Trace centres on a fictional FBI missing persons unit. Each episode follows the investigation of a disappearance. The awareness about the passage of time is a central aspect of the series — captions inform the audience of the number of hours that the person has been missing and a timeline is established on a white board early in the investigation. In the opening episode, Jack Malone (Anthony LaPaglia) and another agent are questioning the boss of a missing 28-year-old female marketing executive. He explains to the agents that the last time he saw her was in a meeting where she gave a wonderful presentation. The camera moves in

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70. Arguably the focus is on the first-mentioned. Weissmann argues that *CSI* "presents 'less a whodunit' than a 'what happened'", in "The Victim's Suffering Translated: *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* and the Crime Genre", *Intensities*, no. 4 (2007), http://intensities.org/Issues/Intensities_Four.html, par. 3.
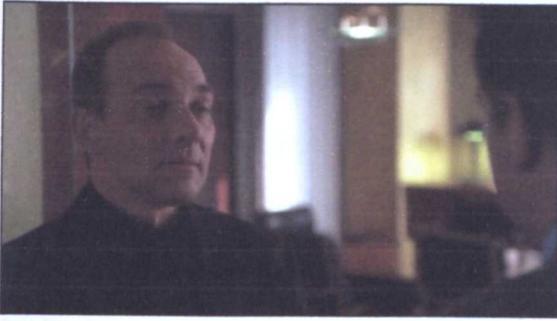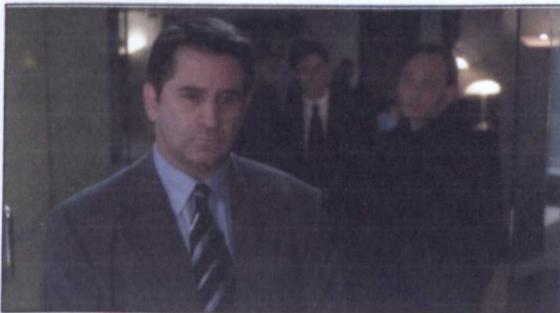
Fig. 30a.

Fig. 30b.

Fig. 30c.

Fig. 30d.

Without a Trace, "Pilot" (1.01).

127

between them to the room (fig. 30a) and the scene described by the man appears on screen —
an appearance indicated by the image coming into focus and marked by a fleeting transitional
sound (figs. 30b-c). Jack positions himself as if watching the scene (fig. 30d) and the way the
sequence cuts between him and the woman suggests that he is imagining the past in the present.
He does this based on the account that we hear throughout. This intra-episode motif creates a
bridge between now and yesterday in the same space. On most occasions, the relation between
the account and the agent's imagining is not as clear as it is in this first instance. However, it is
made clear in all cases that these are not flashbacks, given that some of these accounts turn out
to be partial or complete lies.[71] The motif, because it occurs more than once in every episode,
calls attention to its centrality. Each time the camera moves from an interview and the screen
transitions to the scene that the interviewee described, it is not just an imaginable past that is
conjured up, it is an imagined past where those who went missing and are being sought are
present. These described and conjured up scenes provide information that has to be attentively
scrutinised, as Jack does. Their verification, not their mere accumulation, establish the
movements of the vanished people.

In these police procedurals, image motifs visualise inference, while sounds play different
complementary functions — generally as introductory cues. In each series, the processes
involving deduction from evidence and reasoning are as specific as their presentation. Changes
of background illustrate the profile of serial killers in *Criminal Minds*. Sequences with diagrams
exemplify the mathematics used to solve crimes in *Numb3rs*. Shots of inside the human body
explore possible or actual causes of death in *CSI*. Scenes of disappeared people based on accounts
evoke the past in *Without a Trace*. Functioning as illustration, demonstration, exploration, or
evocation, these image and sound motifs differentiate the series within the CBS line-up.
Furthermore, this product differentiation was made manifest since the beginning of the
programmes, which is why all the examples analysed in detail came from pilot episodes. For the
most part, image and sound motifs are noticeable, because they are not connected with or

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71. The three *CSI*s also use unreliable re-enactments from time to time, but not with the same consistency or
restrictedness. Such sequences may be inserted when the investigators are processing the crime scene, interviewing
witness, interpreting laboratory results, interrogating suspects, discussing the case, and other situations.

integrated in the diegetic world like design and performance motifs are. They pertain more to *how* the series is filmed and edited and less to *what* it is being filmed or seem to be filmed — they also involve aspects like lighting that characterise how things appear on screen. In *Tru Calling* (2003-5), a medical graduate student works at a morgue where corpses suddenly ask her for help. She then relives the previous day and saves whoever asked for her aid. Between the appeal of the dead body and her reliving of the prior day, a succession of images of that day converge to the centre of the screen as if the day is rewinding. Just like in the four CBS police procedurals, the conspicuous nature of image and sound motifs is paramount to how they characterise the series and give form to its central aims.

3. Markings of Series

The units and motifs of television fiction series are utilised as identifying marks and as patterns of identifying marks, that is, as patterned pieces that become distinctive. This is why this chapter has not only analysed these structural and conceptual elements but also examined how they are used and turned into markings of series. The variety of examples laid out the gamut of units and motifs (along with a wide range of their potential use). This taxonomic work, which will continue in the next chapters, is useful insofar as it allows us to make distinctions that are sometimes difficult to make, exactly because this kind of work has not been done in a systematic and reflective fashion. Stan Beeler's work on *Charmed* (1996-2008) shows this difficulty and this lack.

Beeler discusses "two examples of the primary visual leitmotivs that are used to enhance narrative continuity"[72] in this series about four good witches, the Halliwell sisters, Prue, Piper, Phoebe and, later, Paige: the Halliwell Manor and its attic. Yet instead of saying that the manor and the attic are visual leitmotifs, it is more precise to say that the first gives rise to an image motif and the second to a design motif. Refining Beeler's terminology is a way of demonstrating

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72. Stan Beeler, "There Is Nothing New in the Underworld: Narrative Recurrence and Visual Leitmotifs in *Charmed*", in *Investigating "Charmed": The Magic Power of TV*, ed. Karin and Stan Beeler (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), p. 138.

Fig. 31.

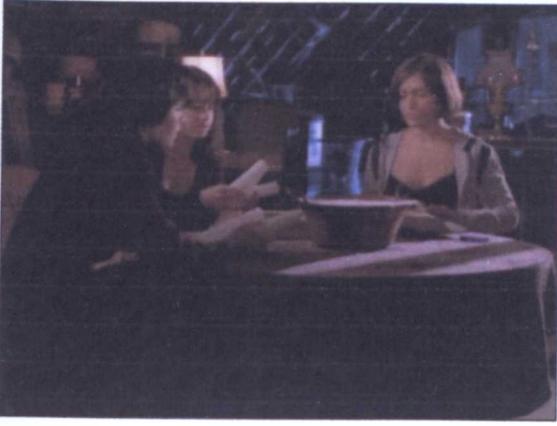*Charmed*, "Something Wicca This Way Comes" (1.01).

COSTUME DESIGNER
DANIELA GSCHWENDTNER

Fig. 32.

Charmed, "Forever Charmed" (8.22).

Fig. 33.

Charmed, "Something Wicca This Way Comes" (1.01).

Fig. 34.

Charmed, "Forever Charmed" (8.22).

the usefulness of the terms developed in this chapter. In fact, his insights into the Manor attic are mostly about the design of the attic and how, since the beginning, in "Something Wicca This Way Comes" (1.01), it is transformed from a cluttered space into the ideal place for casting spells (fig. 31). For instance, in his words, the room is

> brightly lit with stained-glass windows that evoke the sacred atmosphere of a church, while using abstract patterns of light yellow, blue and green glass rather than the specific images of holy figures more common in church windows.[73]

He also draws attention to fact that the Book of Shadows, a precious written collection of spells, is at first carried around the Halliwell home and then kept in the attic on a lectern. We may add that the centrality of the object and its sheltered placement is underlined in the closing credits, from "Witch Trial" (2.01) on. The credits roll over an image of the lectern, with the closed book resting on it and the open door of the attic in the background — even in the few cases in which the volume was not used, like in the concluding episode (fig. 32), "Forever Charmed" (8.22). The design motif of the book carefully placed on the lectern is turned into an image motif repeatedly used in a particular segment, the closing credits.

The shots of the Halliwell Manor facade at different times of the day become an image motif, used as an establishing device similar to the images of the Golden Gate Bridge. The first episode, "Something Wicca This Way Comes", opens with a nocturnal image of the bridge (fig. 33), a concise way of locating the action in San Francisco. The shots of the Manor facade and of the Golden Gate Bridge are then regularly inserted into episodes as transitional sequences. The title sequence features images of the bridge prominently (fig. 34), right until the last episode, "Forever Charmed", which confirms the importance of the locational function of these images for the visual identity of the show. The scholar is right to point out that the images of the bridge are more serviceable than those of the manor. The aerial shots of bridge convey the place (San Francisco) and time (sunrise, day, sunset, night) of the story, while the low-angle, three-quarter front shots of the manor "accentuates the building's unique charm, a Victorian remnant

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73. Beeler, "There Is Nothing New in the Underworld", p. 137.
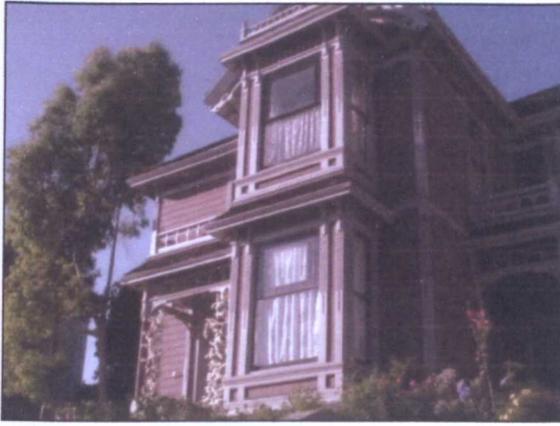
Fig. 35.

Charmed, "Dead Man Dating" (1.04).

that stands out in North American architecture, which tends toward new and featureless buildings in residential areas".[74] His remarks on how these views of the manor express the *uniqueness* of the Charmed Ones through the unique character of their house, resemble my previous comments on how the transitional sequences of *Boston Legal* convey the casual feel of that series. The manor may be one of those "architectural elements that are not so well known as the standard city signifiers that make up the opening scenes of the series",[75] yet it rapidly turned into a well-known element and location. Evidence of this is that only two, "Thank You for Not Morphing" (1.03), or three, "Dead Man Dating" (1.04), episodes after the first, the opening and establishing image could already be of the manor (fig. 35). These images remained regular throughout the rest of the series, if not as an opening shots, then as transitional ones.

As it has been shown, the framework proposed in this chapter of serial units and patterned motifs can help us to refine analyses like Beeler's. The patterns of the two motifs of *Charmed*, the image motif of the Halliwell Manor facade shots and the design motif of the space and objects of the building's attic, reveal the gapped segmentation of the series. The number of gaps between episodes and seasons grow according to regular intervals because, as Thompson explains, "[e]ven serialized comics and movies, which may be released over long periods of time lack the regularity of the television series."[76] Motifs bridge these gaps, connecting episodes and seasons, and giving unity to the series. The next two chapters will describe the principles that *regularly* turn pieces, units and motifs, into markings of a show. These principles of composition are specific to each series and establish relations between serial elements, in this way structuring the style of the programme. The first two of these principles are *repetition* and *variation*.

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74. Beeler, "There Is Nothing New in the Underworld", p. 138.
75. Ibid., p. 136.
76. Thompson, *Storytelling in Film and Television*, p. 32.

Chapter Three:

Repetition and Variation

The units and motifs of television fiction series are arranged first and foremost according to the principles of repetition and variation. Repeating and varying the elements that have been analysed in the previous chapter creates a system of relations, gives a particular form to a series, a *serial form.*[1] Consider this example from *30 Rock* (2006-), a sitcom about the writing and production of a live sketch comedy programme. Kenneth (Jack McBrayer) feels that New York has corrupted his pure soul and leaves for Georgia. The rest of the cast then turn to the camera to sing Gladys Knight & the Pips' hit song, "Midnight Train to Georgia". The musical number is surprising and closes with a few added lines of lyrics, after Kenneth returns and confesses that he missed the train. Should we take this moment as the expected unexpected or the unexpected expected? That is, is this a repetition or a variation? Series rely on a dynamic in which something similar remains on the one hand and something different within certain limits emerges on the other. The surprise that this sequence engenders at the end of "Episode 210" (2.10) is similar to the one that other sequences of the show elicit: the clips from a Spanish soap opera starring Jack Donaghy's (Alec Baldwin) double as the villain in "Generalissimo" (3.10) or the trailer of *Jefferson* where Tracy (Tracy Morgan) plays multiple roles in "Corporate Crush" (1.19). In this sense, these instances repeat a performance motif that has to do with playing, with the inventiveness involved in rendering other parts and in acting out of character. They are also variations on this same motif.

This chapter distinguishes between aesthetic repetition and variation in television fiction series. Repetitions and variations in television fiction series are a consequence of the serial structure of these works. We find repeated and varied elements in films, but in series they are

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1. These principles are, of course, also at work in film and many scholars have called attention to them — see, e.g., David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 8th edn. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), pp. 66-67. The replacement of *film form* by *serial form* signals the difference between how such structural relations shape films and television series.

more layered since they can happen within and between scenes, sections, sequences, episodes, and seasons. The successive added pieces of these programmes create an expanding network of connections — expanding in number and in complexity. This structure allows manifold comparisons of elements and multiple points of entry, but it is not an instance of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic structure,[2] a theoretical model that may immediately come to mind. Television series have a base organisation around regulated cycles of units in linear and sequential fashion. This contrasts with the rhizome, which "connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature".[3] This is not to deny that the rhizome, as a mode of knowledge, can be applied to television series. Perhaps it can connect pieces that do not immediately follow from others. Yet this is something that series themselves explicitly explore, for example, by recovering elements that had been left hanging or dormant for some time. As a descriptive concept, the rhizome is adequate to describe the heterogenous, multiple, disrupted, cartographic, transferential world wide web, but not these structures. Series are linear, sequential, even if within this linearity and sequentiality the relationship between their elements range from direct to indirect ones. Aesthetic analysis demands a respect for the work, that is, for the choices embodied in its aesthetic properties. The creative comparisons of elements and casual points of entry that rhizomatic thinking favours may run against the base organisation of a series when considered as a work with unity.

This unity is composed piece by piece through the actions of repetition and variation. Examining these actions that regulate serial composition therefore allows us to make sense of how the aesthetics of series emerge. As the example above makes clear, they are usually connected: variation may be defined as repetition *plus* difference, a repetition that does not aim at sheer similarity. The way episodes and other units fit into a series is a question of weighting the repetition and variation that they represent within the whole structure. Stanley Cavell provides conceptual tools that can help us think about how episodes fit (or belong) to a serial television programme. In an essay on the aesthetics of television, the philosopher distinguishes

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2. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* [1980], trans. Brian Massumi (New York: Continuum, 2004), pp. 3-28.
    3. Ibid., p. 23.

between two definitions of genre: *genre-as-medium* and *genre-as-cycle*. The first applies to "groups of works in which members contest one another for membership, hence for the power to define the genre"[4] — the melodrama of the unknown woman and the comedy of remarriage[5] are two film genres that he has critically analysed following this definition. As William Rothman explains,

> When a remarriage comedy diverges from other members of the genre, it *compensates* for this divergence. The genre undergoes revision as new members introduce new points of compensation. When other films *negate* a feature shared by the genre's members, those films comprise an "adjacent" genre.[6]

This form of thinking about genre eschews essentialism for an open understanding of genres as a category of works with family resemblances.[7] Cavell argues that "compensation and negation are not invoked either in genre-as-cycle or in serial-episode procedure".[8] Instances of a television series exemplify a *formula*, which is to be thought of not as a pejorative description, but as that which formats the identity of the show. This points towards the acknowledgment that, contrary to examples of genre-as-medium, instances of genre-as-cycle like the *Lethal Weapon* tetralogy (1987, 1989, 1992, 1998) are usually signalled as belonging to a generic group or a series because they are presented under the same name. At the same time, this connection is not merely nominal.[9] Episodes of series share narrative and aesthetic features (the formula) that generate repetitions as well as variations, similarities as well as differences. In this sense, television series are nowadays more regular and complex than film series, given their continuous

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4. Stanley Cavell, *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 13.

5. See Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

6. William Rothman, "Cavell on Film, Television, and Opera", in *Stanley Cavell*, ed. Richard Eldridge (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 218 (emphasis mine).

7. The philosophical idea of family resemblance comes from Ludwig Wittgenstein. See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* [1953], 50th Anniversary ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), sect. 67.

8. Cavell, "The Fact of Television", in *Themes Out of School: Effects and Causes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 246. The philosopher adds some remarks on the "absolute *nonarbitrariness*" (p. 249) of a format, which is the same as saying that a format embodies neither random nor whimsical choices.

9. In fact, it may not even be nominal. *The Dark Knight* (2008) followed *Batman Begins* (2005), e.g., without their titles giving any indication of their connection.

production and seasonal planning and also the fact that they generally consist of a much higher number of different and connected parts.

One of Cavell's fundamental points is that because of these distinct characteristics, genre-as-medium is connected with individual works — *Stella Dallas* (1937), a melodrama of the unknown woman, for example — while genre-as-cycle is associated with cycles of works. In the case of television series this means that the focus is not on an episode, the individual work, but on the program, the serial work. Episodes belong to a series as if they belong to a specific, or more precisely *specified*, new genre. Developing Cavell's ideas, we can say that episodes of a series do not involve negation and compensation, but instead *distinction and accommodation*. A mismatched individual work (or episode) does not negate its affiliation and suggest another genre as much as it distinguishes itself from other works of that genre-as-cycle (or series); this is what happens when we compare two episodes from two different shows. More importantly, a divergent single work does not compensate for its divergence within the genre. Divergences are accommodated within an already established, but evolving formula. The divergent elements are acknowledged, and adapted, based on the dynamic of repetitions and variations of the television series, as the musical sequence from *30 Rock* demonstrates. Contrary to the melodramas of the unknown woman, the identity of the instance, its belonging to the series, is settled from the start by the formula. Formulas evolve with and in seriality; Cavell is apt to point out that no features of plot need be common to all episodes and that a formula may be specified simply by recurring characters and their relationships.[10] A genre-as-medium is revised, a genre-as-cycle is developed. Revision and development mark their difference. The formula develops as the series develops, fostering something that lacks in the genre-as-medium: *continuity and connectedness*. This continuous and connected process is multiple and it encompasses different kinds of repetition and variation.

It is common for these different ways of repeating and varying to be combined within the same series. Sometimes it is not so clear how certain cases are to be taken. As hinted at earlier, the sequence from *30 Rock* can be seen as a repetition of a performance motif or as a variation on the same motif. Seeing it as the former reveals the recurring and undefined side of the motif

10. Cavell, "The Fact of Television", p. 247.

— similar scenes explore in their way the enjoyment of playing, what will be classified ahead as *loose repetition.* Seeing it as the latter discloses the varied and usual facet of the motif — the situations are different every time and aim at being surprising every time, what will be designated later as *set variation.* The two are clearly compatible, even parallel (but we will see that there are some types of repetition that are incompatible with other kinds of variation). Taking this music sequence as a repetition or a variation is a matter of focus, a matter of choosing to focus on one or the other. Consistent, dual classifications, both repetitions and variations, apply to most elements of series. The reason for these dual classifications is easy to grasp: repetition is *almost* never a relation between identical elements or features, but rather between similar elements or features that therefore involve a degree of variation. Even title sequences, which are sometimes repeated from episode to episode without any variation, invariably change from season to season as we have seen in the previous chapter. Of course, there are cases in which the title sequence stays the same throughout the first season and there are no following seasons. Despite these cases, repetition is usually a relation between similar, not identical, elements or features.

The attempt to distinguish between *various* types of repetition in this chapter indicates that a definition of repetition as a relation between two instances of exactly the same thing — *absolute repetition,* we may call it — is inadequate. Instead, repetition has to be seen as fruitful, creative, generative, as something *living,* not dead, capable of giving rise to different forms (and significances)[11] — different yet recognisable. This typical interdependence between repetition and variation does not mean that they cannot be treated separately. The instances that follow will allow us to focus on them one at the time. We can then differentiate between the different types of repetition and variation and develop a fuller account of each of them.

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11. I am here referring to Deleuze's account of repetition in *Difference and Repetition* [1968], trans. Paul Patton (London: Continuum, 2004). This idea, and other Deleuzian ideas related to it and relevant to my arguments, will be further developed in the conclusion of this chapter.

Using some of his thoughts on difference and repetition, the ones that seem to me to be supported by intuition and ordinary thinking, does not entail a commitment to his entire philosophical work. One important characteristic of his philosophy that is at variance with my whole project is his extreme nominalism — the doctrine that general terms (universals) are mere names without any correspondence in reality and that therefore only particular things exist. I take this opportunity not only to distinguish my position from Deleuze's, but also and mostly to notice its incompatibility with the moderate realism that this research embraces. See Introduction, p. 10.

1. Extents to Repetition

One issue that has surfaced from the previous remarks on repetition is the proximity, or even the connection, between repetition and recognition. Recognition depends on the prior knowledge of the viewer about the series. Mulling over the link between the repeated and the familiar can illuminate important aspects about aesthetic repetition. *Deadwood* (2004-6), a Western drama set in the 1870s in the savage place that gives name to the programme where law and order is slowly introduced, can serve as illustration. Most episodes follow the same structure, presenting a single day, often beginning at sunrise and closing after sunset. At first, Deadwood appears to be a chaotic area. The show portrays its upgrade from a camp to a town as officers, businessmen, lawmen, prospectors, henchmen, gunslingers, prostitutes, migrants, start forming a community. The precise structure of the episodes gives visual form to the cyclical effort of these diverse people to live together. Day after day, their routines and rhythms come to the foreground — like the custom of Al Swearengen (Ian McShane), the owner of the saloon, of coming out to the veranda of his room to contemplate Deadwood from above as if he is its ruler. Episode after episode, viewers get acquainted with these patterns.[12]

There are general aspects repeated across episodes (and across series) — for example, the conventional temporal partition of episodes produced for non-pay channels in order to incorporate three to four commercial breaks.[13] The sort of repetition that has been highlighted in *Deadwood* is more specific. Repeating particular aesthetic elements decisively contributes to the sense of stability that television fiction series cultivate. Most series aim to achieve a stable and recognisable blend of elements that also creates possibilities of progression. Scholars have commented on the recurrence of characters, situations, settings in television series — especially

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12. For a study of seriality in the series from a narrative and allegorical perspective, see Sean O'Sullivan, "Old, New, Borrowed, Blue: Deadwood and Serial Fiction", in *Reading "Deadwood": A Western to Swear By*, ed. David Lavery (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), pp. 115-29.

13. This is not the case of *Deadwood*, created for HBO, a pay station. Be that as it may, other aspects of this production were pre-determined for similar reasons. HBO does not have commercials, but it still has programming slots. Therefore, the run-time of each episode was the same as in other series of this television channel like *Big Love* (2006-): about 53 minutes.

in soap operas.[14] Besides the regularity of series, which is intensified in soaps, this recurrence generates what is frequently described as familiarity. However, *repetition* is not a synonym of *familiarity*. For instance, Ellis writes that "[c]haracters in drama series on broadcast TV tend to become familiar figures".[15] Familiarity covers not only an acquaintance with the characters, but also a knowledge of the airing schedule that is integrated into the everyday life of the audience. Since the context and the experience of watching broadcast television is beyond the concerns of this thesis, what is pertinent to point out is that repetition, as an aesthetic principle, can generate familiarity. Familiarity is an effect of repetition. Similarly, when discussing soap-operas, John Corner states that "repetition is a necessary part of the narrative rhythm [...], a factor in its production of familiarity with the fictive world".[16] Of course, my subject here is not exactly the projected worlds of these fictions, but the compositional actions that create their serial aesthetic properties.[17]

Similar actions and properties have been intensely discussed in philosophy of art. Umberto Eco explains that the serial procedure, of a type or model bringing about many tokens, has not been easily accepted as an artistic one in modernity. He writes that "every work of modern art figures out a new law, imposes a new paradigm".[18] Series go against this conception of art and promise a sustained succession of similar things. This means that serialisation involves, in some way, repetition since its development entails the return of the similar. Eco suggests that clarifying what is meant by "return" and "similar" is the task of those who approach *repetition* as a research topic. He proposes that to repeat is simply "to make a replica of the same abstract type",[19] in which "return" is clarified as *a replica* and "similar" as *the same abstract type*. This seems to contrast with the kind of relation between copies of a box-set of a series since these are replicas of a concrete type. Therefore even though Eco uses it in a broader sense, perhaps

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14. See, e.g., Charlotte Brunsdon, "Writing about Soap Opera", in *Screen Tastes: Soap Opera to Satellite Dishes* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 19-25.

15. John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema Television Video*, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 139.

16. John Corner, *Critical Ideas in Television Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 58.

17. For a comprehensive and thorough philosophical study of the actions that make works of art and the characteristics of the worlds they project, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Works and Worlds of Art* [1980] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

18. Umberto Eco, "Interpreting Serials", in *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 83.

19. Ibid., p. 85.

"replica" is too strong a word, connected as it is with the concept of *duplicate* instead of *repeat*. "Simulation" may be a better term. To repeat would be then to produce a simulation of the same abstract type, that is, to generate a similar instance of such a type, strictly or loosely.[20] In *Deadwood*, the day-cycle is aesthetically presented in a more strict or loose manner. During the first season, eight out of the twelve episodes concentrate on a single day, from daybreak to nightfall. An episode like "Here Was a Man" (1.04) shows a bit of the previous night, but ends in the afternoon, providing a similar experience of time. Repetition therefore concerns recurring aesthetic units and motifs that perform similar functions. To discriminate between kinds of repetition means basically quantifying the extent, the degree of this recurrence.

Strict repetition repeats elements with exactness, even though they always appear in new contexts. This is what happens in *24* (2001-10), a drama that deals with the threat of terrorism and conspiracy, which regularly employs a restricted set of photographic and editing techniques, such as the chromatic differentiation of narrative threads. These elements contribute to the persistent dramatic tone that relies heavily on creating and sustaining suspense.

Loose repetition loosely repeats features, which come across as renewed. In *Gilmore Girls* (2000-7), a dramedy (or comedy-drama) about the close relationship between a mother and a daughter, ways of conversing and vocal inflections characterise the relationships between the characters and the different personal and social worlds that they inhabit. The looseness of these recurring features juggles dramatic and comedic moments avoiding the loss of narrative consistency.

There is a third type of repetition that is connected with these two, but is different. *Remade repetition* may be more strict or more loose yet it is, in all cases, based on a prior work with a particular set of repeated units and motifs. The American version of the comedy *The Office* (2005-), about the work environment of a paper company branch, is a good example, when compared with the original British series (2001-3). The remake refashions the style of the original, an imitation of a reportage through private interviews, casual framing, and a sense of improvisation. Not all remakes of television series also remake the aesthetic properties of the

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20. "Simulation" and "similar" both come from the same Latin word, "similis", *like*.

THE FOLLOWING TAKES PLACE
BETWEEN MIDNIGHT AND 1:00 A.M.,
ON THE DAY OF THE CALIFORNIA
PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY.

Fig. 1a.

EVENTS OCCUR IN REAL TIME.
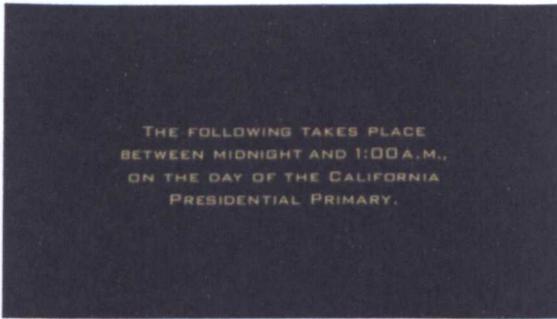
Fig. 1b.

24, "12:00 a.m. - 1:00 a.m." (1.01).

THE FOLLOWING TAKES PLACE
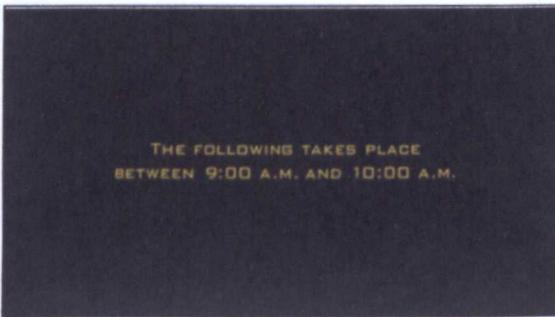BETWEEN 9:00 A.M. AND 10:00 A.M.

Fig. 2.

24, "Day 2: 9:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m." (2.02).

original series. However, when this happens, the structure of repetition that is remade in the new version becomes internal to the version, just like the first two forms of repetition are internal to particular shows. As we shall see, although it originates in another work and the link with this origin is declared, the American *The Office* has its own dynamics.

Again, the last two may seem like variations. They do indeed involve, or may involve in the case of remade repetition, a higher degree of change than the first. Yet following what has been stated about the interconnection between repetition and variation, the classification developed here is a matter of saliency, a matter acknowledging the prominence and assertiveness of repetition over variation in these instances. It is also a matter of focusing on units and motifs from the point of view of repetition. This saliency and this focus that justify this distinction will become clear in the ensuing sections dedicated to each type of repetition.

1.1. Strict Repetition

The strictness of the aesthetic principles of *24* mirror the strictness of its narrative principles. Every episode follows the same basic structure: the narrated time and the time of narration are the same. The 60 minutes of an episode (including commercial breaks) are equivalent to one hour in the fictional world. Every season of this drama presents 24 hours in the life of federal agent Jack Bauer (Kiefer Sutherland) throughout 24 episodes. This repetitive narrative structure is accompanied by a limited set of recurrent technical procedures that result in recurring stylistic units and motifs.[21]

The first season establishes the time and re-establishes the day with a short text at the beginning of each episode. In "12:00 a.m. - 1:00 a.m." (1.01), we are informed that "[t]he following takes place between midnight and 1:00 a.m., on the day of the California Presidential Primary." (fig. 1a). An additional sentence tells us that "[e]vents occur in real time." (fig. 1b). All the episodes of the subsequent seasons give information about the time frame of the events that

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21. For a rare and rich analysis of the style of the series, see Steven Peacock, "*24*: Status and Style", in *Reading "24": TV Against the Clock*, ed. Peacock (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), pp. 25-33.

144

Fig. 3.

Fig. 4a.

Fig. 4b.

24, "Day 2: 1:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m." (2.06).

follow, the starting and ending hours. The second information is dropped in the second season and it only appears in the first episode, "Day 2: 8:00 a.m. - 9:00 a.m." (2.01). "Day 2: 9:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m." (2.02) informs the viewer only about the time frame (fig. 2), because by then it has been well established that the time on screen coincides with the time in the world of the fiction. This pattern continues in the next seasons, with only a few deviations — like "Day 8: 2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m." (8.23) and "Day 8: 3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m." (8.24), the closing episodes of the series.

Throughout an episode, digital clocks situate the viewer within the one-hour frame to the second. A clock with small digits is displayed centered at the bottom of the screen superimposed on the shots. As in all episodes, in "Day 2: 1:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m." (2.06), the small clock is shown on four occasions somewhere during the sections of the episode, the first one at about 1:06 p.m. (fig. 3). The four sections of an episode are demarcated by clocks with big digits that become demarcating units — in the original broadcast, before and after the three commercial breaks, so as to show that time has continued running during the commercials. As usual, in "Day 2: 1:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.", the big clock marks the end of the sections, placed at the centre of the screen, over a black background, with sharp and deep ticking sounds. This is a kind of full stop, a way of ending a section with the simple record of the passage of time, the force that essentially drives the series. These are moments that concentrate all the attention on the ticking clock, the only thing that we see and hear. The clock returns in the same form in the beginning of the next section (fig. 4a) and then is surrounded by images of the various parallel events (fig. 4b). This is what I call *mosaic-screen*,[22] a cousin of the split-screen that is regularly used in the series. "The split screen divides the screen into two or more parts", whereas "[t]he mosaic-screen arranges one or more detached images on screen".[23]

In *24*, the mosaic-screen becomes an image motif and

conveys, not quite an anticipation of disconnection, but the prospect of a disconnection, establishing it as something that can happen at any instant. This creates a permanent

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22. See Sérgio Dias Branco, "The Mosaic-Screen: Exploration and Definition", *Refractory: A Journal of Entertainment Media*, no. 14 (2008), http://blogs.arts.unimelb.edu.au/refractory/2008/12/27/the-mosaic-screen-exploration-and-definition—sergio-dias-branco/.

23. Ibid., par. 25.

Fig. 5a.

Fig. 5b.

24, "Day 3: 3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m." (3.03).

tension and, more interestingly, an uncertainty about what is going to follow. *24* seems, on one level, to merely stress continuity and contiguity of action, but actually it does something else. It directs the audience's attention from the almost unlimited possibilities of the story to the limited scenes of the plot. It therefore constantly brings to mind the fact that some events are not shown — and consequently that those that are shown were selected and are fragments of an unravelling sequence of simultaneous events. [...] [T]he preponderance of the limits of the screen has vanished. The spectator does not look at the screen as a whole and concentrates on one of its parts like in the split screen. The isolated images and intervening spaces of the mosaic-screen ask us to choose between images as if we were selecting from various smaller screens, each one with its own narrative[.]24

There are therefore temporal and spatial dimensions to this technique. As Robin Nelson remarks, the series uses "each subframe to evoke a strand of the narrative and bring its linear tensions into the present moment".25 Yet this could be achieved with split-screens, that is, with the simple partition of the screen. What is unique to the mosaic-screen is its compositional potential. In "Day 3: 3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m." (3.03), for example, Bauer convinces the parents of Kyle Singer (Riley Smith), a boy who is possibly infected with a lethal virus, to call him so that CTU can locate him by tracking the call. When the two vertical images, one of the boy's father, the other of the boy, are composed on the black screen, the first is located at the top of the screen and the second at the bottom (fig. 5a). The second image has more visual weight because it is larger, effectively underlining the boy's upper-hand in relation to his father's perturbation. Then the composition changes and the images become horizontal when the boy is about to hang up. The wide image, similar to an anamorphic widescreen image, on the top is able to accommodate the father on the phone in the foreground and Bauer, who is listening in, in the background (fig. 5b). Later on, Kyle's

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24. Dias Branco, "The Mosaic-Screen", par. 13.
25. Robin Nelson, *State of Play: Contemporary "High-End" TV Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 139.
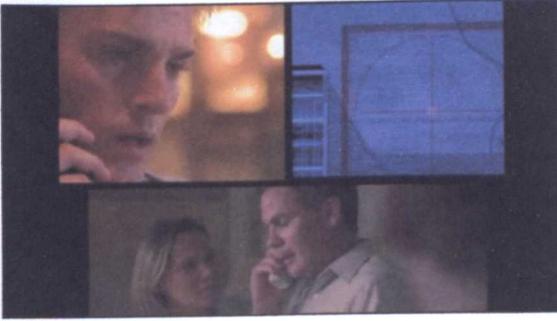
Fig. 6.

Fig. 7.

24, "Day 3: 3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m." (3.03).

Fig. 8.

24, "11:00 p.m. - 12:00 a.m." (1.24).

Fig. 9.

24, "7:00 a.m. - 8:00 a.m." (1.08).

square-like image is coupled with a similar image from CTU, at the top, while his parents are seen at the bottom in a single, wide horizontal image (fig. 6). Still in the same scene, a fourth image is added and we see, clockwise: CTU, Bauer, Kyle, and the parents (fig. 7). Typical of *24* is the way photographic effects and production design elements chromatically characterise and contrast each narrative strand: blue for CTU, dark grey for Bauer, yellow for Kyle, light grey for the parents. The mosaic-screens express the dynamic interaction between the people involved, altering the shape of images, introducing new ones, and adjusting their preponderance in the overall composition.

New contexts give new significance to what is strictly repeated. Strict repetition does not mean that all episodes are similar, but that some principles that guide them are followed with precision. This is why any deviation from these guidelines is more noticeable in a series that follows this kind of repetition. For example, there is a brief flashback in the last episode of the first season, "11:00 p.m. - 12:00 a.m." (1.24), after Jack Bauer finds his wife dead. On the right of a close-up of Bauer's face, the mosaic-screen presents a replay of a prior scene tinted in sepia tones (fig. 8) — an intimate moment when he exchange a kiss with his wife. This is the only internal analepsis[26] in the whole series and this is a device that belies the claim of unrepeatability[27] that is so central in the show. Yet these rare examples become conspicuous exactly because they are part of a structure shaped by strict repetition.

This kind of repetition is at times used in short cycles and then abandoned. A short montage sequence that begins with a superimposition (fig. 9), a technique the series avoids because it contradicts the clear separation of each narrative strand (they can be placed alongside, but not over each other), is added during the first season, from "7:00 a.m. - 8:00 a.m." (1.08) on. It is substituted by a "previously on *24*" sequence in the remaining seven seasons of the series, which instead of strictly repeated, as in the case of the previous practice, is organised around the successive major plot points of the ongoing narrative.

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26. Internal analepsis is a flashback to an earlier point of the plot of the narrative. External analepsis is a flashback to a point that is part of the story, but that happened before the start of the plot and therefore was not shown.

27. For an analysis on the unrepeatable nature of the scenes of *24* and its connection with *liveness*, see Peacock, "*24*", p. 27.

Strictness must be understood within the confines of what is here meant by repetition, which is not to be taken simply as the duplication of features or elements. Therefore strict repetition is not something akin to the generation of duplicates. Strictness signals the exact nature, and often normative character, of this kind of repetition. Because it is so manifest, this repetition is easily detectable. *24* may be an extreme instance of this, but series like *In Treatment* (2008-), which does not have as many strict guidelines, also employs this repetition. Most episodes are structured around *one* therapy session conducted by the protagonist, the psychologist Dr. Paul Weston (Gabriel Byrne). The sessions are filmed using the usual shot/reverse-shot technique without crossing the axis connecting the psychotherapist and the patient. Whenever there is a breakthrough or a revelation during a session, this event is asserted through a camera movement that crosses the axis. From that instant on, the shots/reverse-shots are captured from the other side of the axis. This is an irregular repetition, because it is connected with events that only occur from time to time, but it is as strict as the regular repetitions in *24*.

1.2. Loose Repetition

Some features of *Gilmore Girls* are loosely repeated because they take different forms throughout the series. This dramedy about the shared life of Lorelai Victoria Gilmore (Lauren Graham), a single mother, with Lorelai Leigh Gilmore (Alexis Bledel) known as "Rory", her daughter, keeps shifting between drama and comedy. The show belongs to a genre that results from a combination, not simply a drama with a few comic moments or a comedy with some dramatic scenes, but a drama *and* a comedy. The shift from a dramatic to a comedic register, and sometimes fusion of the two, gives the genre an irregular, inconstant structure that is manifest in *Gilmore Girls*.

One way in which dramatic and comedic are combined is through conversation. Exchanges of words involve giving and receiving and have the potential of both expressing emotions and generating humour, *in connection*. Certainly dialogue is an important element of most series, but here it goes beyond conveying a character's feelings or transmitting narrative information.

Fig. 10a.

Fig. 10b.

Gilmore Girls, "Pilot" (1.01).

Gilmore Girls explores the pleasure of conversation, an enjoyment that is often displayed in long talks. It is symptomatic that "Pilot" (1.01) ends with an interrupted conversation, a chat that seems that will end long after the credits.[28] Lorelai begins asking Rory about the boy that she met that day, something about which the girl had kept quiet. They are dining at Luke's dinner, the homey restaurant of a friend where they feel comfortable enough to talk as if they were at home. The beginning of the conversation is clearly audible (fig. 10a), but the sound fades as the camera pulls away from the window (fig. 10b) and the episode ends. The audience is left hanging, knowing that there was a lot more to listen to, eager for an opportunity to hear anew.

Giada da Ros evocatively notes the ceremonial aspects of *Gilmore Girls* mise-en-scène, both in its dramatic and comedic expression.[29] For her, regular events like the Friday Night dinners at the Gilmore Mansion, where Lorelai's wealthy mother and father live, or the peculiar town meetings of Stars Hollow, the small town where Lorelai an Rory live, become *liturgies* since these gatherings are transformed into a form of ritual. Da Ros does not go into details, but her contribution is relevant to the analysis of the repeated attention that the series pays to verbal performance and interaction, exploring the fluid nature of the dramedy. One glaring aspect that reflects this attention, and that becomes a recurrent motif, are the fast retorts reminiscent of screwball comedy,[30] used sometimes even in dramatic scenes. This way of replying is especially associated with Lorelai, who cannot be called a "dame", since she lacks the demeanour of a decorous lady, but about whom Maria DiBattista's words still apply: she "talks fast and talks on and talks in a singularly American way".[31] Her verbosity in the series is not simply rehashed, but presented in different contexts that warrant different expressions. The series investigates class difference through the contrasts between Lorelai's world, the Stars

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28. The last episode of the series, "Bon Voyage" (7.22), also ends with an interrupted conversation between Lorelai and Rory while they are sharing a meal — in this case, breakfast. This repetition is further evidence that supports my claims.

29. Giada da Ros, "TV 'Dramedy' and the Double-Sided 'Liturgy' of *Gilmore Girls*", in *Screwball Television: Critical Perspectives on "Gilmore Girls"*, ed. David Scott Diffrient with David Lavery (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2010), pp. 57-75.

30. For an edited collection that explores these traits of *Gilmore Girls*, see Diffrient with Lavery, eds., *Screwball Television* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2010).

31. Maria DiBattista, *Fast-Talking Dames* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 6.

Fig. 11a.

Fig. 11b.

Fig. 11c.

Gilmore Girls, "Rory's Birthday Parties" (1.06).

Hollow community, and her parents', the Hartford upper-class society, the world where she grew up and that she decided to leave behind. In the opening scene of "Rory's Birthday Parties" (1.06), an episode that investigates the gulf between the two worlds, Lorelai answers her mother, Emily (Kelly Bishop), about whether she likes pudding with these caustic, excessive remarks: "Oh, I love pudding. I worship it. I have a bowl up on the mantel at home with the Virgin Mary, a glass of wine, and a dollar bill next to it." Lorelai and Rory are having dinner at the family mansion — a weekly event established in the beginning of the show as payment for the money her parents lent Lorelai to pay for the tuition of the private school where Rory studies. In the moments that precede these sentences, Lorelai is tense, with both arms on the dinner table, slightly leaned forward (fig. 11a). Before she takes her right arm off the table, the pudding is served (fig. 11b). She is surprised that her mother actually took note of something she likes and that her mother is serving something that she herself does not like just to please her daughter. Lorelai then puts the right arm back on the table, returning to the original position, as if she is not at ease and can only assume a position and return to it. She does not let go of this stiffness when she turns her head to deliver the remarks to her mother (fig. 11c).

Performance, the way lines are said and accompanied by postures and gestures, is then a fundamental aspect of the loose repetition that we see in the series. It defines characters, but it is not fixed in a kind of repeated trademark of the character. It is instead a definition that is always under construction, always open to new performative forms. Lauren Graham develops performance motifs that underline the two worlds, the rigid world of her parents and the cozy world that she now inhabits every day. Consider this exchange later in the same episode that explores these differences in detail, this time in Lorelai's home:

EMILY: Lorelai, I just tried some of those hors d'oeurves. They're unbelievable. Who is your caterer?

LORELAI: Sookie.

EMILY: What's a Sookie?

LORELAI: That's a Sookie.

Fig. 12a.

Fig. 12b.

Gilmore Girls, "Rory's Birthday Parties" (1.06).

It is Rory's birthday and her grandmother and her mother each have planned a party. The dialogue anchors the characters in the universe they inhabit and exploits the resources of language.[32] Emily's second question reveals her lack of knowledge about Lorelai's personal life, since she does not know Sookie, her daughter's best friend; she thinks it is a thing, "a Sookie". But more than simply pointing out the divide between Lorelai and Emily, this moment shows Lorelai more at ease, despite the fact that their parents are at her house and at her party. She is able to pour sangria into a glass while she replies to her mother (fig. 12a) — the kind of simultaneity of actions that we rarely see at her parents' home. In addition, she continues pouring and points to Sookie with her head instead of with a finger and exclaims the last line (fig. 12b). This last action once again demonstrates her relaxation and her departure from social etiquette and conventional female poise. Instead of the irony of her remarks on the pudding, she seizes this chance to play, in a warm manner, recognising her mother's cluelessness, but accepting the terms of her question and saying "That's a Sookie" instead of simply "She's Sookie."

Besides performative aspects, the pattern of verbal composition that is loosely repeated in the series consists of other elements such as allusions. Because it has not been simply historically formed, but rather conceptually created, dramedy is a reflexive genre, whose "references require a substantial degree of both popular and classic cultural literacy from viewers for full appreciation of their allusions and nuances".[33] Lines of dialogue frequently make reference to popular culture. Take "I Can't Get Started" (2.22) as an example. The title comes from the song with the same name, sung by Ella Fitzgerald, which is also heard in the episode. There are also mentions to cult actor James Dean, famous driver Greg Louganis, homemaking pundit Martha Stewart, American vice-president Hubert H. Humphrey, sibling filmmakers the Farrelly Brothers and the Coen Brothers, newspaper tycoon William Randolph Hearst, and also to a character (Mr. Freeze from the *Batman* comics), a comic strip (*Garfield*), a movie (*Basic Instinct* [1992]), a Broadway musical (*Brigadoon*), a sitcom (*Diff'rent Strokes* [1978-86]), a novel (*Girl, Interrupted*), a

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32. See Sarah Kozloff, *Overhearing Film Dialogue* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 33-34. These are two of the nine functions of dialogue in narrative film, according to Kozloff.
33. Leah R. Vande Berg, "Dramedy", in *Encyclopedia of Television*, ed. Horace Newcomb, vol. 2 (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997), p. 761.

children's book (*Rebecca of Sunnybrook*), among others. Not all of them are direct. At one point in the episode, Rory's friend Paris says "You're quiet, you say excuse me, you look like little birds help you get dressed in the morning" — a reference to a scene from *Cinderella* (1950), in which blue birds help the poor girl get dressed. Or consider this sentence that Luke (Scott Patterson), the owner of the town diner, utters: "They told me to start writing letters to Jodie Foster" — a reference to the letters that John Hinckley, the gunman who attempted to assassinate President Reagan, obsessively wrote to the actress. These allusions, especially the more indirect ones, can only be comprehended by a knowledgeable audience, able to take in this abundance of references in a single episode.[34] Furthermore, numerous episodes declare this strategy in the title, which function as a label, with spins on film titles, like "They Shoot Gilmores, Don't They?" (3.07) from *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (1969). Or even using the original title like "An Affair to Remember" (4.06), the classic directed by Leo McCarey in 1957 starring Cary Grant and Deborah Kerr.

This kind of repetition is loose because it is formally vague. It creates an expectation about finding similar features, but not necessarily similar elements, like in the case of strict repetition. It therefore has more to do with motifs than with units. In *Gilmore Girls*, this may be seen in the centrality of word exchange and play in the performative and aural style of the series, from the way Lorelai converses and acts in different contexts to verbal allusions, combining performance and sound motifs. We can see this repetition at work in many series because shows tend not to declare their repetitive nature and consequently avoid overwhelming strict repetition. *Sex and the City* (1998-2004), a sitcom about a group of four independent women and their romantic and sexual adventures in the Big Apple, for example, loosely repeats the feeling of nervousness combined with romance and comedy.[35]

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34. For more examples of references to actors, actresses, performers, artists, classic and cult films, filmmakers, characters, songs and musicians, television shows and personalities, books and writers, throughout the seven seasons of *Gilmore Girls*, see David Lavery, "'Impossible Girl': Amy Sherman-Palladino and Television Creativity", in *Screwball Television: Critical Perspectives on "Gilmore Girls"*, ed. David Scott Diffrient with David Lavery (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2010), pp. 12-14.

35. See Tom Grochowski, "Neurotic in New York: The Woody Allen Touches in *Sex and the City*", in *Reading "Sex and the City"*, ed. Kim Akass and Janet McCabe (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), pp. 150-52. As it is common, *Sex and the City* also employs strict repetition, for instance, in the use of Carrie's (Sarah Jessica Parker) voice-over to convey the thoughts about her and her friends' experiences that she puts in writing in a weekly column.

1.3. Remade Repetition

The third kind of repetition can incorporate the previous two repetitions, strict and loose. Remade repetition raises issues that are specific to it. Umberto Eco distinguishes between a *retake*, which recycles the characters and continues the narrative in a new work, and the *remake*, which presents the same basic narrative of the precedent.[36] A further aspect that Eco calls attention to is how some works echo previous works, for example when "quotation is made explicit and recognizable".[37] The remakes of *The Office* pursue this kind of inter-referential dialogue with the original British sitcom. The series on the daily life of the workers in a regional office of a big company, focused on their boss and his relationship with his employees. The series created by Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant has generated five remakes by now — a Chilean, a French, a German, a Québécois, and an American. This last production has a close relationship with the original series, since Gervais and Merchant serve as executive producers and wrote the pilot with the developer of the American version, Greg Daniels. This connection warrants an analysis of the differences stemming from a geographical and cultural shift, from Britain to America, and how the most distinctive aspects of the original series have been repeated and remade.

As Brett Mills writes, the first *The Office* "is an odd hybrid of the live and the recorded"[38]. The show received numerous awards, including a Golden Globe for best comedy series, an award won for the first time by a non-American programme — a recognition that laid the ground for the remake. For Mills, "it is only through the abandoning of its theatrical origins and instead using the television aesthetics of the documentary form that sitcom as a form has achieved some kind of cultural status".[39] This kind of sitcom has antecedents in *The Royle Family* (1998-),[40] but the specific documentary form of *The Office* resembles a reportage, which implies situations in which the cameraman has to react quickly to what is happening. The seemingly unplanned nature of the performances is mirrored by the shooting style. Mills points out that

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36. Eco, "Interpreting Serials", p. 85.
37. Ibid., p. 88.
38. Brett Mills, *Television Sitcom* (London: BFI, 2005), p. 50.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid., p. 62.

Fig. 13.

The Office, "Downsize" (1.1).

Fig. 14.

The Office [US], "Pilot" (1.1).

to catch character reactions the camera has to pan very quickly across the office, often recording the end of reactions rather than the whole of them. The use of cameras to rove the office as characters work within it creates a more fully realised narrative space than that of traditional sitcom. Similarly, the camera's constantly changing position continually alters the distance between the audience and the performers, and viewers aren't kept at a distance from the action in the manner traditionally seen as vital to the comic reaction. Therefore, the series consistently refuses to use sitcom's visual characteristics, and so fails to signal its intent in the traditional manner.[41]

The original is a mockumentary, or mock documentary, where fiction is presented as non-fiction. In this case, the footage that we see is supposed to have been documented by a television crew. As "Christmas Special, Part 1" makes explicit in the beginning, with the kind of written information that brings *24* to mind: "a BBC documentary crew filmed the everyday goings on in a typical workplace". In line with this premise, the series is punctuated by statements of the characters to the camera, usually framed in close-up. The first character who talks to the camera alone is the chief, David Brent (Ricky Gervais), in "Downsize" (1.1) (fig. 13). As is customary in remakes of television series, the new version tries to include recognisable traits of the British series and also uses this device, even if the framing is habitually slightly wider shot, showing the upper part of the chest and more of the surroundings — what is technically called a close shot. The chief, here named Michael Scott (Steve Carell), is also the first to speak, in "Pilot" (1.1) (fig. 14). Occasionally, in both series, two people address the camera in this confessional mode — for example, in the original, Brent and his assistant, the toady Gareth Keenan (Mackenzie Crook), and in the remake, the flirtatious and then married Jim Halpert (John Krasinski) and Pam Beesly (Jenna Fischer). These kind of private interviews and personal statements filmed as talking heads are a convention of documentary film-making.

Another aspect that conveys a feeling of spontaneity is the behaviour of the camera, as if the cameraman is reacting to what goes on, moment by moment, adapting his attention. The camera

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41. Mills, *Television Sitcom*, pp. 61-62.

Fig. 15a.

Fig. 15b.

Fig. 15c.

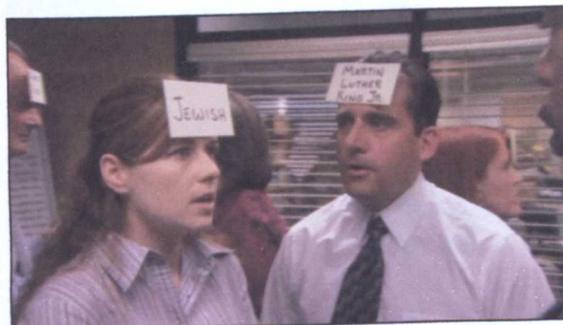*The Office*, "The Quiz" (1.3).

Fig. 16a.

Fig. 16b.

Fig. 16c.

Fig. 16d.

The Office [US], "Diversity Day" (1.2).

Fig. 17.

The Office, "Motivation" (2.4).

Fig. 18.

The Office [US], "Basketball" (1.5).

Fig. 19.

The Office, "New Girl" (1.5).

Fig. 20.

The Office [US], "Health Care" (1.3).

moves or zooms, reframes, and it sometimes loses focus in the process. This is well exemplified in "The Quiz" (1.3) when David is talking to the receptionist, Dawn Tinsley (Lucy Davis). The camera zooms in on them (fig. 15a), the image becomes blurred (fig. 15b), and then the lens is adjusted and the two actors come into focus (fig. 15c). Similar moments are easy to find in the remake. In "Diversity Day" (1.2), Michael convinces the personnel to role play as if each one of them is of a different race (affixed on their forehead). Pam is interacting with a colleague under Michael's supervision. The camera rotates from her interlocutor (fig. 16a) to her (fig. 16b) and then abruptly zooms in on her face when she is speaking (fig. 16c). After this, her close-up stays focused (fig. 16d).[42] Changes in framing are not smooth or elegant, but rough and messy, creating the impression of an unplanned filming venture.

In addition to these issues regarding mobile framing, the framing of some shots also have recurring aspects. These shots avoid balanced and polished compositions and often include blurred objects in the foreground. In "Motivation" (2.4), we are shown one of the sellers, Tim Canterbury (Martin Freeman), kissing his colleague Rachel (Stacey Roca), with plant leaves in the foreground occupying one third of the screen at the bottom (fig. 17). Such compositions are usual in the remake. In "Basketball" (1.5), Jim is wooing Pam, and the bottom right corner is also occupied by plant leaves (fig. 18). Foregrounding things can lend a greater sense of depth, but in the two series the intention seems to be to lay one thing over another so that both are still visible and so as to overcrowd the shot. The objects, most of them stationery, that crop up in these images effectively pollute them so that they do not look clean.

For time to time, there are shots that have no specific subject. These shots are distinct, because they not only are not over-the-shoulder, but are taken from a lower height, and are fixed. One such shot in "New Girl" (1.5) shows one of the workers yawning (fig. 19). In an episode of the remake, "Health Care" (1.3), a similar shot presents Dwight Schrute (Rainn Wilson) and Jim's concentrated work (fig. 20). These images seem remote not close like the others, conveying either the dullness or the absorption of the work at the office.

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42. The original series uses more varifocal lens than the remake, which opts for parfocal or zoom lens. Contrary to the former, the latter lens stays in focus after the focal length changes in a scene, that is, after the zoom reposition or magnification occurs. Varifocal lens, which contains various movable elements to permit changes in the focal length, requires refocusing with each change.

Fig. 21.

The Office, "Training" (1.4).

Fig. 22.

The Office [US], "Company Picnic" (5.26).

Fig. 23.

The Office, "Judgment" (1.6).

This does not mean that the style of the remake does not have significant differences from the original. The series share many similar aural aspects — the absence of a laugh track is one of them, repeated and remade in the American version, for example — but one aspect in which these differences are evident is sound capture. "Training" (1.4) opens with an argument between Dawn and her fiancé. The quarrel is seen through the armoured glass of a fire door (fig. 21). Their words are perfectly audible. Shots captured through windows are also quite common in the remake. Yet here, not in keeping with the original, sometimes these barriers between the camera and the subjects interfere with the sound reception. In "Company Picnic" (5.26), for example, the conversation between Pam and Jim in the doctor's office (fig. 22), when they are told that Pam's pregnant, is inaudible. The awareness that people are being spied on is very much alike, but the characters of the remake occasionally assert their right to privacy and hide from the camera.[43] The camera is often acknowledged in both comedies as an observational and recording device, but in the American version its presence seems at times intrusive. Perhaps this reflects the more detailed definition and more extensive history of the characters in the remake, which is now a long-running series, as opposed to the original, which is comprised of only two seasons and a special. In this sense, the characters of the later series have more to protect and more to lose with the full, unrelenting access of the camera, which extends well beyond the boundaries of the office. The remake reminds the viewer from time to time that some conversations will remain unheard, when characters disappear from the screen despite the attempts of the camera to film them. In "Judgment" (1.6) from the earlier series, Gareth turns and looks directly to the camera during a conversation with his boss (fig. 23). This kind of recognition is constant in the interviews. The remake uses this performance motif, of course, but as the series progressed the characters also shield themselves from the eye of the camera. "Dunder Mifflin Infinity" (4.02) provides one of the best examples of this shielding in the series. Ryan Howard (B.J. Novak) had asked Pam to redesign the logo for the website of the branch. She is showing him the sketches on her pad when he

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43. As a complement, Michael carries an individual microphone and when he hides, for example when he is with Holly Flax (Amy Ryan), the human resources representative whom he dates during the fifth season, we can still hear what is going on.

Fig. 24a.

Fig. 24b.

Fig. 24c.

The Office [US], "Dunder Mifflin Infinity" (4.02).

asks her if she wants to discuss her ideas over dinner. Pam is prompt to tell him that she is dating Jim. Ryan is first surprised and then embarrassed, because he was swollen with conceit about his effect on women. When he walks away from Pam's reception desk (fig. 24a), he passes close to the camera and lifts her pad (fig. 24b) to cover his face (fig. 24c). He does not want to be exposed to mockery and so preserves the facial expression of his embarrassment as something private, not accessible.

This points towards the differences between English and American humour that James Thurber summarises by saying that "the English treat the commonplace as if it were remarkable and the Americans treat the remarkable as if it were commonplace".[44] It is true that this does not encompass the surreal comedy of Monty Python, but it identifies a tendency in each strand of humour. *The Office* can be seen as exemplary in this respect. The concept of fictional documentary is understood and explored differently in each version and this is noticeable in the performance motifs associated with the central characters. David Brent acts eccentrically for the camera to mask his own awkwardness and ridicules other people to disguise his low self-esteem. David acts differently when he thinks he is not being filmed, not less truthfully, but less spontaneously, because his theatrics are indeed revealing about him. He positions himself so that the camera captures him doing something grand, worthy of attention. Gervais's performance underlines David's mischievousness with pensive poses, as if he is imagining ways of turning ordinary things into extraordinary things. Michael Scott, on the other hand, does things that seem eccentric, but are mostly well-intentioned. Many times, Michael calls attention to himself by accident or incompetence. He is able to share screen space with his close friends and employees without envy. Carrell's performance conveys Michael's inventiveness with childlike smiles and twinkles; he wears his heart on his sleeve doing striking things that are integrated into the everyday.

Cases of remade repetition are common in the global market of television production and distribution. They are not always successful, but American remakes of popular British like *Cold Feet* (UK: 1998-2003, US: 1999) or *Dear John* (UK: 1986-87, US: 1988-92) abound.

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44. George Plimpton and Max Steele, "The Art of Fiction No. 10: An Interview with James Thurber", *Paris Review*, no. 10 (1955), http://www.parisreview.com/viewinterview.php/prmMID/5003. p. 14.

Remakes often adapt the narrative premise and aesthetic characteristics of the original to American reality and culture. *Man About the House* (1973-76), a sitcom about three roommates, a man and two women, was remade as *Three's Company* (1977-84) and its comedy of errors became more direct and personal, restating their mutual attachment at the end of each episode, like in classic American sitcoms such as *I Love Lucy* (1951-57). Remakes raise questions about how to capture and preserve the essential traits of the initial series and, additionally, also about the margin for adjustment allowed in order to maintain the link between original and remade series.[45] As my analysis of *The Office* has demonstrated, remakes also reveal how noticing repetition leads us to consequently notice variation between series. Something that the previous examples of strict and loose repetition show as well, but between episodes.

2. Appearances of Variation

From the previous pages, the connection between repetition and variation has become clear: the second is only identifiable if compared with the first. While some series look for unity through the emphasis on repetition, others are more open to variation, yet this does not make them seem disjointed. In fact, this kind of unifying aesthetic structure, based on similarity and diversity through the variation of repeated elements, has a great tradition in art — for example, in musical compositions in which a theme, a recurring melody, is developed through variations in harmony, rhythm, dynamics, and orchestration. Umberto Eco has been mentioned before to explain how the notion of seriality entails repetition. For him, it also entails variation. In order to understand this we have to consider the distinction that he draws and investigates between structural thought and serial thought. This differentiation reframes (and expands) the discussion from serial arrangement to the kind of thought that gives rise to

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45. It is pertinent to mention that a particular type of remake, the *re-imagining*, brings up these questions in specific ways. The re-imagining reboots an earlier series, developing the same narrative premise, but employing a contrasting new style. For an example of this kind of remake and of the issues it raises in relation with the original series, see the section on the design motifs of the new version of *Battlestar Galactica* (2003-9) in Chapter Two, pp. 100-9.

this arrangement.[46] Structural thought is based on a structure that determines the series of connected events or things. With serial thought, structure is no longer seen as stable and determinant, but as open to modification, originating "a structure that is at once open and polyvalent".[47] Using a formula that parallels the one used to describe repetition, we can say that to vary would be to produce a diversification of the same abstract type, that is, to generate diverse instances of such a type. Openness and polyvalence are the effects on the structure of the series of this generated diversity. Therefore the most crucial matter is then for us to be able to identify the forms or appearances that this diversity take.

Variation is, for example, at the heart of *Northern Exposure* (1990-95). The series is set in Cicely, a multi-cultural, multi-generational small town where Joel Fleischman arrives to be the town doctor. The focus on different characters and events[48] — for instance, traditional Native Americans and the aurora borealis — results in evident variations in tone between episodes. In this case, variation appears as something that is not bound with an established pattern. If that were the case, it would be a *set variation*. This kind of variation becomes customary and regular, creating an expectation, not for the similar, but for the different within the boundaries of a fixed scheme. The variation in this particular series can be identified instead as an *odd variation* that is unusual and occasional. The different types of variation have therefore to do with the form that they take in relation to the patterned structure of the programme. The third type is *arc variation*, which may become set or remain odd, but it is always associated with a narrative arc of the show.

Series rely on repetition and on the familiarity that repetition engenders. Yet they also bring variety into play to engage the viewer. This is exactly what the dramas that will illustrate each variation do. The medical drama *Grey's Anatomy* (2005-) provides persuasive examples of

46. See Eco, "Series and Structure", in *The Open Work* [1976], trans. Anna Cancogni, intr. David Robey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 217-35. I write "and expands" in parentheses because Eco's subject is broader. He reflects on the divide between structural thought and serial thought, which Claude Lévi-Strauss's sees as two opposing cultural attitudes and philosophical stances. The major and more consequential aspect of this contrast lies in how historical evolution is perceived. As will become clear, what is relevant to our discussion is the way these conflicting views translate into artistic composition — Lévi-Strauss and Eco discuss, for example, serial music, also known as serialism, as practiced by Arnold Schöenberg.

47. Ibid., p. 218.

48. See Christine Scodari, "Northern Exposure", in *Encyclopedia of Television*, vol. 3, ed. Horace Newcomb (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997), pp. 1667-69.

Fig. 25a.

Fig. 25b.

Grey's Anatomy, "A Hard Day's Night" (1.1).

set variation, when the protagonist's usual voice-over, a sound motif that opens and closes the episodes, is performed by other characters. The action drama *Alias* (2001-6) explores odd variations on image and design motifs, revolving around the change of locations and the transformation of bodies, and involving spies and double agents. Finally, the police drama *NYPD Blue* (1993-2005) integrates diverse performance motifs associated with one of the main characters in the first two seasons, John Kelly performed by David Caruso, and his narrative arc.

2.1. Set Variation

The variation under scrutiny in *Grey's Anatomy* involves the establishment of a repeated sound motif: the opening and closing voice-overs of the episodes. These narrations play an important part in the structure of the show. Episodic series (also known as series) tend to be centred on a particular line of work like the police, whereas the centre of serial series (also known as serials) "is place and people".[49] As is usual today, *Grey's Anatomy* is an hybrid programme that revolves around a profession *and* a group of people and a place. The series dissects the emotions of a group of surgical interns and residents at Seattle Grace Hospital, in a melodramatic tone that has become associated with these serial dramas.[50] Meredith Grey's (Ellen Pompeo) voice-over commences and concludes the episodes commenting on the themes and lessons of the chapter, during the first season. After the first episodes, each new episode was therefore expected to be book-ended with Meredith's double voice-over narration. The first time that we hear her voice, in "A Hard Day's Night" (1.1), she says, "The game. They say a person either has what it takes to play, or they don't. My mother was one of the greats. Me, on the other hand, I'm kind of screwed." These words are heard over a collection of superimposed images of a surgery with a dreamlike quality — visually hazy and with subdued colours (fig. 25a). Right after her words, she opens her eyes, after having slept with a man who she will know later is her superior at the

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49. Corner, *Critical Ideas in Television Studies*, p. 58.
50. See Jason Jacobs, *Body Trauma TV: The New Hospital Dramas* (London: BFI, 2003), pp. 29-37.

hospital (fig. 25b). The words, like the images, go from the art of surgery to her personal history. It is this shift that characterises her narrator.

In *Invisible Storytellers*, Sarah Kozloff calls attention to the flexibility of focalisation of voice-over narrators that expands the fluid focalisation that films often follow. Shots of the character or scenes from which the character is absent do not breach our bond with that character's voice,[51] how we listen and attend to it. This is especially important concerning this series given that it complicates these shifts between presence and absence, with the use a first-person narrator that speaks as a third-person narrator. Following Kozloff who follows Genette, we can say that Meredith is a homogeneous narrator that usually speaks as a heterodiegetic narrator.[52] That is, she is a narrator homogenous with the diegesis, a character in the fictional world. The first voice-over balances a third-person ("they say") and a first-person ("my mother") perspective. The series usually opts for the first, but the narration always indicates the speaker indirectly. The function of the voice-over is to frame and comment on the dramas of a large of group of characters. This function is emphasised with the employment of three voice-over narrations throughout the first episode, instead of just an opening and closing narration that becomes regular after this first episode. In the middle of a surgery, pumped up by the stress, Meredith says in the penultimate voice-over:

> I can't think of any one reason why I want to be a surgeon, but I can think of a thousand reasons why I should quit. They make it hard on purpose. There are lives in our hands. There comes a moment when it's more than just a game. And you either take that step forward or turn around and walk away. I could quit, but here's the thing... I love the playing field.

The opening voice-over tells us something personal about her family history, in vague terms. This voice-over is more concrete, completing her first words with a brief reflection on the

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51. Kozloff, *Invisible Storytellers: Voice-Over Narration in American Fiction Film* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), p. 48.

52. See ibid., p. 42. For the original taxonomy of narrators, see Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 248.

progress of her career as a surgeon, therefore connecting the private and professional spheres of her life. She expresses her awareness that surgery is more than a challenge, when she states "There are lives in our hands." After establishing Meredith as the main character, her following narrations becomes less personal. The "I", so crucial in these quoted sentences, will not be heard again in the series. The opening lines of the next episode, "The First Cut Is the Deepest" (1.2), are in the second-person and set the tone for the rest of series:

> It's all about lines. The finish line at the end of residency, waiting in line for a chance at the operating table, and then there's the most important line, the line separating you from the people you work with. It doesn't help to get too familiar to make friends. You need boundaries, between you and the rest of the world. Other people are far too messy. It's all about lines. Drawing lines in the sand and praying like hell no one crosses them.

Meredith is then usually more of an *authorial* "third-person" narrator than a *character* "first-person" narrator.[53] Kozloff claims that not all authorial narrators "are frame narrators. The fact that such narrators are relatively rarely embedded does not make embedding impossible on formal grounds."[54] Frame narrators produce an embedded narrative, a narrative within or over the main narrative. The framing device creates the conditions for the main narrative to be read in another way. Meredith's voice is omniscient in the sense that heterodiegetic narrators, who are not part of the diegesis, usually are. Her words vaguely reflect on the themes and topics of the episode so that they encompass the experience of the other characters. Kozloff points out that such narrators not only seem to know everything, but "[t]hey tend to voice the ideological and/ or moral agenda"[55] of the work. The voice-over in *Grey's Anatomy* has this function, wittily expressing the lessons that the characters learn. Moreover, it is sometimes a voice in the plural ("we"). In these instances, like "Winning a Battle, Losing the War" (1.3), Meredith speaks directly for all the protagonists or instead of them.

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53. See Kozloff, *Invisible Storytellers*, p. 6.
54. Ibid., p. 76.
55. Ibid., p. 80.

Fig. 26.

Grey's Anatomy, "What Have I Done to Deserve This?" (2.19).

The next seasons introduce a variation: another character or multiple characters perform the opening and closing voice-overs in some episodes. Set variation covers these cases in which basic aesthetic guidelines of a series are followed — but in a different way. In this case there is no obvious change in form or configuration (the voice-overs), but there is a change in contents or ingredients (its narrators). The narrator that substitutes Meredith is, as a rule, one of her medical colleagues, which means that he or she is a character who is part of the diegesis and therefore an homodiegetic narrator. The fact is that, like Meredith, these narrators never talk in the first person, never talk for themselves as characters. They have the qualities already mentioned in regard to Meredith's narrations and are general — even though the variation makes clear that the point of view that they embody is different and personal.

The first time that Meredith's voice-over narration is absent is in "What Have I Done to Deserve This?" (2.19). Instead, George O'Malley (T. R. Knight) narrates the introductory and concluding remarks. In the end of the previous episode, "Yesterday" (2.18), George finally tells Meredith that he is infatuated with her and they have sex. Even though there are other story lines, like the gradual closeness between cardiac patient Denny Duquette (Jeffrey Dean Morgan) and Isobel "Izzie" Stevens (Katherine Heigl), "What Have I Done to Deserve This?" focuses mainly on how George deals with what happened on the previous night. Meredith and George avoid each other at work and, disturbed as he is, George falls down a stairwell, dislocating his shoulder. He recalls what happened in Meredith's bedroom, how she cried out of remorse while they were having sex. This realisation prompts him to move out of Meredith's shared house, where Izzie also lives. This is also the episode in which George catches the attention of an attending female orthopaedic surgeon. These narrative aspects justify the substitution of Meredith's voice with George's, since the central drama of the episode is the way he copes with the rushed sexual encounter with his close friend. Moreover, George's remarks are more personal and direct — whereas, as explained earlier, Meredith's commentaries are usually general so as to reflect all the major characters and what they are about to experience or have experienced. The camera pans from his empty bed to him seated on the floor and leaning against the bedroom door (fig. 26) and he says, "Okay, so sometimes,

even the best of us make rash decisions, bad decisions." There is a sense of relief in the confessional, emotional tone of his voice, right from the very first words that he utters as narrator. Yet the narration is, as usually with Meredith, in the third-person despite its intimate, informal tone.

There are other examples. Characters whose voice is heard occasionally, substituting Meredith's, include: the resident surgeon Christina Yang (Sandra Oh), a friend of Meredith's who wants to be a cardiothoracic specialist, in "From a Whisper to a Scream" (3.09); the attending general surgeon Miranda Bailey (Chandra Wilson) in "Lay Your Hands On Me" (4.11); Denny in "Stairway to Heaven" (5.13);[56] the resident surgeon Alex Karev (Justin Chambers) in "Elevator Love Letter" (5.19); Izzie in "What a Difference a Day Makes" (5.22); the head of neurosurgery Derek Shephard (Patrick Dempsey) in "Give Peace a Chance" (6.07), "State of Love and Trust" (6.13) and "Death and All His Friends (2)" (6.24); the ex-chief of surgery Richard Webber (James Pickens Jr.) in "The Time Warp" (6.15); and the head of trauma surgery Owen Hunt (Kevin McKidd) in "Suicide Is Painless" (6.18). It is not the case that the narrative is restricted to these characters, but their stories are central in these episodes. Their voices give us access to points of view, points of entry into and of exit from the fiction. They are motivated by personal feelings, but are normally in a detached first-person plural, referring to the speaker together with other people — which at times does not mean just other surgeons. Every season, except the first one, has had an episode in which someone other than Meredith narrates.

"Deterioration of the Fight or Flight Response (1)" (2.26) exemplifies another set variation within the series. It is the first part of a two-part episode that closed the second season. It was aired on the same night, undivided, and for this reason, the ensuing "Losing My Religion (2)" (2.27) does not have an introductory voice-over.[57] The first part, however, starts with an unusual narration performed by all the main characters: Meredith, George, Cristina, Izzie, Miranda, Shepherd, the head of cardiothoracic surgery Preston Burke (Isaiah Washington), the former head of obstetrics, gynaecology, and neonatal surgery Addison Montgomery (Kate

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56. This is the only time that a secondary character (and a guest actor) has done the voice-over.
57. It also lacks a concluding voice-over — as we shall see, this makes sense given the peculiar collective characteristics of the introductory voice-over. This kind of lack is uncommon, but there are some similar instances. "Don't Stand So Close to Me" (3.10), for example, only features the closing voice-over.

Fig. 27a.

Seattle Grace OR 1

HR
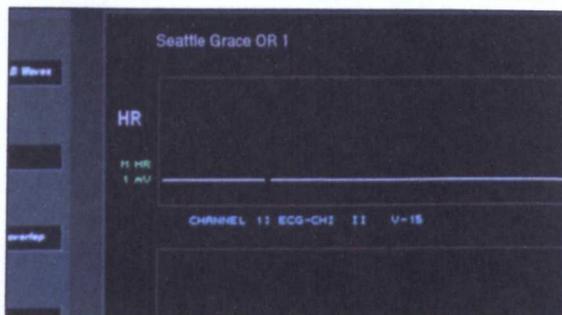
Fig. 27b.

Fig. 27c.

Fig. 28.

Grey's Anatomy, "Deterioration of the Fight or Flight Response" (2.26).

Walsh), Karev, and Webber. The multiple voices convey the entanglement of the story lines in this season finale. From Burke (who has been gunned down) to Denny (who desperately needs a new heart), the sequence presents two people who are in critical state, between life and death:

Burke is unconscious, lying on the ground; Bailey tries to revive him (fig. 27a).

MEREDITH: Human beings need a lot of things to feel alive.

Flat line (fig. 27b). *Black screen.*

GEORGE: Family...

Denny is in bed (fig. 27c).

CRISTINA: Love...

IZZIE: Sex.

Flat line.

DEREK: But we only need one thing...

BURKE: To actually be alive...

Black screen. Derek leans on railing inside the hospital. (fig. 28)

CRISTINA: We need a beating heart.

Burke is still unconscious.

ADDISON: When our heart is threatened...

ALEX: We respond in one of two ways.

Burke's eyes are open and still.

GEORGE: We either run...

Black screen. Blurred lights.

BURKE: Or...

Black screen.

IZZIE: We attack.

Burke regains consciousness.

CHIEF: There's a scientific term for this:
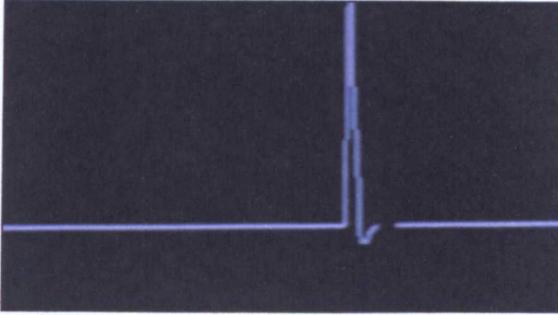
ALEX: Fight...

Fig. 29a.

Fig. 29b.

Fig. 29c.

Grey's Anatomy, "Deterioration of the Fight or Flight Response" (2.26).

A moveable stretcher is dropped.

ADDISON: Or flight.

BAILEY: It's instinct...

The paramedics grasp Burke to move him (fig. 29a).

MEREDITH: We can't control it.

Flat line spikes (fig. 29b). *White flash. Izzie is holding a cut tube by Denny's bed* (fig. 29c).

IZZIE: Or can we?

Mikhail Bakhtin thought that the concept of polyphony expressed the diversity of points of view and voices that we find in Dostoevsky's novels like *The Adolescent.* According to him, like in polyphonic music, the voices in that novel maintain their independence and are simply combined. Which means that "the world cannot in any condition be reduced to the unity of an individual and emotionally accented will".[58] This sequence aims at exactly the kind of single vision that Bakhtin sees Dostoevsky as rejecting. The characters complete each other's sayings. Here we hear homophony instead of polyphony, a conjunction of words and points of view that work together in harmony, that gel together. In the beginning, Burke is unconscious, lying on the ground. The sequence is inter-cut two times with a flat line in a heart monitor, before the voices list what human beings need to live and around when they affirm that what they mostly need is a heartbeat. Uncommonly for the series, the monitor is not clearly situated in the fictional world. The line is used as an emblematic image that represents the threat of death and the possibility of revival — life is equated with a beating heart. That explains why the line returns in the end with a sudden spike when Burke regains consciousness. At the same time, Denny needs a heart transplant, which Izzie intentionally makes urgent when she cuts the tube to the ventricular assist device, and Derek is preoccupied because he is going to have to operate on his colleague Burke. Denny and Burke can only be saved through collaborative actions. The words spoken in concert are an image of this collaboration. The characters speak as if they voice one person, one character with different parts. Their voices speak in one voice.

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58. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 22.
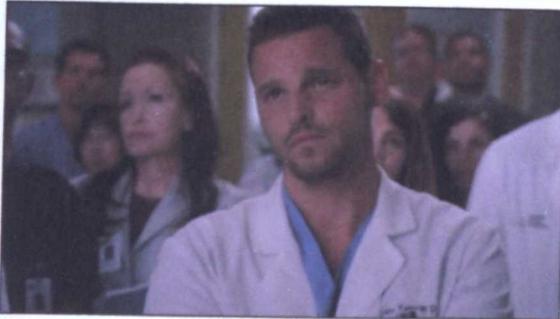
Fig. 30a.

Fig. 30a.

Fig. 31a.
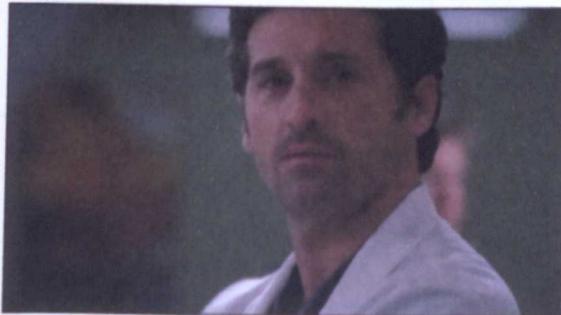
Fig. 31b.

Grey's Anatomy, "Goodbye (2)" (6.02).

"Goodbye (2)" (6.02) also closes with a voice-over narration done by all regular characters. "There are five stages of grief. They look different on all of us, but there are always five" says Meredith while Webber is preparing to speak to the staff (fig. 30a). Then Richard speaks about the upcoming and undesired merger with another hospital. Between his sentences the voice-over of regular characters state the five stages: Karev says "Denial" (fig. 30b), Shepard says "Anger", Bailey says "Bargaining", Lexie (Chyler Leigh), Meredith's half-sister, says "Depression", and lastly Webber says "Acceptance". Contrary to the concert of voices of the previous sequence, in which sound and image are autonomous, here each word accompanies the image of the character saying it. This synchronicity is only broken in the last word to emphasise the solitude of the chief. "Acceptance" relates to Webber's determination to make the best of a difficult situation and it is only said after he disappears to the right side of the frame (fig. 31a), over Shepard's image (fig. 31b).

Set variation is widespread in fiction series. It is a mode of combining the familiar with the novel by introducing variation on established aesthetic elements or features. Introducing this variation renews the interest of the audience without going beyond what is expected. In *FlashForward* (2009-10), a series about an event that caused all human beings to lose consciousness for two minutes and seventeen seconds and see their own future in around six months, the title sequence is always enigmatic in new ways thanks to the set variation of an image. The title becomes larger and the letters become unreadable, reduced to straight and curved lines, and reveals a single image that is different for each episode. The series integrates the device of the flashforward in its title sequence. The image will prove to be key, but it is simply puzzling when seen for the first time. This kind of variation is therefore somehow internal to the patterns of the series. In contrast, the next kind, odd variation, does not rely on this regularity and it is external to these patterns.

2.2. Odd Variation

Oddness in variation has to do with the unexpected aesthetic changes of show. Such elements are not taken as anomalies in the series because they depend on recurrent narrative

Fig. 32a.

Fig. 32b.

Fig. 32c.

Alias, "Truth Be Told" (1.01).

Fig. 33a.

Fig. 33b.

Fig. 33c.

Alias, "Phase One" (2.13).

characteristics. Here lies the difference between set and odd variation: the first relies not only on this narrative recurrence, but also on an aesthetic recurrence that becomes varied. *Alias* demonstrates with clarity that what is aesthetically odd in a series may be narratively conventional. At the centre of the series is Sydney Bristow (Jennifer Garner), a secret agent who assumes false identities in different settings to carry out her missions. Characters are often unreliable, seeding distrust between them, and this uncertainty is reflected in the use of *constant change* as a stylistic idea, insisting on the multiplication of images through copies, aliases, doubles, clones, mirrors and other reflecting surfaces.[59] Let us see how this takes shape as odd variations.

The series opens with a tense and suspenseful scene that throws the viewer into the middle of the action without explanations. The protagonist is submersed in water, beaten (fig. 32a), and shackled (fig. 32c). Her hair, which covers her scared face, is painted red (fig. 32b). She is captive, unable to control what happens in a dim-lit, windowless chamber that seems to be used only for torture. Yet she resists vigorously. The music accentuates the feeling of suspense with sudden and climatic violin sounds. Compare this opening from "Truth Be Told" (1.01) with the one from "Phase One" (2.13). We see a corridor with a sophisticated and clean design. The walls follow a black quadrangular grid, the carpet on the floor is red, as is the door shut at the end of the hallway (fig. 33a). Instead of cliffhanging instrumental music, we hear a popular rock song, the thrilling "Back in Black" by AC/DC; first only the cymbals of the drum, then the guitar when Sydney opens the door (fig. 33b). As she walks through the passage, the counter-shot shows that she is about to enter a room where someone is waiting for her (fig. 33c). In this second scene, she is posing as a call girl. In contrast with the first, she is in complete control of the situation as the choreography of the scene highlights, matching her confident entrance with the inaugural guitar chords.

This is why a scholar like Jason Mittell questions the consistency of *Alias*. He writes that the series is characterised by the "radical shifts in tone, style, or narrative structure as seemingly motivated by network pressure to boost ratings by making the show less complex

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59. For an essay collection that examines these issues, even though only from a thematic and not from a stylistic perspective, see Stacey Abbott and Simon Brown, eds., *Investigating "Alias": Secrets and Spies* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007).

Fig. 34.

Fig. 35a.

Fig. 35b.

Fig. 36.

Alias, "Masquerade" (1.18).

and easier for new viewers to join".[60] His evaluative claim has no relevance to this thesis, but the evidence he uses to make it has. Implicit in the author's careful argumentation is the idea that recognising and valuing aesthetic unity are different actions. Therefore it is possible to discuss aesthetic unity and disunity in terms that stress the recognition and further examination of the patterns of the show. Agreeing with Mittell that such "shifts fracture a sense of unity"[61] need not hinder us from pursuing the idea that this lack of unity was a feature of the programme from the start and not simply the result of changes that the network demanded. His account can be restated in this way: arguably later changes did not respect or magnify the ingrained disunity of the series; they distorted them. Yet this disunity remains unexamined as the result of a structure that opts for reinvention instead of reiteration. The opening moments from the two episodes analysed are both part of planned operations that the female protagonist is performing with precise missions. For this reason she becomes, or is forced to become, an *other*, a different woman, robust or titillating, and the style of the series mirrors this difference.

"Masquerade" (1.18) opens with Sydney climbing an enormous cliff (fig. 34). A closer shot shows her struggling, touching the rock and discovering its edge (fig. 35a), settling for a point of support and holding on to it while she moves upward (fig. 35b). She reaches the top and calls the FBI to turn herself in and deal with the suspicion that the Rambaldi prophecies are about her. Before her stands an impressive landscape of mountains, a purple and ruby sky, and a rising sun behind the peaks (fig. 36). These images are complemented with vocal music by Anonymous 4, a female a cappella quartet that sings sacred medieval songs. This is another example of a radical shift of tone in the series. This scene aims at expressing a communion with and enthralment of nature, as something that can be touched and understood, as something that calls for contemplation. It is a moment of, if not revelation, at least insight, that connects bodily with spiritual awareness, physical with moral determination. This deeply personal facet is still linked with her secret activities as an agent. The narrative of the series, structured around false or

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60. Jason Mittell, "*Lost* in a Great Story: Evaluation in Narrative Television (and Television Studies)", in *Reading "Lost": Perspectives on a Hit Television Show*, ed. Roberta Pearson (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), p. 128.
    61. Ibid., p. 128.

Fig. 37a.

Fig. 37b.

Fig. 37c.

Fig. 37d.

Alias, "Double Agent" (2.14).

assumed identities, gives continuity to the stylistic changes as well as consistently present reasons for these changes.

In some episodes, the spy storyline is even started off without Sydney. The teaser sequence of "Double Agent" (2.14) demonstrates this. The camera gives us a view of Berlin at night (fig. 37a) and then tracks back to a bedroom and films the woman who lies in bed from her toes to her face. Her close-up shows a man's hand as it touches her skin (fig. 37b). The next shot is over the man's shoulder (fig. 37c) and only the following counter-shot reveals the man's face (fig. 37d). The framing and editing builds up suspense by delaying revelation, taking its time to set up the participants of the scene, enigmatically. The camera covers the woman's body to get to her head instead of directly cutting to it. The disclosure of the face, and therefore of identity, is held over. When the man's face is finally shown, the focus of the sequence seems to be her. It turns out that he is the possible double agent of the title. Moments later he punches her and calls to inform that he has been compromised as well as his assignment in Berlin.

As exemplified, odd variation goes beyond the established aesthetic patterns of the series, constantly re-establishing them with new motifs. The viewer has to adjust to the difference that this type of variation introduces. Odd variation need not be so constant as in *Alias*, where stylistic elements that are different from those previously used are regularly introduced. Doubtless, this regularity makes the oddness of the variation become usual, yet frequent viewers do not know *exactly* what to expect when an episode begins — that is, the variation is odd because it is unexpected, even though it is regular. Nevertheless, in most series, odd variation is more sporadic. *Bones* (2005-), for instance, a police drama in which a female forensic anthropologist and a male FBI agent who investigate cases involving human remains, varies unusually and unexpectedly its teaser sequence from time to time. Some cases are introduced through the setting up of a short scene with a specific ambience where unknown, and never to be seen again, characters discover the bones. Other cases are presented with the two investigators already having casual conversations on the crime scene with all the forensic apparatus in place.

2.3. Arc Variation

Narrative arcs are over-arching story lines. They can span a few episodes, an entire season, or even the complete series. Arcs do not have to be continuous and are usually interrupted or intersected by non-arc narrative threads.[62] Arc variation aesthetically parallels narrative arcs, usually progressing with it. It often complements, and sometimes enhances, the different individuated moments of the arc with aesthetic variations. In spite of this, this section will concentrate more on the details of the varied elements that are linked with the story arc and less on the *development* of these elements — it will focus on the variation itself and not on its progression.[63] The police series *NYPD Blue* contains an example of this kind of variation associated with the arc of a major character, Detective John Kelly, throughout the first season and part of the second. The character is played by David Caruso, who pursues variations on performance motifs that are made more prominent through stylistic choices concerning lighting, camerawork, and editing.

The following comments build on previous observations by Karen Lury on Caruso's performance in the series. Lury describes it as underplayed and internalised. She writes that his technique is

> characterised by "method-like" twitches — he looks and doesn't look (mimicking a busy intensity, both anxious, needy and aggressive). At the same time, he appears to carry a burden, indicating both his acceptance of responsibility and his sensitivity, so that his posture is hunched, and when he speaks to others, his head is bowed indicating again, sensitivity and intensity. (The implication being, perhaps, that he is *listening*.) Caruso's "soft-hard" performance is reinforced by the technology employed by the programme, so

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62. See Jeremy G. Butler, *Television: Critical Methods and Applications*, 2nd edn. (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002), pp. 30-31.

63. Cf. Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), p. 173. Bordwell calls attention to the "through-composed" elements of style in some contemporary cinema that are connected with narrative aspects and are developed across a film. Despite these similarities, mine and Bordwell's concepts are quite different. As I have made clear, arc variation may entail progression, but it *is not* progression: it is simply the variation of aesthetic elements *associated with* a narrative arc. As such, I am more interested in analysing arc variations and less concerned with how these variations progress. *Progression* will be dealt with in detail in the next chapter.
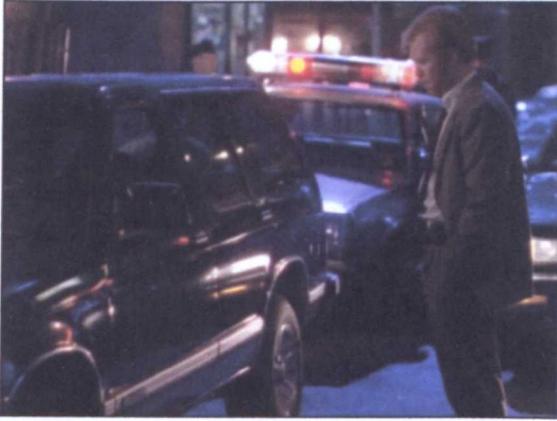
Fig. 38a.

Fig. 38b.

Fig. 38c.

Fig. 38d.

NYPD Blue, "Pilot" (1.01).

that the quick, repetitive and fussy camera pans emphasise the look and non-look, while the crowding of shots, and the odd camera angles reproduce intensity. Most significantly, however, the character's hard-softness is in part a result of the mixture of a harsh *tele-noir* look recreation in the station (strong shadows and dark corners, performers framed in silhouette) and a soft, backlit glow in which Kelly is bathed for romantic situations.[64]

Lury's words are evocative, but can be further developed and made more precise. Kelly's narrative arc chronicles how a respected detective ends up resigning when he is under internal investigation. He is divorcing his wife, Laura Michaels (Sherry Stringfield), when he starts seeing a colleague, officer Janice Licalsi (Amy Brenneman). Later, it is revealed that Licalsi is an informant for Angelo Marino (Joe Santos), a local Mafia boss who John is relentlessly investigating. Marino has her father on his payroll and blackmails her with this fact, ordering her to assassinate John. Instead, she murders Marino. The consequences of this action will affect her as well as John, who she had confided in. Since the focus is on variation, what is more relevant is not the development of this arc, but the stylistic variations within it.

In "Pilot" (1.01), John's partner, Detective Sergeant Andy Sipowicz (Dennis Franz), is shot because he has gone after a Mob member. Sipowicz is in the hospital and John is worried about his partner's condition. This is the reason why he pressures Marino, demanding that he gives up the man who pulled the trigger. John is called because of an attack and robbery in the building where his ex-wife lives. Janice is also at the scene because she was nearby. He says goodbye to her and when she is already inside the car, he stands still next to the vehicle (fig. 38a). His stillness is reinforced by his hands on the pockets. He turns his body with his arms and hands in the same position (fig. 38b) and sees his ex-spouse (fig. 38c). He then looks down, with his torso still immobile (fig. 38d). His gestures are paused and the successive moments of reflection are intensified by his concentration. There are only a few, precise motions (turning to the left, looking in the same direction and then down) while most of his body remains locked, expressing that he is absorbed in his thinking, trying to make a decision that unlocks his body with a clear

64. Karen Lury, "Television Performance: Being, Acting and 'Corpsing'", *New Formations*, no. 27 (1995), p. 124.

Fig. 39a.

Fig. 39b.

Fig. 39c.

NYPD Blue, "Rockin' Robin" (1.22).

Fig. 40.

Fig. 41.

NYPD Blue, "From Hare to Eternity" (1.11).

purpose — something to do, a place to go. He finally walks to the car and goes to the hospital to be by Sipowicz's side.

One noteworthy aspect of this scene is not just the fact that the camera is interested in his pauses, but also how they are captured. In these moments when John is immersed in his thoughts, Caruso is filmed more straightforwardly, avoiding the dynamic camerawork that became a signature of the series. The camera becomes more tranquil, less shaky and the immediate background is in focus — a clear contrast with the shot of his ex-spouse in which the whole background is blurred. If these pensive instants ground him in the world, so that he can take his time to be resolute, then this is heightened by the cinematography and the lighting that reveal and illuminate the textures of his surroundings with clarity. When he is acting alone, the nervous camerawork of the series tends to be calmer, matching the quiet intensity of the character. The last episode of the first season, "Rockin' Robin" (1.22), shows him talking to a man who found the dead body of a priest in a garden. John and the man are framed from the knees up and sharply focused (fig. 39a). The calmness of the camera is sustained while they talk. Then, there is a cut to the body (fig. 39b) with a quick and blurred pan to the forensic specialists (fig. 39c). This visual excitement, rapid and unclear, clashes with the placidity of the previous shot.

The first series, in which the character appears throughout, places him in various intimate, peaceful scenes, in which the edgy Sipowicz would be misplaced. He visits his forgetful mother in a rest home at the end of "From Hare to Eternity" (1.11) and is patient enough to reenact his arrival, after she salutes him for the second time as though he had arrived just then. He sits on her bed with the hands on the lap and looks at her, giving her full attention (fig. 40). His devotion is accentuated when he gets up and because of the deterioration of her short-term memory she greets him for the second time. He does not hesitate and his gestures are weighty yet serene as he returns to her bed, indicating the acceptance of a burden that he does not see as a nuisance. The series underlines this by placing him in exactly the same position as earlier and framed the same way, only a bit tighter (fig. 41). He adopts a similar attentive posture, but is now a little bent and even closer to his mother.

His introspection invites our contemplation. His calmness transforms the urban rush of the

Fig. 42a.

Fig. 42b.

Fig. 42c.

NYPD Blue, "Dead and Gone" (2.04).

scenes.[65] His serenity and determination are both professional and personal. Performance motifs around quietude and sternness are varied and intensified by the visual stylistic choices of the series. Before his final scene in the series, John is again seen holding on to a fixed posture. These are the last moments with Sipowicz, a farewell in the locker room of the precinct in which John is seated and his friend takes the place beside him, in empathy. When Sipowicz burst in, John occupies the left third of the screen, and the image is rough (fig. 42a). The next shot steps back and shows John in profile, seated on a bench, immobile, backlighted, occupying the same screen space and Sipowicz on the right gesticulating in full body and dominating the composition (fig. 42b). This contrast between immobility and movement vanishes once Sipowicz joins John, sharing the feeling that he has not given up, but that he is at rest (fig. 42c). This last shot is tighter shot and the position of the camera has changed to the right, enough so that we see their faces and the effect of their backlighting diminishes. Caruso's performance motifs are varied across the character's arc. For the sake of clarity and emphasis, my analysis has pointed out these variations without detailing the stylistic arc that they entail. Be that as it may, there is a clear pattern in these variations that shows his quiet reflections and stern determination, first among other people — slowing down the pace of the scene — and then increasingly alone when internal affairs and his captain persecute him.

An arc may also concentrate on a group of characters instead of on a single character. It may last more than one season as well. The hallucinations of the title character in *Ally McBeal* (1997-2002) lasted the whole series, for example. Not all episodes include them, but throughout the series arc, various hallucinatory fantasies reflect the female lawyer's moments of irritation, feelings of insecurity, romantic ideals, and longing for motherhood — from the surprising appearance of famous persons to an enthralling dancing baby.

3. Diverse Recurrence

The description of these types and the analysis of these examples have made clearer the reach of the concepts of repetition and variation when applied to the aesthetics of television fiction series.

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65. In the scenes when he is angry, his anger seems restrained, measured, a kind of non-violent displeasure.

Like the chapter on units and motifs, this one described the distinct repetitions and variations and how these general processes become specific and given particular significance in shows. It is only now, after these clarifying previous sections, that it is the right time to develop some of the theoretical remarks offered in the beginning of this chapter.

The series analysed in this chapter illustrate how their aesthetic identity is continuously defined and redefined by repetitions and variations. It is fruitful then to point out the parallel, even if not the coincidence, between this continuous definition and redefinition and Deleuze's thoughts on difference (as *difference in itself*) and repetition (as *repetition for itself*) in relation to identity. It is vital to address Deleuze's thinking on difference and repetition because it is a key contribution to the study of these concepts, which underpins his philosophical work and has become influential in contemporary philosophy.[66] The difference that interests the French philosopher is pure difference — a difference that is not based on a prior concept, that is, a difference that is not a distinction between two things, x and y, or a relation derived from negation, x and not-x. Because we are confronted with too many differences between things, the identity, *the concept of a thing*, is not prior to nor the fixed ground of differentiation, but it is instead the product of the awareness of these countless differences. So according to him, it is differentiation that generates identity and not identity that allows differentiation.[67] We may say that it is both, since once identity is generated it logically allows differentiation. For an attentive viewer, every unit of a series is different, unique in some fashion, and their comparison gives rise to an aesthetic identity that is itself always open to redefinition.

For Deleuze, repetition (for itself) is the temporal relation of difference (in itself). The definition of identity depends on the realisation that difference is ingrained in repetition, that

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66. Deleuze's book, *Difference and Repetition*, has become a classic of 20th-century philosophy. Keith Ansell-Pearson's *Germinal Life: The Repetition and Difference of Deleuze* (London: Routledge, 1999), James Williams's *Gilles Deleuze's "Difference and Repetition": A Critical Introduction and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003) and Joe Hughes's recent *Deleuze's "Difference and Repetition": A Reader's Guide* (New York: Continuum, 2009) are only three of many in-depth studies and critical guides on it.

67. See Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, ch. 1. For Deleuze, philosophy creates concepts that stem for difference, the condition of diversity (p. 280). Hence his classificatory work of different kinds of cinema images, e.g., in *Cinema I: The Movement-Image* [1983], trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) and *Cinema II: The Time-Image* [1985], trans. Tomlinson and Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

variation is introduced in repetition.[68] In other words, the process of repeating creates *something else*, that is, creates difference and therefore variation. We may agree with this up to a point and in abstract. Yet even though there are various types of repetition, repetition is not variation — they may be linked, but they are also distinguishable. Variation is introduced in a series against a background of repetition, but it is a specific process as well, which has to do with a change that is striking and patterned. A unit of a series is differential because it is defined only in its relation to, or difference from, other units. On this account, a unit like an episode is but one actualisation of the evolving aesthetic principles that guide the creation of the show.

Recapitulating, the aesthetic identity of the show is configured and reconfigured with every repetition and variation. This identity, which is conceptual and not merely nominal, which has to do with aesthetic concepts and not simply with episodes presented under the same title, is constantly *formed* based on differences and similarities. As chains of pieces, series create two expectations: they guarantee the similar and they promise the different. In order for this guarantee and this promise to be fulfilled, the structure of a series has to be adaptable, accommodating, flexible.

Robin Nelson has developed a term to explain the narrative indeterminacy, character density, and thematic ambiguity of contemporary series, which weave various story lines simultaneously: *flexi-narrative*.[69] The expression "denotes the fast-cut, segmented, multi-narrative structure".[70] The stylistic intricacy of series like *24* or *NYPD Blue*, composed through repetition and variation, demonstrate that a *flexi-aesthetics* accompanies their flexible narrative structure. This aesthetic diversity, internal and external to series, is the result of artistic choices as well as decisions concerning viewership. Conglomerates like Time Warner, which includes subsidiaries like HBO and The CW, have become proficient in maintaining and catering to diverse audiences rather than dispersing or making uniform what was once diverse.[71]

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68. See Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, ch. 2.

69. For an examination of instances of this kind of narrative structure, see Robin Nelson, *TV Drama in Transition: Forms, Values and Cultural Change* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), chap. 2.

70. Nelson, *TV Drama in Transition*, p. 24.

71. John Thornton Caldwell, "Convergence Television: Aggregating Form and Repurposing Content in the Culture of Conglomeration", in *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 68.
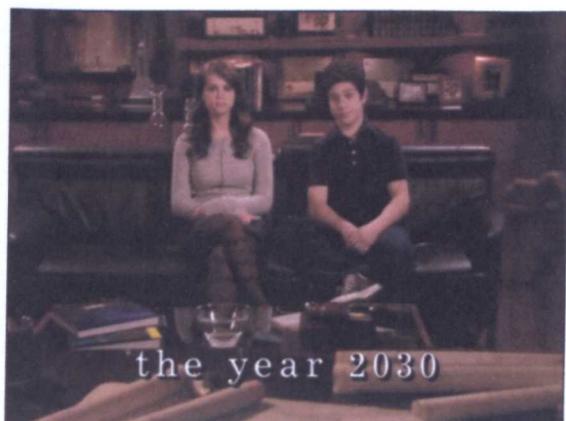
Fig. 43.

How I Met Your Mother, "Pilot" (1.01).

Yet aesthetic diversity is more extensive and it is produced by other compositional operations besides repetition and variation. Eco writes about these two operations, arguing that

> what is of interest is not so much the single variations as "variability" as a formal principle, the fact that one can make variations to infinity. Variability to infinity has all the characteristics of repetition, and very little of innovation. But it is the "infinity" of the process that gives a new sense to the device of variation.[72]

In this context, "infinity" can be taken as the horizon of presuppositions and expectations of the viewers. What a viewer presupposes and expects expands as the series develops, so that this possible infinite process creates a continuum that is shaped by cyclicality, periodicity, and regularity. This excerpt suggests that this structure is opposed to originality or innovation in a descriptive, not evaluative, sense — the original or innovative should therefore be taken as the unusual, the novel, the unexpected. The semiotician is more direct later when he explains the displacement of theoretical focus from repetition, as allowing a dialectic between the (disparaged) scheme and the (valued) innovation, to a "scheme-variation knot" where scheme and variation are equally appreciated.[73] Put this way, this is as a response to the triumph of a new aesthetic, one that excludes innovation from its horizon, based on a repetitive scheme and seemingly endless variations on it. Perhaps Eco is just calling attention to two different aesthetic/ theoretical models, but their opposition seems an oversimplification given how television series and other serial works usually combine both models.

The sitcom *How I Met Your Mother* (2005-) exemplifies this combination, playing with the conventions of the genre and introducing innovations. In the beginning of the series, and from time to time, Ted Mosby (Josh Radnor) recounts to his two children how he met their mother. "I'm going to tell a story. The story of how I met your mother.", we hear him say off-screen to his daughter and son (fig. 43) in the pilot episode. The story revolves around his friends: Marshall Eriksen (Jason Segel) and Lily Aldrin (Alyson Hannigan), Barney Stinson (Neil Patrick Harris),

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72. Eco, "Interpreting Serials", p. 96.
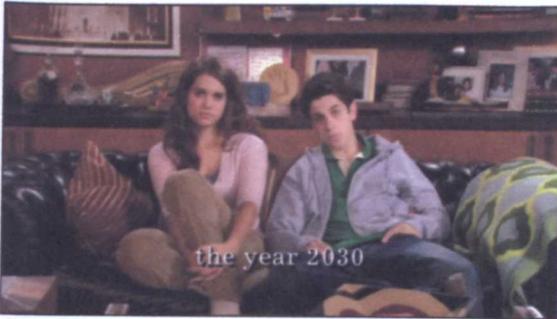73. Ibid., pp. 97-98.

Fig. 44a.

Fig. 44b.

How I Met Your Mother, "Wait for It..." (3.01).

and Robin Scherbatsky (Cobie Smulders), Ted's short-term girlfriend. This means that the series is a "buddy" sitcom in the vein of *Friends*. The conventions of the genre, like the concentration on two settings, a living space (Lily and Marshall's apartment) and a meeting space (the bar MacLaren's), establish the circularity and resistance to change associated with the genre. The retrospective voice-over challenges these conventions. It gives the series a direction connected with the anticipation for finding out how Ted met his kids' mother, an anticipation that is prolonged, but that can end at any time — because Ted's meeting with his future wife will happen at the conclusion of the series, whenever that is. Generic conventions like these of sitcoms give rise to *generic repetitions*, elements that rely on the prior knowledge and experience of the viewer. Specific repetitions of a work also become *specific conventions*. Jason Mittell calls attention to the fact that genres are not simply a collection of conventions, but are formed through the activation of conventions, "linking them to various assumptions of definition, interpretation, and evaluation, all under the rubric of the given genre".[74] Whereas sitcoms usually try to be continuous, the show is disjointed, with flashbacks, flash-forwards, commentaries, re-enactments, repetitions from other perspectives. Its scenes follow the traditional multiple-camera proscenium schema,[75] but given its reliance on the montage of bits of scenes, and not simply on switching between cameras, it could not have been performed before a live studio audience. This disjointedness happens mostly between scenes in different settings, but also sometimes within a scene — for example, with a flashback of only a few minutes. The split between the moments when the teenagers listen to their father and the images that follow, or intercut them, is exemplary of this.

By the beginning of the third season, "Wait for It..." (3.01), the opening repeats the shot of the adolescents (fig. 44a) with Ted's voice saying "Kids, there's more than one story of how I met your mother. You know the short version," followed by "the thing with your mom's yellow umbrella. But there's a bigger story; the story of how I became who I had to become before I could meet her. And that story begins here." This second part is said over an image of a large yellow umbrella on an empty street (fig. 44b). What is interesting is not just the fact that he is

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74. Jason Mittell, *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004). p. 118.
75. For an account of this schema, see Chapter One, p. 63.

talking about a story that we do not know at this time, but this sort of image, a apparently symbolic image. As far as we can see, after five seasons, this is not an image of an event in the fictional world of the series, it is an image that stands for something else, which plays the symbolic function of conveying the importance of the umbrella and represents the absence of information about its role in the story through the emptiness of the backdrop. The umbrella appears later in this season and in following seasons in concrete situations — the first time when Ted finds it at a club and takes it home after a St. Patrick's Day party, where, unbeknownst to him, his future wife was.

The image may be presenting an actual event that will be revealed in the future. It may be projecting Ted's mental image of the yellow umbrella as he tells the story to his kids. Whatever the hypothesis, this *use* of a symbolic image is completely new, unique, within the structure of the series. It is obviously not a repetition, but it is also not a variation. It is an *exception*. Exceptions deviate both from patterns of repetition and of variation. This exceptional first image is subsequently developed into actual scenes that provide a context that turns "a yellow umbrella" into "the yellow umbrella" of the story. So there is a *progression* in series that is commonly not devised in advance, but moulded as the time of production goes by. Progression involves the serial arrangement of repetitions, variations, and exceptions of units and motifs, comprising the overall aesthetic movement of a series. Already in this chapter there was a hint of this progress: for example, in the discussion of arc variation. Yet noticing the change that is highlighted in this kind of variation — one connected with a developing story arc — does not demand that we have to explain how this progress takes place. In addition to the classification of the different types of exception, the next chapter will give a detailed account of the procedures that progression entails.

Chapter Four:

Exception and Progression

The serial aesthetic form of television fiction involves the ordering of units and the patterning of motifs according to certain principles of composition. The previous chapter focused on two of these principles: repetition and variation. This one will concentrate on two additional compositional relations: exception and progression. Series explore alternatives to sequences of repetitions and variations by introducing anomalies into their structure. These exceptions produce an effect of singularity in the way that repetition creates and variation recreates a sense of familiarity. Progression is radically different from these three principles because it encompasses all of them and gives them a direction of progress, built block by block. It is therefore the most complex and comprehensive of the four. Exception and progression are discussed together because both of them require an extensive view of the series. The former, in order to be recognised as a deviation from the regular patterns of repetition and variation. The latter, in order to be understood in its multiple dimensions of advance that only become apparent after some time, once the aesthetic structure of the series with its elements and relations is made clear.

Considering a series like *Mad Men* (2007-) can make these concepts more understandable. In this series, mise en scène and continuity editing are employed to portray a place, New York City, and a time, the early 1960s, which are under attentive observation without other narrative strains that may neutralise the intensity of the focus on the details of *that place* and *that time*. However, "The Hobo Code" (1.09) introduces flashbacks to the past of the main character, Don Draper (Jon Hamm), the creative director of a top advertising agency. Although this is an *exception*, it expands on the interest of the series on his hidden past and social climbing, from a motherless poor boy to an affluent family man, from an anonymous soldier to the assumed identity of his lieutenant. It is what will be called a *motivated exception*, one that underlines a crucial narrative moment with aesthetic exceptionality.

The revelations of the flashbacks are slowly accompanied by revelatory scenes in the present in which Don, whose real name is Richard Whitman, confronts his personal history and those whom he lied to. The stylistic *progression* of the show establishes a present space and time in detail and then digs into another space and into a previous time, until the links between places and times have consequences in the present. This connection and progression is clearly expressed when the programme later frames and situates flashbacks *within* the established present. The third season shows Don revisiting vivid episodes of his childhood while remaining in his current situation. In these scenes, the present metamorphoses into the past for a few minutes making memories real, through the bond between his experience and his recollection.

As it is evident from this example, aesthetic exception and progression raise questions about the interaction between narrative and aesthetics. Exception, because it seems to point towards their dissociation. Progression, because it appears to imply their union. David Bordwell's observations on the autonomy of style and plot in some films are of use here. According to him, the stylistic patterns of fiction films tend to be subordinated to the syuzhet or the plot, the order and manner of presentation of narrative events. Yet he notices that there are works that opt for a different type of narration termed "parametric" in which style establishes its own parameters independently. Bordwell argues that in cases like Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1959) "the stylistic system creates patterns distinct from the demands of the syuzhet system. Film style may be organized and emphasized to a degree that makes it at least equal in importance to syuzhet patterns."[1] This description seems to posit either the dependence *or* the independence of style in relation to plot, but Bordwell is clear that a work may combine both. A clarification is needed at this point. There is no sense in talking about non-narrative elements in a narrative work. Every element of such a work deepens our sense of the projected world of the fiction and of its inhabitants; even when they do not give us more information, they gives us more detail.[2] All elements are also aesthetic — or stylistic, if we are talking about a specific work or kind of work — insofar as they make up the *designed*

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1. David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 275.
2. In contrast, plot is structured around main events and not fleeting moments, around the thread of narrative and not its breath. That is why *plotting* is in essence devising a sequence of decisive events.

appearance of the work. Bordwell describes style as the "repetition and development of instantiations of film technique",[3] which encompasses any aspect that can be chosen and manipulated in the making of a film.[4]

What Bordwell is pointing at is that some stylistic elements are more narratively motivated than others. This does not mean that some of them are less narrative — after all, he still talks about *narration*, but of a specific and rare kind, parametric. Within television series, exception may be classified according to a similar narrative motivation or absence of it. Exception can only be grasped with a previous knowledge of patterns of repetition and variation from which it deviates. Otherwise, what may look like exception to an unknowledgeable viewer may be a repetition or a variation. In other words, repeating and varying patterns establish limits that exception breaks. Aesthetic conventions associated with specific genres have been central in the previous chapters precisely for this reason. Genres are not immutable categories. What is typical of them, their set of conventions, is not fixed, but open to change and combination, thus creating external principles that series follow or forgo, preserve or alter, and that each series accompanies with particular internal principles.[5] Exception eschews the repetitions and variations of external and internal aesthetic principles. However, even if they are outside of the recurrences and variances of series, the different kinds of exception are part of the principles that internally structure serial form, shaping its aesthetic progression.

These remarks show that there are narratological tools useful for an approach to the aesthetics of television fiction series. This is because works like these create a serialised aesthetics, an aesthetic narrative, a chain, not of story events, but of units and motifs that are ordered and related, whether causally or in other ways.[6] This sequence entails progression, the passage from one part, with its aesthetic components and characteristics, to another. As the lines of the story of a series advance so do the lines of its style, more or less dependently, more or less

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3. Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 275.
4. Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 8th edn. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), p. 481. That is, this all-encompassing definition includes not only the use of equipment, but also, for example, the performance of actors.
5. In Bordwell's terminology this corresponds to extrinsic and intrinsic norms. See Bordwell, *Narration in Fiction Film*, pp. 150-56.
6. See George M. Wilson, "Narrative", in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 393.

independently. As we shall see, such a process of progression involves a number of procedures that have to do with the position and the relation of the array of pieces that a series is. These distinct procedures will be explored and explained through the analysis of a single example, one series, because progression encompasses all the other relations, including exception. Before this, and in contrast to this, the next pages will provide various illustrative instances with the intent of defining the different types of exception.

1. Bases for Exception

In the aesthetics of a television series, exception pertains to those unusual characteristics that make an element or feature stand out. Episodes that contain these elements or that have these features catch our attention because they are exceptional within the repeated and varied patterns of the programme. It is common for this aesthetic exception to have an emphatic function or an experimental aim. In *Medium* (2005-), Allison DuBois's (Patricia Arquette) psychic intuitions are revealed in dreams that sometimes take cryptic and unexpected forms — long point of view shots or animated sequences, for example. Yet these instances should be considered odd variations, since they steam from the same premise: these visions that open the episode and occur throughout it, no matter how odd, convey information to Allison about events that have taken or will take place. The distinction between odd variation and all types of exception lies exactly in this point. Exceptions forgo established narrative premises and as such they are not just extremely odd, but completely different. Take "Time Keeps on Slippin" (6.20), for instance, a very unusual episode, one to which the audience has to readjust, one in which we are reacquainted with the style of the show. In the opening dream, Allison sees Ariel (Sofia Vassilieva), her oldest daughter, hiding in the bathroom because she is no longer a teenager, but a very old woman. From that moment on, the episode revolves around Ariel, who shares her mother's psychic powers, and not Allison. The girl has been staying awake for too many hours studying for an exam. Without proper rest, she starts losing hours and then years of time. The series conveys this in the most direct way, simply cutting to another scene in the close or distant

future, in a different setting, with a different texture and lighting, and with an older Ariel. The viewer tries to seize hold of points of reference like Ariel does. Scene after scene, she discovers that she must solve a crime that had tragic consequences in her life, including the murder of her mother. It is ingenious that the episode never abandons this fragmented, bewildering structure, and uses it to support the discovery and solution of the crime via a gradual process. It is only when Ariel knows what happened that, without explanation, she is back in the station wagon in front of the boy who is going to be the murder. Within the overall relations between the parts of the series this is an *arbitrary exception* because it is unrelated to a narrative arc (for example, the one involving her mother's brain tumour, which had been diagnosed at the end of the previous season and resurfaces in the sixth season finale). It also does not emphasise a crucial point in the inter-episode or inter-season narrative, merely confirming that Allison's capacities are hereditary. Its intention is more experimental than emphatic.

Despite its exceptional components and characteristics, this episode from *Medium* opens with Allison's dream as usual. There are always some repeated and varied aspects in such episodes, that contribute to the maintenance of stylistic continuity. An episode described as exceptional does not comprise only exceptional elements or features. As the previous chapters have made clear, the complex aesthetic structure of series combines diverse principles within every episode and season. Consequently, while the dream may be an odd variation, most of the episode is composed of arbitrary exceptions. Contrary to what this example shows, exception may also be dependent on a narrative arc. Such *motivated exception* underlines a crucial moment in the narrative development of the show. *Season exception* occurs in the episodes that define the boundaries of seasons as bookends. It is in general motivated, but it can also be arbitrary. Not all season premieres and finales are exceptional, but when they are, they belong to this type of exception, which calls attention to their pivotal structural position within the series. The episodes from three fantasy series, *Supernatural* (2005-), *Lost* (2004-10), and *Angel* (1999-2004), analysed in the next pages exemplify each one of the narrative bases for aesthetic exception: arbitrariness, motivation, and season bookending, respectively. All three include examples of each kind of exception throughout their many seasons, but the focus will be on only one of the

three kinds. In truth, exceptions are frequent in fantasy television fiction. The magic that imbues this genre makes it easier for the creators to justify them within these fictional worlds, whereas on realist television fiction not everything seems possible.

Exception is often connected with an institutional practice informally called *stunting*. Producers and critics call *stunts* to special episodes that create a television event. These episodes are meant to be unusual, distinctive, and daring — and are marketed as such. John Caldwell explains that they are more common during sweeps periods, intervals when there is a survey of the ratings of broadcasts to establish or revise advertising rates.[7] The rationale behind this practice is that these special episodes are able to catch the attention of the audience and thus increase the ratings of the series. Caldwell identifies several types of stunts: the *masquerading stunt* masquerades as another show or genre; the *self-conscious stunt* experiments with other styles; the *docu-stunt* turns into a documentary; the *"making-of" stunt* breaks the diegetic frame; the *cross-network stunt* uses characters from a different series aired on a different network; and the *cross-genre guest-star stunt* stars a recognisable star associated with another genre.[8] Enumerating these terms and their descriptions is relevant because it demonstrates that they are based on institutional practices of production and marketing. They are useful only if my aim, like Caldwell's, were to research such documented practices. The serial context of these stunts, or exceptions, is therefore downplayed or erased in favour of the specific characteristics (like self-consciousness) or assets (like television stars) used to promote the episode. It is undeniable that stunting is associated with formal aggregation and permutation, responding to the regular industrial need to avoid standardisation and redundancy.[9] This tells us a lot about the proceedings and routines of the television industry, but little about the aesthetics of television series and the connections that exceptional episodes establish with the rest of the units of a series. It is these latter aspects that the following classification and analyses address in detail.

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7. John Thornton Caldwell, "Convergence Television: Aggregating Form and Repurposing Content in the Culture of Conglomeration", in *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 61.

8. Ibid., pp. 62-64.

9. Ibid., p. 70. He associates these practices with Post-Fordism in the American context and with fashionable over-consumptionism, a detached relationship with things in which consumers always want *something else*. Despite this contextualisation in America, these remarks relate to a much larger context given the fact of globalisation and the overwhelming exportation of American series.

1.1. Arbitrary Exception

Supernatural follows two brothers, Sam (Jared Padalecki) and Dean Winchester (Jensen Ackles), who hunt demons and other supernatural beings. The series is structured around well-defined narrative season arcs. In the first season, the brothers go on a quest to find their father and discover the creature that killed their mother, a demon that can only be killed with a Samuel Colt gun. In their journey, Sam realises that he has supernatural powers. The next season chronicles their hunt for the demon. Sam loses his life in this search. Dean then makes a deal with a crossroads evil spirit, offering his soul to bring Sam back from the dead. Finally Dean kills the demon, but unleashes other demons in the process. The brothers are reunited in the third season and chase the unleashed fiends. They try to find a loophole in Dean's contract with the powerful demon Lilith (Katherine Boecher). But Sam's stronger powers are not enough and Dean's soul is taken to Hell. Throughout the fourth season, the brothers work with the angel Castiel (Misha Collins), who had rescued Dean from hellish torment. They try to stop Lilith from breaking the 66 seals that liberate Lucifer. Sam's demonic side is taking hold of him and it is only after he kills Lilith that he realises that her death was the last seal. The latest season focuses on the battle with Lucifer (Mark Pellegrino) to avoid the Apocalypse. Dean and Sam battle both angels and demons as they fight against their destiny to become, respectively, the vessels of the angel Michael and of the demon Lucifer. They collect the rings of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, which act as the keys to Lucifer's prison. Finally, with the grace and strength of God, they emerge victorious from the final confrontation. It is crucial to understand that these are very brief and extremely simplified synopses of the seasons. The death of Sam's fiancée in the beginning of the series at the hands of the same creature that killed his mother and other key events are absent. Ruby, an apparently good demon that finds out who holds Dean's contract, and later manipulates Sam into killing Lilith to set Lucifer free and other important secondary characters are not mentioned.

The serial structure of the show accentuates narrative continuity, but it also allows some room for the episodic, with close-ended instalments. This is especially true of the first two
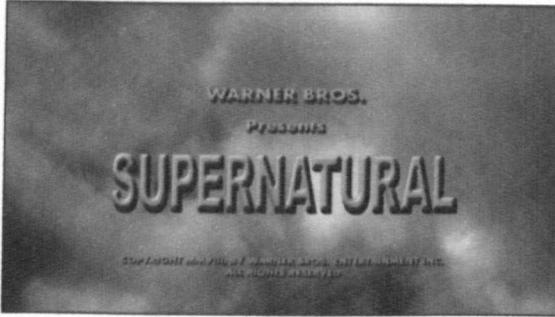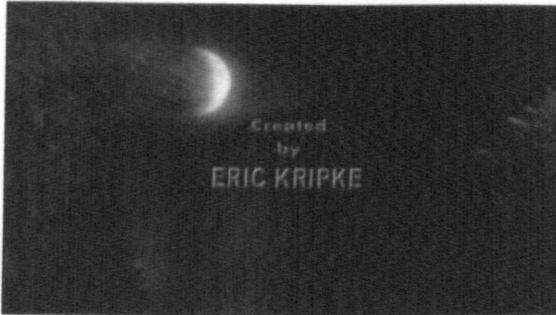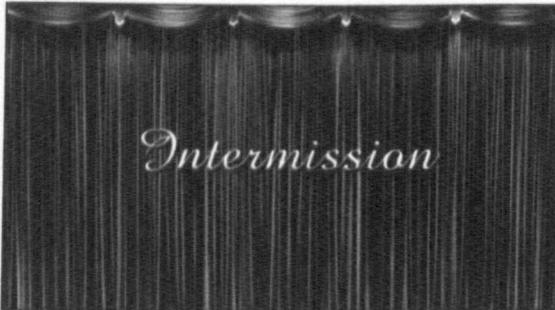
Fig. 1a.

Fig. 1b.

Fig. 1c.

Fig. 2.

Fig. 3.

Supernatural, "Monster Movie" (4.05).

Fig. 4.

Supernatural, "Monster Movie" (4.05).

seasons that are on many occasions similar to a road movie. The Winchester brothers go from town to town and solve the supernatural problems of people they meet and the paranormal cases that they see in the newspaper. Most of these episodes also contribute to the overall narrative arc of the season. Yet this contribution is small and localised and it usually takes place in the last scene, as a coda, after the conclusion of the story of the episode. Not all of these single story episodes are stylistically exceptional or contain stylistic exceptions, but "Monster Movie" (4.05) is one of them.

In this episode, the brothers Sam and Dean investigate several murders perpetrated by popular monsters from horror fiction like Dracula, the Werewolf, or the Mummy. The opening is reminiscent of classic horror cinema, with a Warner Bros. Pictures big logo (fig. 1a) followed by the habitual credits, but over menacing clouds and with a lettering that is typical of those classics of film (fig. 1b). The music uses brass wind instruments in assertive fashion announcing the beginning of the episode like in those classical movies. The last image of the credit sequence shows the top of trees on both sides and a bright waxing crescent moon smudged by clouds that recreates a gothic atmosphere (fig. 1c). An interval similar to the ones that some studio films contain, especially long films, comes up in the middle of the episode, featuring an image of a closed curtain, the word "intermission", and accompanied by an ambient lounge tune (fig. 2). All this is new, a deviation from the stylistic patterns of the series. As is the black and white photography, which departs from the usual brownish, dim colour photography. Here, the lighting and frame composition have movies like Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931), and other 1930s Universal horror productions heavily influenced by German Expressionism, as patent and declared visual references.[10] We see this in the high-contrast highlights — like the patch that illuminates Dracula's intense eyes when he tries to attack a girl (fig. 3). Dean rescues her and runs after the vampire. One of the next shots opts for a dynamic, high-angle composition in which the pointy rooftops of buildings and the two characters cast long shadows over the stone pavement (fig. 4). Expressionist influences are also evident in the utilisation of backlighting and sharply projected shadows. This use occurs, for example, in the scene when Sam sees one of the

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10. See Rick Worland, *The Horror Film: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), ch. 6. The chapter is aptly called "*Frankenstein* (1931) and Hollywood Expressionism".

Fig. 5.

Supernatural, "Monster Movie" (4.05).

217

suspects playing on the organ of an old movie theatre. Sam sees the suspect as a lively shadow in front of him and in the distance (fig. 5).

Exceptional episodes, stylistically unique parts of a series, may be narratively continuous and aesthetically discontinuous. However, this is not so in the particular case of arbitrary exception, which may be thought of as the exception within the exception. As "Monster Movie" makes plain, these exceptions have no inter-episode motivation, no basis within a story arc, and no function of narrative emphasis. This does not mean that episodes that employ arbitrary exception do not advance the narrative of the series. It means only that their place in the sequence of the show is as arbitrary as their aesthetic exceptionality, that is, that this exceptionality forgoes narrative momentousness. "Monster Movie" could have been placed elsewhere within the sequential structure of the series, but this is where it was placed, as the fifth episode of the fourth season. Yet these episodes are not, in any sense, redundant. On the contrary, they are sometimes the most celebrated moments of a show. Their role in the grand narrative is diminished. Nevertheless, an episode like "Monster Movie" celebrates salient serial traits, which are more conceptual than narrative: *inter-referentiality* in this case and *self-referentiality* in the case of "Ghostfacers" (3.13), about a group of amateurs who are shooting a pilot for a supernatural reality show. *Supernatural* absorbs many traditional myths and religious beliefs, presenting them, not as competing and possibly false, but as coexistent and equally true. This self-conscious coexistence generates informed discussions between the characters, often turning inter-referentiality into self-referentiality. Additionally, the series explores fiction self-consciously, alluding to its constructed nature as a work of art, imitating and sometimes parodying genres and styles.[11] "Monster Movie" is exemplary in this regard.

This episode also demonstrates that arbitrary exception does not necessarily erase the connection between narrative and aesthetics that is common and expected in television fiction. In this kind of exception, this link is only weakened between the aesthetic properties of the episode and the larger narrative structure of the series — here lies its arbitrariness, which should not be seen as a pejorative characterisation, but simply as a factual description. Yet the

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11. See Alberto N. García, "Breaking the Mirror: Metafictional Strategies in *Supernatural*", in *TV Goes to Hell: An Unofficial Road Map to "Supernatural"*, ed. David Lavery and Stacey Abbott (Toronto: ECW Press, forthcoming).

intra-episode relation between these two aspects is usually maintained. As we have seen, the peculiar stylistic characteristics of "Monster Movie" are related to its storyline: the Winchester brothers investigate a case in which a wave of crimes is being committed by classic horror film characters. Even these episodes rely on a memory of previous events that allows the viewer to be aware, for example, of who the two main characters are and what is their occupation. *Fringe* (2008-), a series about a team of "fringe" scientists and FBI agents who investigate unexplained incidents, includes a unique musical episode, "Brown Betty" (2.20). The musical scenes are part of a story that is told to a little girl, a strange detective noir fantasy with science-fiction elements such as artificial hearts. The story lessens the role of important narrative threads of the series, but some of them are still present, like the guilt that Walter Bishop (John Noble) feels about his behaviour towards his son and now colleague. This is why in the original ending of the story that Walter tells, the character that represents his son does not forgive the mad scientist, who stands for him. Yet this inter-episode narrative thread is weakened and this is not a vital moment in it. In a way, it is a narrative suspension in which something already known is restated in another form. It is obvious that this restatement deepens the issue, furnishing more detail, but it does not take the overall narrative to a new stage. As such, "Brown Betty" is arbitrarily exceptional.[12]

1.2. Motivated Exception

In contrast with the previous type, motivated exception is ingrained in the narrative development of the series. This aesthetic exception is therefore supported and justified by a pivotal moment in the story line. There are many exceptional episodes that fall into this category in *Lost*. The series opens with the crash of Oceanic flight 815, which was flying between Sydney and Los Angeles, on a tropical island in the South Pacific. The survivors soon discover stations and other structures and realise that they are not alone. They also notice

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12. This distinction between arbitrary and motivated exception may be likened to the distinction between *bound motif*, a small unit of plot that the story requires, and *free motif*, similar units that are not necessary, in Russian Formalist literature.

enigmatic presences like a terrifying black smoke and puzzling aspects like the fact that all of them seem to be connected in some way. Episodes typically feature a primary story line on the island and a secondary story line. The latter was at first a flashback centred on a character, then became a flash-forward, and in the last season what the creators called a "flash-sideways", which posits what would have happened if the plane had landed safely in Los Angeles. The narrative of *Lost* is continuous from episode to episode and this is why Jason Mittell claims that every piece contributes to the whole. Indeed, this feeling of wholeness is central to our understanding of the series, as if we are given successive bits of a gigantic puzzle. He writes that

> The pilot episode (1.02) ends with Charlie (Dominic Monaghan) asking a seemingly simple question, "Where *are* we?", which seems to define the entirety of the series. Every episode, every flashback and every character's story can be understood as contributing to a larger understanding of the nature (or artifice) of *Lost*'s island locale. Unlike nearly every other television series, *Lost* features no stand-alone episodes, and no "monsters-of-the-week" that offer reprieves from the serialized mythologies [...].[13]

An exception that is narratively motivated is closely connected with this sense of purpose and design that Mittell identifies in *Lost*,[14] since it is this sense that gives grounds for this exception. For this reason, exceptional episodes with narrative motivation are commoner in this series.[15] It is no surprise then this scholar hints at what this chapter calls "exception", and specifically "motivated exception", in the following passage:

> *Lost*'s operational aesthetic offers particular expressive possibilities that only become available to a serialized form like television narrative. The show develops intrinsic norms

13. Jason Mittell, "Lost in a Great Story: Evaluation in Narrative Television (and Television Studies)", in *Reading "Lost": Perspectives on a Hit Television Show*, ed. Roberta Pearson (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), p. 125.
14. Ibid., p. 127.
15. "Exposé" (3.14) is one of the few arbitrary exceptions in the series. It is an exceptional, because it *replays* and *revisits* previous events so as to include two minor characters, Nikki (Kiele Sanchez) and Paulo (Rodrigo Santoro), in them. Therefore, it does not underline a particularly important narrative point. For a brief discussion of this episode see ibid., p. 131.

over time, establishing conventions and rules that viewers internalize as defining the show character intercut with island life. Episodes violating these norms stand out as *exceptional*, either in violating fan expectations or providing unexpected pleasures. "Maternity Leaves" (2.15) and "Three Minutes" (2.22) feature flashbacks internal to island life [...].[16]

For Mittell, *Lost* is a prime example of the "operational aesthetic" that prevails in contemporary American television.[17] The term was coined by Neil Harris[18] and describes the technique of exposing the creative structure and process of an art work as a source of pleasure for the audience. The show exposes the inner workings of its storytelling as something to be engaged with, encouraging forensic analysis. It is at this juncture that Mittell's remarks, which focus mainly on narrative, can be connected with aesthetics, through the insistence on how the programme directs our attention to the *telling of the story*. He is responsive to the changes that take place throughout a series and also to our awareness of them. His hints can be refined with the terminology developed in this thesis, which allows us to make distinctions that he does not make. A case in point is the two episodes that he mentions as exceptional, "Maternity Leaves" and "Three Minutes". Using the terms expounded in the previous chapter, these episode may be classified as set variations on the established patterns of the series, the "norms" that Mittel identifies. They keep the basic flashback structure, changing only the temporal location of the flashbacks from the distant past to the near past.

These episodes may not be suitable as examples of motivated exception, but "Flashes Before Your Eyes" (3.08) is. It is the first episode in which scenes on the island do not punctuate the flashback of a character's life. The exception that the episode represents within the architecture of the series is justified because it highlights the moment that introduces the theme of time travel that will turn out to be crucial. Desmond Hume (Henry Ian Cusick), a man who has been stranded on the island after a shipwreck, three years prior to the plane crash, *relives* his past in London. Gradually, Desmond is revealed to possess the ability of surviving powerful

16. Mittell, "Lost in a Great Story", p. 132 (emphasis mine).
17. See Mittell, "Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television", *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 58 (2006), pp. 29-40.
18. See Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 57.

Fig. 6.

Fig. 7a.

Fig. 7b.

Fig. 8.

Lost, "Flashes Before Your Eyes" (3.08).

electromagnetic events, which cause shifts in time and space on the island. Because of his abilities, he sees glimpses of the future, as the teaser sequence of the episode reveals when he saves Claire (Emilie de Ravin) from a foreknown drowning. Desmond is filmed in a long shot carrying her, isolated (fig. 6), while the people who have witnessed the incident speculate about what happened. There is nothing exceptional about this teaser. The exception occurs later, after Desmond is forcibly intoxicated to disclose the truth about his powers, and it fills most of the episode.

Desmond runs towards Charlie (Dominic Monaghan) and knocks him to the ground. On top of Charlie, Desmond says in an agitated voice, "You don't want to know what happened to me when I turned that key! You don't want to know what happened to me!" (fig. 7a). Then there is a flashback to the end of the second season, when Desmond had to turn a key in the security system of the hatch to avoid a catastrophic electromagnetic event. The transition to the flashback is abrupt. Suddenly, the series is back to that moment, with the hatch alarm going off, the panel numbers turning erratically and a pre-recorded voice saying "System failure" (fig. 7b). This is singular. Throughout the series the flashbacks are conventionally introduced and concluded by sound effects, what sounds like an increasingly accelerated and higher-pinched noise of an airplane engine. When transitions are marked with this sound motif we are certain that they bookend a flashback — even though we may be uncertain about some of the enigmatic events that happen in it. The fact that the sound is absent is the first sign that this is something different, perhaps a flashback, but a unique one.

After he turns the key, a white flash follows and then a quick montage of flashes of Desmond's life. The next shot shows an eye opening in close-up (fig. 8). Shots like this are a noticeable visual motif in Lost. The series even starts with an eye opening and ends with an eye closing. This image shows the intimate nature of what is happening, has happened, or will happen to the characters. It expresses the relevance of their perception to make sense of a puzzling experience and their disorientation and confusion. Where is Desmond? When is he? Has he gone back in time to match his premonitions? Is this a flashback within a flashback? He wakes up in London, but the answers to these questions are not easy to find. Little by little, it is

Fig. 9.

Fig. 10.

Lost, "Flashes Before Your Eyes" (3.08).

unveiled that he is reliving his past before coming back to the island. This relived past stretches almost the entire episode, without interruptions. In the end, he is knocked out in a pub and awakes on the island already out of the reliving experience. The strictly repeated sound motif, dropped in the earlier transition to the end of the second season, announces the end of the flashback and he is again grabbing Charlie. It is the ambiguous segment in London, which ends at this moment, that makes this episode exceptional. Nikki Stafford informs us that there are two schools of thought on what happens to Desmond: "Either he physically left the island and time-travelled to the past [...], or [...] his life flashed before his eyes, but in such a way that he *believed* he could change the course of events."[19] Haunting images and sounds convey the narrative ambiguity that equally supports these two readings. Instances of this are the images of Desmond waking up in London at his girlfriend's flat and the warning sound of the microwave oven. When Desmond opens his eyes, he is lying on the wooden floor of the flat covered in a red paint that is too similar to blood (fig. 9). Later, as he is about to leave to meet her father, the microwave warns that his hot beverage is ready and the sound is the same as the timer beep in the hatch (fig. 10).

Motivated exception is akin to a motivated cut in film editing. This kind of cut allows the viewer to see something that it makes sense for the viewer to want to see. A typical example of this is the shot/reverse-shot technique in which the cuts generally coincide with the changes of speaker. The motive of the cut has to do with the pattern of alternation of the dialogue.[20] "Help for the Lovelorn" (2.11) from *Felicity* (1998-2002) is a further example that can clarify this analogy. It is a special episode in black and white that pays tribute to *The Twilight Zone* (1959-64). The introductory scenes inform us that the female protagonist misses her two ex-boyfriends and is not happy. The episode revolves around a strange clinic that she visits and that leads her to expect that she will be healed form her hopeless romanticism. She soon discovers that the clinic is a harmful place. Like the cuts between shots and reverse-shots are motivated by dialogue, her fantasy is motivated by the state of mind of the character and the

19. Nikki Stafford, *Finding "Lost" - Season Three: The Unofficial Guide* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2007), p. 60.
20. For a theoretical essay on this technique as a cinematic convention, see David Bordwell, "Convention, Construction, and Cinematic Vision", in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, ed. Bordwell and Noël Carroll (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), pp. 87-107.

realisation of what becomes her basic dilemma throughout four seasons: the choice between two love interests.

1.3. Season Exception

As the previous examples show, aesthetically exceptional episodes are sometimes also narratively central. Season premieres and finales are episodes in which this commonly happens, because of their opening and closing function. However, even though the beginning and ending of seasons tend to concentrate on the major themes and concerns of a series, season exception need not be motivated. The ending of the second season of *Angel* provides a good illustration of this. The series is a spin-off of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) that centres on Angel (David Boreanaz), the vampire with a soul that Buffy loves. They have a romantic and celibate relationship, because he is cursed and will lose his soul if they have sex. He eventually breaks up with her hoping that she will be happier without him and then finally decides to leave. When *Angel* begins, he is living in Los Angeles.

The series is informed by the noir tradition. This inspiration is evident in its visual style: "scenes are in shadow; faces are half-lit, figures silhouetted; visual symbols of entrapment — images of barred windows, banisters and iron railings — abound; and motifs of the night and the city are continually interwoven".[21] Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery call attention to the use of chiaroscuro with which the series visually introduces shading and depth to the world and the characters of the show. Their reference is the candle of light in the dark used by Caravaggio to light the subjects of his paintings. This perspective makes the association between *Angel* and noir more complex. In their suggestive words, "You have to know where to put the light to see the darkness, to see in the darkness. The noir world, however, seems more unrelievedly dark than Angel, which exhibits a different take on morality and a different sense of humour."[22] This dominant imagery is combined with other styles and genres, such as the superhero fiction. Angel

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21. Benjamin Jacob, "Los Angelus: The City of Angel", in *Reading "Angel": The TV Spin-off with a Soul*, ed. Stacey Abbott (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), p. 80.
22. Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery, "Afterword: The Depths of 'Angel' and the Birth of 'Angel' Studies", in *Reading "Angel": The TV Spin-off with a Soul*, ed. Stacey Abbott (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), pp. 225-26.
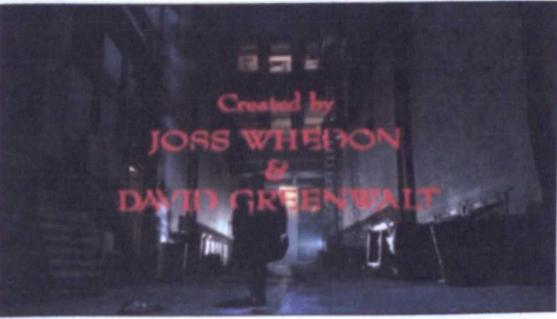
Fig. 11a.

Fig. 11b.

Fig. 12.

Fig. 13.

Angel, "Through the Looking Glass" (2.21).

is presented as a guardian of the City of Angels, watching over its inhabitants from a rooftop or protecting them on the streets in the nighttime.[23]

The second season of the series ends with a three-episode arc. The main characters visit Pylea, a place in an alternate dimension where demons are the ruling majority and humans are the exploited minority. "Belonging" (2.19) concludes with Cordelia (Charisma Carpenter), a school friend of Buffy who Angel runs into at the beginning of the show, passing through a portal and ending up in this alternate world. The next episode, "Over the Rainbow" (2.20), crosscuts between the two worlds, until Cordelia's friends successfully travel across dimensions to come to her aid. The last two episodes of the season, "Through the Looking Glass" (2.21) and "There's No Place Like Plrtz Glrb" (2.22), continue the narrative arc. The second takes place mainly in Pylea, but it also includes the safe return of the characters to Los Angeles. This analysis will focus on the first, because it is only set in the unfamiliar, demonic universe of Pylea — a characteristic that magnifies, and motivates, the exceptional aesthetic properties of this particular episode that are associated with the arc.

"Through the Looking Glass" begins with Angel, his associates, Wesley Wyndam-Pryce (Alexis Denisof) and Charles Gunn (J. August Richards), and a friend, Lorne (Andy Hallett), being taken before the sovereign of Pylea. They are surprised to see that Cordelia has been crowned princess. The production design is simple, even crude. The rudimentary helmets and props of the guards (fig. 11a) and the silver sequinned dress and vulgar jewellery that Cordelia wears seem to be made to look amateurish (fig. 11b). There is a sense of enjoyment in these design motifs that contrasts with the refined nourish designed look of Los Angeles as it is filmed in *Angel*. The episode maintains the same credit sequence, which facilitates this comparison. We need only to consider the emblematic last shot of this sequence, in which Angel, dimly backlit, walks on an empty backstreet at night (fig. 12).

Moreover, Pylea is a rural, not an urban world. After Angel and Lorne alight from a small horse-drawn carriage, they are shot as minuscule figures in the middle of the natural landscape (fig. 13). The vividly green grass and the radiant leaved trees foreground this backdrop as

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23. See Stacey Abbott, "Kicking Ass and Singing 'Mandy': A Vampire in LA", in *Reading "Angel": The TV Spin-off with a Soul*, ed. Abbott (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), pp. 8-9.

Fig. 14a.

Fig. 14b.

Angel, "Through the Looking Glass" (2.21).

something pulsating with life. Lorne was born in Pylea as a member of the Deathwok Clan, but now runs a charitable karaoke bar in Los Angeles. The reunion between Lorne and his family makes manifest that it is not just the setting and the texture of the series that changes in this arc, and especially in this episode, but also the type of humour. Comedy had been incorporated into the series from the start, not only verbally through the witty lines of dialogue, but also physically through characters like the clumsily earnest Wesley.[24] Yet the humour of this episode is more absurd, based on bizarre juxtapositions and nonsensical situations. In middle of Lorne's conversation with his mother, she makes a hand sign to Numfar, Lorne's brother, who is behind her (fig. 14a). "Numfar, do the dance of joy!", she orders. Numfar, played by creator Joss Whedon, does a silly dance, uncontrollably raising his legs (fig. 14b) and jumping while tapping on his head. Stafford calls attention to the similarities between this dance and the Monty Python's sketch "Ministry of Silly Walks".[25] She argues that what makes it funnier is that it goes on in the background, without any visual prominence. Later, Numfar performs a similarly foolish dance of honour.

This instance from *Angel* is an exception located at the end of a season. It is motivated because it has to do with a narrative arc. Yet season exceptions, which open or close seasons, may also be arbitrary. *Scrubs* (2001-10), a fast-paced comedy set on a teaching hospital filled with surreal daydreams, starts with "My First Day" (1.01) that narrates J. D.'s (Zach Braff) first steps as a hospital intern. It is the only episode in which the title theme Lazlo Bane's "Superman" also plays during the end credits. The repetition of the song makes the episode singular. There is no narrative justification for this exception, but it gives a circular form to the inaugural episode, which is by definition a unique point in the series. In addition, this case is evidence that exception demands a previous, but also a subsequent engagement with a series in order to be recognised — given that this exception in *Scrubs* occurs in the first episode. Through this engagement, we are able to track the aesthetic progression of the programme, the mode in which relations like exception are built over time.

24. See Abbott, "'Nobody Scream... or Touch My Arms': The Comic Stylings of Wesley Wyndam-Pryce", in *Reading "Angel": The TV Spin-off with a Soul*, ed. Abbott (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), pp. 189-202.
25. Stafford, *Once Bitten: An Unofficial Guide to the World of "Angel"* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2004), p. 193. The sketch, performed by John Cleese, can be found in "Dinsdale!" (2.01) from *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (1969-74).

2. Progressing and Progression

A fiction show advances stylistically each time a piece is added to it and its serial form changes, creating new internal relationships. Such an advance usually involves development, that is, evolution;[26] but not *necessarily*, because the added element may, for instance, strictly repeat an preexistent element. This sequential structure is a defining aspect of the form of these televisual works[27] that encompasses narrative and aesthetics. The overall sense of aesthetic progress of series may be encapsulated in the concept of *progression*. Progress is to be taken here in its simplest and broadest sense: not necessarily as a development toward something, but simply and broadly as an advance, as a movement forward, which may be more or less directed. The serial form of these programmes is the result of three organising operations that shape it throughout the episodes of the seasons of a series: *positioning, relating*, and *arraying*. These actions are simultaneous, but for the sake of clarity, they will be dealt with separately. *Positioning* is basically the arrangement of pieces in the series. *Relating* is fundamentally the establishment of relations between the placed pieces. *Arraying* is the overarching "editing" of the series that combines the first two operations, producing a course of progression — just like film editing involves the combination of and the connection between selected portions of footage according to certain principles and ultimately produces the finished movie. A series keeps progressing aesthetically based on these adjoined yet specific actions that encompass the units, motifs, repetitions, variations, and exceptions that have already been surveyed. It is because of the proximity between these three actions and their comprehensiveness that it is more fruitful to study them within a single series. *Carnivàle* is a stylistically intricate, but relatively short drama, with only two seasons and 24 episodes, and therefore a fitting choice. Its intricacy guarantees that it suits as a case study for the three operations as well as for the elements, features, and relations that they involve. Its brevity makes it more graspable as a whole. Nevertheless, the purpose is not to analyse the series in detail, which would require, not half of a chapter, but several chapters. The aim is simply to single out some representative

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26. Cf. Chapter One, p. 66.
27. See Glen Creeber, *Serial Television: Big Drama on the Small Screen* (London: BFI, 2004), p. 10.

moments and aspects that can enable a general look at the complete stylistic structure of the series, organised around the trio of operations that construct progression.

"Milfay", the first episode of the series, opens with a sequence that condenses the style of the series, by way of introduction: the sound of the windstorm sets the slow pace of the scene, the images have a brown tonality with contrasted light and shadow. It is dark and stormy. We can barely see a man running away from something in a cornfield. A tattooed sturdy man, bare to the waist, pursues the first. A soldier in a war trench is terrified. A half-open and shaky hand displays a signet ring with a cross. The images flow rapidly across the screen, alternating with the chase in the cornfield: a gentleman in tuxedo, an officer in uniform, tarot cards, a funeral procession, a snake and an enchantress, a magic hat, a dead sheep, a framed photo of a group of coal miners, a woman in agony, a revolver and four bullets, a two-finger claw-like hand, a boy uncovering his body whose legs have been lacerated, a wall clock with a pendulum, the soldier, and a small community under a big tree. Then a young man wakes up. His name is Ben Hawking (Nick Stahl) and we come to understand that this was one of the many dreams that he will have. It is 1934 in Oklahoma and he is watching his mother slowly dying during the Dust Bowl.

"New Canaan, CA" (2.12), the last episode of the series, closes with a shot inside a shady trailer, gradually tracking forward to a puppet theatre where Ben lies unconscious. In the previous scene, Sofie (Clea DuVall) walks through the cornfield to find the dead body of Ben's opponent, Brother Justin (Clancy Brown). She kneels down and puts her hands on his chest. Iris (Amy Madigan), Justin's older sister, looks down from the yard of the Casa de Creepy as the Carnivàle leaves. A wide shot shows a dark wave growing in the cornfield and withering the corn as the last trucks leave the town of Shantyville. The dark green of the trees and the green of the cornfield, turned even darker than the former, occupies the top half of the screen, while the arid brown that had become a visual staple of the series fills the bottom half. What connects the intimacy of the first moment with the spectacularity of this last moment? How does this series progresses from a succession of intriguing, fleeting images to this apocalyptic imagery? Umberto Eco writes that "a series, qua constellation, is a field of possibilities that generates

multiple choices".[28] Therefore, the answers to these questions have to take into account the alternatives that series prompt, but most importantly the decisions embodied in the *form* of these works.

A further feature that makes *Carnivàle* such an interesting case is its sudden ending. This aspect will be addressed in the section on arraying, which will be more theoretical and less analytical in order to conclude the three sections that look into progression. Creator Daniel Knauf had planned this drama set during the "dustbowl of the 1930s, between the two great wars"[29] to have six seasons. The ratings had dropped during the first season. The number of viewers increased a little toward the end of the second season — but it was too late. The series had become increasingly more expensive to produce and HBO, the broadcasting and production company, decided not to renew it for a third season. Carolyn Strauss, then president of the entertainment department, declared in a definite manner: "We feel the two seasons we had on the air told the story very well and we are proud of what everyone associated with the show has accomplished."[30] This decision has relevance to the examination of aesthetic progression, because it cannot but highlight the progression that was occurring and that was interrupted. As understandable as the creator's disappointment and the fans' protests are, this also brings to the fore that progression proceeds according to serial units, not only episode by episode, but season by season as well. The fact is that this is the final shape that the series took. Looking at it as a whole involves first of all considering how its units have been positioned.

2.1. Positioning

Before the beginning, after the great war between Heaven and Hell, God created
the Earth and gave dominion over it to the crafty ape he called man.

    — SAMSON, "Milfay" (1.01)

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28. Umberto Eco, "Series and Structure", in *The Open Work* [1976], trans. Anna Cancogni, intr. David Robey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 220.

29. Daniel Knauf, "The Making of a Magnificent Delusion", *HBO Online* (2004), http://www.hbo.com/ carnivale/behind/daniel_knauf.shtml (broken link), par. 2.

30. Josef Adalian, "*Carnivàle* Packing Up", *Variety*, 10 May 2005, http://www.variety.com/article/ VR1117922539.html?categoryid=1417&cs=1&s=h&p=0, par. 3.

Fig. 15.

Fig. 16a.

Fig. 16b.

Carnivàle, "Milfay" (1.01).

Fig. 17.

Carnivàle, "After the Ball Is Over" (1.02).

The dwarf named Samson (Michael J. Anderson), who co-manages the Carnivàle, says this opening sentence before the fascinating, brief images of Ben's first dream. He says them directly to the camera over a black background so that the viewer listens to his words without distractions (fig. 15). "Milfay" (1.01) starts with this monologue that serves as a prologue, not just for the opening episode, but for the whole season. The same happens in the second season premiere, "Los Moscos" (2.01). In the first introduction, Samson talks about a battle between darkness and light that took place before creation and explains that this clash continues, until the Atomic Bomb inaugurates the age of reason and announces doomsday. In the second, he is more precise and less prophetic and refers to an event, World War I, that precedes a new confrontation between good and evil in a specific place, the United States. This fight will take place in the time when the action is set: between 1934 and 1935, during the Great Depression, after the financial and industrial slump of 1929.

The seasons are arranged to be contrasted. Like Ben's dream, the first season is intriguing and inconclusive, whereas the second answers questions and leads to the clash between the two opponents. All through the first season it is not clear who is who in this battle. In contrast, the beginning of the second season reveals that the eerie and elusive Management of the carnival, who hid behind a curtain in the previous season, is Lucius Belyakov (Michael Massee), who Ben saw in his dream as a young Russian soldier (Vladislav Kozlov), Justin's father. The gentleman in tuxedo (fig. 16a) that we briefly see in front of Lucius (fig. 16b) in the same dream is Henry Scudder (John Savage), Ben's father. They were the preceding adversaries: Lucius stood for good and Henry for evil. The dream is the first of many that Ben, a chain gang fugitive, has. Brother Justin, a Methodist minister, also shares them. These dreams weave enigmatic images that allow the series to connect the two main characters, who remain separate throughout the first season and most of the second. Justin and Ben share a dream in "After the Ball Is Over" (1.02). They are both seated at a diner counter and the frontal framing stresses their symmetry and their succession after Henry and Lucius, respectively, who are placed behind them (fig. 17). Yet their story lines overlap only in the two last episodes, "Outside New Canaan" (2.11) and "New Canaan, CA" (2.12). Until that point each episode parallels Ben's travels with Justin's ministry. Ben moves with the carnival from town to

Episode												Total
"Milfay" (1.01)												**54:42**
BEN	8:33	26:47	8:54	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	44:14
JUSTIN	6:02	4:26	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	10:28
"After the Ball Is Over" (1.02)												**50:43**
BEN	8:33	26:47	8:54	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	33:34
JUSTIN	6:02	4:26	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	17:09
"Tipton" (1.03)												**47:01**
BEN	6:11	16:53	17:04	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	40:08
JUSTIN	2:52	4:01	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	6:53
"Black Blizzard" (1.04)												**43:58**
BEN	7:33	15:12	16:08	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	38:53
JUSTIN	2:12	2:53	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	5:05
"Babylon" (1.05)												**45:54**
JUSTIN	:23	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	:23
BEN	45:31	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	45:31
"Pick a Number" (1.06)												**53:17**
BEN	6:01	12:28	2:50	19:20	4:57	—	—	—	—	—	—	45:36
JUSTIN	1:55	1:13	1:50	2:43	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	7:41
"The River" (1.07)												**50:09**
JUSTIN	1:37	6:37	3:25	5:56	1:05	—	—	—	—	—	—	18:40
BEN	3:05	8:43	10:16	9:25	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	31:29
"Lonnigan, Texas" (1.08)												**55:16**
BEN	8:11	10:15	6:07	4:15	18:00	—	—	—	—	—	—	46:48
JUSTIN	1:17	4:56	:42	1:33	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	8:28
"Insomnia" (1.09)												**42:29**
BEN	8:18	13:26	6:11	9:25	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	37:20
JUSTIN	2:38	:59	1:32	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	5:09
"Hot and Bothered" (1.10)												**49:57**
JUSTIN	1:24	:55	1:16	1:45	5:26	—	—	—	—	—	—	10:46
BEN	2:14	4:26	1:55	30:07	:29	—	—	—	—	—	—	39:11
"Day of the Dead" (1.11)												**51:15**
BEN	12:20	10:43	4:58	13:42	2:54	—	—	—	—	—	—	44:37
JUSTIN	1:40	1:59	:42	2:17	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	6:38
"The Day That Was the Day" (1.12)												**51:59**
JUSTIN	1:11	2:53	6:45	1:06	:26	:27	—	—	—	—	—	12:48
BEN	15:27	10:57	2:20	5:45	:30	4:12	—	—	—	—	—	39:11

Table 1.

Run-times of Ben's and Justin's segments in the first season of *Carnivàle*.

town, from state to state, getting closer and closer to Justin, who stays in California during that time. The use of the names of the places where the traveling amusement show stops as episode titles signals the movement of Ben towards Justin — intermittently in the first season, in which "Insomnia" (1.09) follows "Lonnigan, TX" (1.08), and continuously in the next. The series gradually establishes the two figures and their worlds in an attentive way, conveying their changes and revelations. At first, the mysteries are slowly presented and not immediately resolved. The second season is more about the journey to the finish line, to the showdown.

The two parallel strands of narrative that intersect only in the penultimate and final episodes, one centred on Ben, other on Justin, create a strong and bisected structure. The style, its spatial qualities and its temporal organisation, is informed by this narrative structure, presenting Justin's and Ben's story lines in distinct ways. Justin's is linear, eventful, and mostly confined to repeated places, presenting his persuasive ministry and his epiphanies regarding his destiny. Ben's mirrors the repetitiveness and looseness of carnival life: travelling for days, stopping in a new town, erecting the fair, supplying amusement, and then preparing for the next trip. This is a sequence of activities visually renewed every time by new locations and different audiences that is the regular background where Ben slowly discovers his fate and is helped in this discovery.

The series devotes considerably less time to Justin's narrative strand than to Ben's. Ben's and Justin's *segments* are well-defined *units* of the series throughout the two seasons. The run-times of these segments are fundamental because they portray each story line through a specific sense of duration. "Babylon" (1.05), for example, dedicates less than one minute to Justin, who is shown solely in the beginning in an intense moment — confirming the pattern of his segments. He is seated on his haunches in the dark, illuminated by a tenuous ray of light, praying for the children who lost their life in the fire that destroyed the building where he is, his Christian orphanage. In other episodes, the contrast is not so glaring, but the first episode initiates a noticeable pattern: it reserves only 11 minutes to Justin's narrative and around 43 minutes to Ben's (see table 1).[31] For

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31. Title sequences and final credits did not enter into the calculations for the tables. Samson's extra-diegetic intros in the two season premieres have also been excluded — as well as Ben and Justin's shared dream sequence and ensuing parallel awakening in "After the Ball Is Over" (1.02). Only the segments clearly marked as either Ben's or Justin's have been included.
For each episode, the first name listed corresponds to the character whose segment appears first in that episode.

Episode												Total
"Los Moscos" (2.01)												46:36
JUSTIN	2:22	2:45	2:21	2:15	:37	1:48	2:50	4:37	—	—	—	19:35
BEN	6:36	3:25	5:35	2:44	1:23	2:55	4:10	:13	—	—	—	27:01
"Alamogordo, NM" (2.02)												48:26
JUSTIN	1:29	1:24	4:51	2:07	2:52	:48	—	—	—	—	—	13:31
BEN	6:20	5:55	12:00	2:22	8:18	—	—	—	—	—	—	34:55
"Ingram, TX" (2.03)												48:09
BEN	2:12	2:33	4:22	1:52	2:56	5:42	10:46	5:02	—	—	—	35:25
JUSTIN	1:06	1:45	:56	2:34	3:15	:36	2:32	—	—	—	—	12:44
"Old Cherry Blossom Road" (2.04)												43:36
JUSTIN	:54	1:59	1:28	1:10	1:53	:04	:04	2:48	1:55	—	—	12:15
BEN	4:34	10:19	12:00	2:22	2:57	:05	:03	11:20	1:29	—	—	41:21
"Creed, OK" (2.05)												53:49
BEN	6:14	3:26	6:26	25:38	2:06	:45	—	—	—	—	—	44:35
JUSTIN	1:48	:43	2:10	2:03	2:30	—	—	—	—	—	—	9:14
"The Road to Damascus" (2.06)												54:03
BEN	2:45	8:25	3:24	6:47	13:29	6:08	1:47	—	—	—	—	42:45
JUSTIN	1:45	1:08	1:36	1:05	4:47	:57	—	—	—	—	—	11:18
"Damascus, NE" (2.07)												44:50
JUSTIN	2:30	4:19	:04	:19	4:31	—	—	—	—	—	—	11:43
BEN	8:53	7:07	:26	8:13	6:28	—	—	—	—	—	—	33:07
"Outskirts, Damascus, NE" (2.08)												50:58
BEN	:30	4:14	6:46	5:20	10:00	13:37	—	—	—	—	—	40:27
JUSTIN	:42	1:31	2:48	2:12	1:52	1:26	—	—	—	—	—	10:31
"Lincoln Highway" (2.09)												49:47
JUSTIN	:38	:52	3:58	:51	2:21	2:51	4:39	:52	:44	1:51	2:49	22:26
BEN	2:39	6:53	1:43	3:12	3:24	1:24	2:18	:53	3:35	1:20	—	27:21
"Cheyenne, WY" (2.10)												49:10
BEN	10:00	:43	:52	1:06	4:00	2:10	1:56	—	—	—	—	20:47
JUSTIN	1:06	2:34	1:01	2:38	2:57	18:07	—	—	—	—	—	28:23

Table 2.
Run-times of Ben's and Justin's segments in the second season of *Carnivàle*.

my purposes, the exactness of the numbers is less important than the simple recognition of this discrepancy between on-screen times. The times are less discrepant in the second season (see table 2). Yet it is striking how Justin's scenes remain briefer, even though their total time within an episode is usually higher than that the total times in the first season. "Lincoln Highway" (2.09) and "Cheyenne, WY" (2.10) maintain the same inter-episode crosscutting motif, but are the most balanced episodes in terms of time, preparing for merging of the two narrative strands in the next and last two episodes. These details merely confirm what is evident for any viewer of the series. As Robin Nelson contends, although the show "intercuts Crowe's interim experience 'in the wilderness', specifically evoking Christ's journey of trial and introspection, with that of Ben with the carnival, it focuses more on the latter with its strong visual qualities".[32]

Beyond pace, the duration of each segment is related to the number of characters that they cover. There is a enormous difference here. In Justin's thread, his older sister Iris is the sole other main character that is constant throughout the series — Reverend Norman Balthus was a later addition and only became one of the protagonists during the second and last season. In Ben's thread, however, there is a group of ten characters who were all leading parts: Samson, the operator of the Ferris wheel and the leader of the roustabouts Jonesy, the fortunetellers Sofie and Apollonia, the bearded lady Lila, the manager of the striptease show Felix Dreifuss, the stripteasers Rita Sue and Libby Dreifuss, and the snake charmer Ruthie and the strongman Gabriel (the mentalist Lodz is only a main character during the first season). The tone of Justin's segments is more reserved and concentrated with a more formal staging and fewer points of visual interest than Ben's. The *scenes* set in the carnival follow the rhythm of a life of nomadism and camaraderie and result in images with multiple planes and various points of attention. This dense visual texture prevails even when the focus is on the conversation between two particular characters within the group. These *image motifs* set Justin's and Ben's segments apart. Similarly, there are *performance motifs* that characterise the two main characters. Justin is played by Clancy Brown as a resolute man that overcomes the doubts about his fate. These doubts creep in when

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32. Robin Nelson, *State of Play: Contemporary "High-End" TV Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 99.

Fig. 18.

Fig. 19.

Carnivàle, "Milfay" (1.01).

240

he talks and his voice breaks down or becomes hesitant. Later, he vocalises his resoluteness and mastery over his followers and his destiny comes across through his straight, vertical posture, and the compact and imposing clerical black cassock that he wears. In contrast, Nick Stahl's performance as Ben is subdued. His watchful eyes and loose bearing present him as someone who is never certain about what to do, but ends up doing what he is supposed to do anyway. He acts as if he accepts this lack of certainty, always alert, waiting for something to happen that comes from him, but that he does not master.

The first episode is in a position to serve as a template, not just for the segmentation, but also the mood and framing of each segment. Earthly, dry colour tones predominate already in the first scene of Ben's segments, when he ends up joining the passing carnival. The encounter between Ben, who is burying his mother's body, and Jonesy is framed in low-angle, wide, full body shots (fig. 18) that will become a staple of the visual style of Ben's segments, and because of the weight of these segments, of most of the series. Paramount here is also the presence of the landscape in the composition. Nelson observes that "the landscapes of the Midwest dustbowl are vast, with big skied and ravaging storms. The wide-angle shots of landscape or of the carnival at night are beautifully depicted to convey an elemental vastness, and the special-effects dust-storms are powerfully realised in sound and vision".[33] Similarly, the first scene of Justin's segments introduces the deep blacks that will be dominant in his scenes. Moreover, the grounding of the characters that the wide framing facilitates is substituted by closer shots in Justin's segments. While mystery and magic are part of the everyday of the travelling carnival, in Justin's environment the strange occurrences are more directly and concisely conveyed. This is what happens when an Okie church attendee spews out coins, a moment captured by a high-angle, assertive shot (fig. 19). The images of the carnival in the landscape may be impressive, but are not spectacular or eye-catching in this way.

The composition of the two threads of segments in *Carnivàle* demonstrates that positioning involves more than arranging. It involves asking what is being arranged. Positioning is therefore the arrangement of specific pieces, that is, pieces with particular

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33. Nelson, *State of Play*, p. 99.

aesthetic properties. Progression is a gradual and irregular process, even when a series is thought out in advance. Usually, series can only be devised ahead of time within certain limits, which are at least seasonal and subjected to unforeseen events that may influence it. Yet every time an episode is completed or a season ends, choices about the arrangement of the parts of the series balance and weight their role. Typically, progression becomes more visible in the closing and opening of each season because they often bring in new aesthetic elements — such as the merging of threads in the last two episodes. An effect of the positioning of the units and motifs in a series is the emergence of *relations* of connection and disconnection between them. Only when we consider such relationships can we truly talk about the aesthetic structure of a series.

2.2. Relating

Into each generation is born a creature of light and a creature of darkness.
    — Tag line for the first season of *Carnivàle*

Their journey. Their battle. Our future.
    — Tag line for the second season of *Carnivàle*

Fulfilling their function, these tag lines summarise the fundamental narrative centres of the two seasons of the show: the first simply states that there are two rival creatures that appear in every generation, the second declares that they are journeying towards a battle in which the fate of humankind is at stake, that is, this is a fight with collective consequences. The tag line for the first season of the series is the modified first sentence of the rest of Samson's opening lines. These are the remaining words that Samson utters in the first introductory sequence:

> And great armies clashed by night in the ancient war between good and evil. There was magic then, nobility, and unimaginable cruelty. And so it was until the day that a false sun exploded over Trinity, and man forever traded away wonder for reason.

The creature of light is Ben Hawkins whose name evokes hawks. The creature of darkness is Justin Crowe whose name evokes crows. Their battle echoes the "great war between heaven and hell" or between good and evil that Samson mentions in the beginning. The "false sun" that explodes "over Trinity" refers to the first nuclear test in history that took place in July 1945, in Jornada del Muerto, a desert valley in New Mexico. John Donne's devotional poetry inspired Oppenheimer to call the test Trinity, which refers to the three persons in the Christian Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The series would have ended on the sixth season with this nuclear explosion that marks the beginning of the Atomic Age.

All these references lay bare the core importance of Samson's isolated monologues, which is underlined by their qualities as season prologues — and *season exceptions* because they occur only once in each season. The mythology of the show is mainly based on two religions, Christianity and Hinduism, which like other spiritual traditions rely on stories, poems, and accounts that were first transmitted orally and then preserved in written form as scriptures. Samson's words have a scriptural character, evoking strong images about events with a transcendental nature. This evocation is more powerful because the words are said, or more precisely *proclaimed*, instead of simply presented as a text on screen. The series also appropriates specific Christian and Hindu elements that become image motifs. From Christianity comes a wealth of imagery, from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil found in "Genesis" to the symbol of the Knights Templar in a ring, both of which appear in Ben's first dream. From Hinduism comes, for example, the two opposing incarnate divine beings or avatars — that, as it has been shown, the series visually convey through the contrasting characterisation of the two narrative threads and through symmetrical framing when the two characters share a scene.

Robin Nelson points out that in this Manichean battle between light and darkness, good and evil, "the established minister of the church, Brother Crowe, might seem better placed than the refugee roustie, but it is soon evident that [...] things might not be what they seem".[34] This surprising reversal of expectations is built little by little. Like Samson's words, every moment

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34. Nelson, *State of Play*, p. 99.
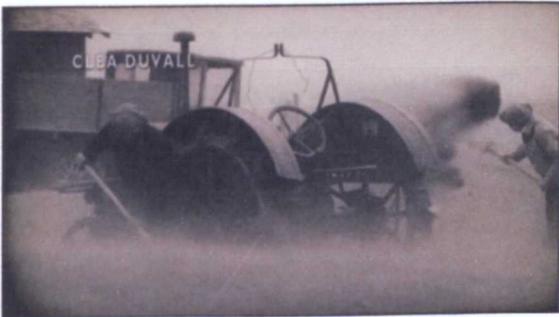
Fig. 20.

Fig. 21.
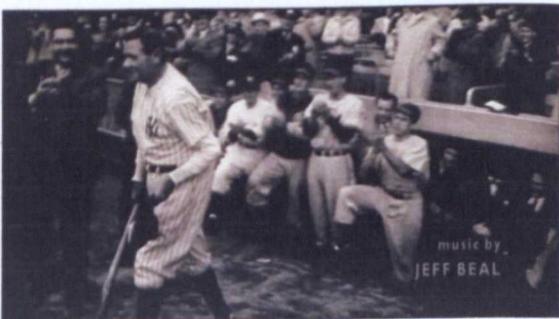

Fig. 22.

Fig. 23.

Fig. 24.

Carnivàle, title sequence.

and religious references to construct and detail its literal and figurative levels as a work of fiction. The series presents two parallel, and at times intersecting, responses to the Great Depression that are connected with these levels: the role of entertainment as an antidote to hopelessness and the emergence of solidary religious communities.

The relation between literalness and figurativeness is explored in the grandiose title sequence — which provides the first images and sounds to the series, before Samson's prologue. The sequence conveys the formal relation and mutual evocation between words and images: words evoke images and images evoke words. It begins with a deck of Tarot cards ruffled by the wind (fig. 20). The camera zooms in[35] and penetrates one of the cards, "The World", that represents a battle between Heaven and Hell, higher and lower beings. The camera movement continues and the layers of painted drawings give way to footage of the Depression era. The first shot shows a line of people waiting for assistance (fig. 21). The last shots concentrate on the severe dust storms that devastated the American prairies during the 1930s (fig. 22). The opposite movement of the camera then follows: the camera zooms out from a different card, "Ace of Swords", a card associated with force of insight and clarity of vision usually represented through a sword piercing a crown and here represented through a warrior with a sword battling an enormous dragon. This procedure of entering a card, seeing through its art work, revealing historical footage, and then pulling back from another card is repeated three times, from "Death" to "King of Swords" (related to dictatorship, racism, and poverty), from "Temperance" to "The Magician" (connected with recreational dance and sporting events), from "The Tower" to "Judgement" (linked with the United States Capitol, American politics, and social protest). This archival material includes images of the Fascist Italian leader Benito Mussolini (fig. 23), the Communist Soviet commander Joseph Stalin with Vyacheslav Molotov who negotiated the non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany in 1939, the track and field black athlete Jesse Owens whose gold medals at the Olympic Games in Berlin outraged Hitler, and the baseball legend Babe Ruth (fig. 24). These images are related to the political and social history of America (beyond the poverty and desperation of the Great Depression) — the racist Ku Klux Klan, the

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35. This is an optical zoom, generated in post-production. Therefore my use of "camera" here is generic and a way to facilitate the visual description of this type of movement. It does not refer to an actual filming device.

Fig. 25.

Fig. 26.

Fig. 27a.

Fig. 27b.

Carnivàle, title sequence.

thousands of Bonus Marchers approaching the Capitol, and Franklin D. Roosevelt whose New Deal programs fought the Depression. This engagement with history is widened to the world, with a great emphasis on figures of the World War II (the great war to come) like Mussolini — which also includes Roosevelt. Some of the images are also specific to American culture and are inserted under "Temperance" (fig. 25), a card related with balance and that is here connected with recreation (recreation counterbalances unhappiness) — like the image of Ruth, who is considered one of the greatest heroes of American sports. The sequence ends with the camera tilting up from the "Judgement" card to the "Moon" and the "Sun" that are placed side by side (fig. 26), once again exploring the image motif of symmetry. The "Moon" has a representation of the Devil and the "Sun" has an image of God (and a widely known one, from the Sistine Chapel ceiling painted by Michelangelo).

Historical figures, cultural icons, and religious imagery are joined to give a dense portrait of the world. Nelson notices that the series "sets out its distinctive and innovative mix of history, myth and the supernatural"[36] through this sequence. Yet more than mixing, which is a relation that entails the combination of distinct elements, the sequence and the series put these aspects in contact, as if they are complementary, different visions of the same reality. The series does not invite the viewer to look for such numerous references to history, culture, and religion, as if there is something hidden that can be uncovered and deciphered. It instead makes these references manifest, plain, introducing them as part of its visible structure of relations. Mussolini, Ruth, and the other people seen in the archival footage, even the anonymous faces, are contemporaries of the era when the action of the show is set and become part of its narrative continuum. The religious imagery give us access, not to another story, but to the other side of the same story, giving us images that serve as keys to unlock the connection between the two sides. This is made evident when after the first repetition of the zoom in-out movement, there is a dissolve from the face of a young, poor girl (fig. 27a) to the Archangel Michael (fig. 27b), in the card "King of Swords" and then the camera tracks back. This *set variation* is maintained until the end of the sequence, reinforcing the idea of specific

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36. Nelson, *State of Play*, p. 100.

connectedness (the dissolves are different) and circularity (the zoom in-out movement is the same). The title sequence schematises the relations that the series explores in a visually arresting form. Similarly to other HBO series, what makes it such a forceful statement about this relational structure is its long duration, one minute and a half, and the fact that it is an instance of *strict repetition* — except for the name changes in the principal cast and, more regularly, in the writers and directors of each episode.[37] The sequence is therefore an insistent inter-episode and inter-season unit that reacquaints the viewer with the series and its dual but connected style, between the card figures and the archive footage, between Ben's and Justin's segments, every time another episode begins. Within the series, it is an emphatic reminder of the particular "density of construction of its imagery".[38]

Ordering the pieces of a series, or positioning, is only one facet of progression. Relating is another aspect of progression that has to do with the relations established between pieces, not only by their position, but also by their forms and meanings.[39] The analysis of the references that the series summons through Samson's words and the title sequence demonstrates how relations are built on the formal and representational properties of the pieces. These relations are dynamic and not fixed — the dual strands of narrative, which as we have seen are stylistically differentiated, come together by the end of the second season, for example.

2.3. Arraying

On the heels of the skirmish, men foolishly called the "war to end all wars", the

dark one sought to elude his destiny and live as a mortal. So he fled across the

ocean to an empire called America. But by his mere presence a cancer corrupted

the spirit of the land. People were rendered mute by fools who spoke many words

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37. This information appears at the end when a stronger wind blows all the cards away to reveal the Carnivàle sign under the dust. Then, the creator's, writers' and directors' names appear on the covers of three successively piled books.

38. Nelson, *State of Play*, p. 104.

39. I have avoided what Bordwell called *symptomatic meanings* that are ascribed to art works on account of their historical or social context (and in some interpretations, even by virtue of contexts that emerge after the creation of the work). My analysis has pointed out *referential meanings*, based on allusions that the viewers are expected to recognise, and *explicit* and *implicit meanings*, all of them grounded in what the series presents and its overt or tacit significance. See Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

but said nothing, for whom oppression and cowardice were virtues, and freedom
an obscenity. And into this dark heartland the prophet stalked his enemy. Till,
diminished by his wounds, he turned to the next in the ancient line of light. So it
was that the fate of mankind came to rest on the trembling shoulders on the
most reluctant of saviours.

— SAMSON, "Los Moscos" (2.01)

Comparing these opening words for the second season with those for the first, it becomes clear
that these are more specific. Samson is no longer referring to a general battle and to events of the
collective memory, but to the characters Lucius Belyakov ("he fled across the ocean to an empire
called America"), Alexsei Belyakov's (Justin Crowe) father, Henry Scudder ("the prophet stalked
his enemy") and his son Ben Hawkins ("the most reluctant of saviours"). The style of progression
of *Carnivàle* positions and relates its pieces so as to slowly disclose the conflict between evil and
good, the forces that Brother Justin Crowe and Ben Hawkins personify. This progression leads to
a final, spectacular clash between them.

Arraying, the arrangement of related pieces according to a *principle* may be *directional* or
nondirectional, that is, it may have or lack a direction. As it has been explained, progression is not
to be understood as a teleological movement (though it may be), but as a synonym for advance.
Progressing is simply advancing and it routinely involves many factors that are difficult to
estimate or assess since this practice sometimes spans many years. One common factor is that the
non-renewal for another season (and sometimes the cancellation during a season) are always
possibilities. This means that such a factor is part of the *conditions* of the making of a series.
Because of this, television series may be likened to what Eco calls *open works*, based on "a poetics
of serial thought" and aiming "at the production of a structure that is at once open and
polyvalent".[40] For him, this concept is hermeneutic and refers to works that are not limited to a
single reading or range of readings. The analysis of *Lost* has showed that this series may be
classified this way. Yet television shows may also be considered open and polyvalent because they
create a range of possibilities of progression. This redefines the concept of open work as having

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40. Eco, *The Open Work*, p. 218.

more to do with composition than with hermeneutics. For Eco, it is the other way around, but the compositional features of these works are also important — hence the idea that they derive from a poetics of serial thought. *Poetics* is here the artistic purpose of the work.[41] In this sense, aesthetics hinges on poetics. That is, aesthetic analysis of progression of a serial work involves the consideration of the purpose of its connected elements within the architecture of the whole series. Yet series are whole *temporarily*, until the moment that they are whole *definitely*, when they end. Glen Creeber writes that "part of the appeal of serialisation lies in its ability to construct 'open' rather than 'closed' narrative forms".[42] At the same time, he recognises that some series propose a well-defined arc and therefore point towards some kind of narrative closure.[43] It is in the balance between these two aspects that fiction series unfold their possibilities, their potential. Definitive resolution is delayed or evaded, until it is demanded or it is chosen, that is, until the time of the series is up or the right time comes. Throughout their run, series invariably build a thick structure with resonating internal connections that progress over the time of their production.

As it was explained in the beginning of the previous chapter, series are created based on seasonal planning which means that the temporary nature of their wholeness is planned seasonally — even when they are axed in the middle of a season. On an immediate level, this temporariness is perceived at another scale: not that of the season, but that of the episode. Every episode seems to close the series temporarily. Nevertheless, all episodes are also understood as belonging to a larger unit, the season — in other words, every episode is seen as not simply another piece of the series, but as a part of a specific season. Series turn the temporary character of their wholeness into openness throughout their run because if it is true that they may be cancelled, it is also true that they may continue.[44] Therefore, the endings of seasons tend to close

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41. David Robey, "Introduction", in Eco, *The Open Work*, p. xiii.
42. Glen Creeber, *Serial Television: Big Drama on the Small Screen* (London: BFI, 2004), p. 4.
43. Ibid., p. 10. He is here referring to a series like *24* (2001-10) that is analysed in Chapter Three, pp. 144-51.
44. The endings of series are planned ahead when creators know that the series is ending, by decision of the producers or the network. Endings are rarely planned years in advance, with a set date, like in the case of *Lost*. Even when some planning for the ending exists, it may take more time than initially thought — see the example of *The Sopranos* (1999–2007), in Chapter One, p. 17. Moreover, some successful series continue after their creator's original intentions as a consequence of high ratings and revenues — *Supernatural* was planned to run for only five seasons and the sixth season started in September 2010. For a meticulous discussion on aesthetic intention and (revised) planning, see Paisley Livingston, *Art and Intention: A Philosophical Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), esp. ch. 2.
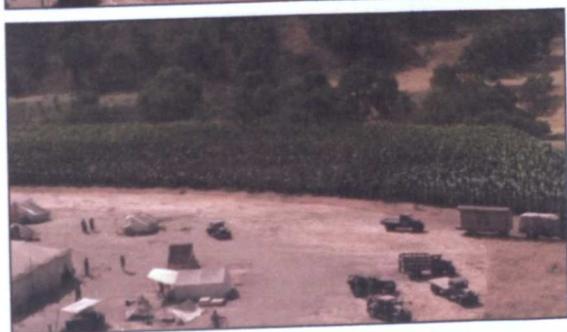
Fig. 28a.

Fig. 28b.

Carnivàle, "New Canaan" (2.12).

251

some narrative threads while opening others, so that they feel like some kind of ending, albeit a temporary one. Sarah Kozloff states that serials can be divided into those that end like miniseries and those that may be cancelled, but that hypothetically may never achieve a conclusion like soap-operas.[45] This description of the extremities of serial fictions is less useful for hybrid series, which usually present a tentative conclusion and also prepare their possible continuation.[46]

The ending of *Carnivàle*, like the series itself, raises questions regarding the relation between the historical and the fictive, the history of the world (and of the series) and the imagination in our engagement with the world (and in the creation of the series). Regarding this relation, Frank Kermode appropriately asks: "How, in such a situation can our paradigms of concord, our beginnings and ends, our humanly ordered picture of the world satisfy us, make sense?"[47] Given the idea that the battle presented in the series is never-ending, that evil and good are always embodied in new beings, the open ending seems strangely fitting, rejecting the presentation of the final triumph of the good — if it is an achievement is another matter. Sofie is confirmed to be the Omega, the Destroyer, the Antichrist, when she darkens and dries the corn around her in the last episode; a suggestion that is made as early as four episodes before, in "Lincoln Highway" (2.09). This spectacular event is filmed in an extreme long shot, in which the people become minuscule and give an even larger dimension to the dark wave that begins as a localised patch (fig. 28a) and then destroys the entire cornfield (fig. 28b). Within the *season exception* that the last two episodes represent, because they abandon the dual segmentation of the previous 22 instalments, this is the visual culmination that the series was building towards. It connects narrative and aesthetic progression: the moment when the supernatural forces invade the natural world and show the true, gigantic dimension of the fight. As a kind of coda, right after, there is a concluding tracking shot inside the Management trailer

45. Sarah Kozloff, "Narrative Theory and Television", in *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd edn., ed. Robert C. Allen (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 70.

46. This is the reason why the creators of television series tend to speak about future seasons using vague language. The creator of *Carnivàle* confirms this tendency in "The Making of a Magnificent Delusion" when he says in anticipatory but uncertain terms:

I really don't know how long it'll take, but it's definitely a finite story. It's not a serial like *Days of Our Lives* [1965-]. There's definitely an end to the series. And there are definitely going to be signposts that take them to that endpoint.

47. Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction (with a New Epilogue)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 38.
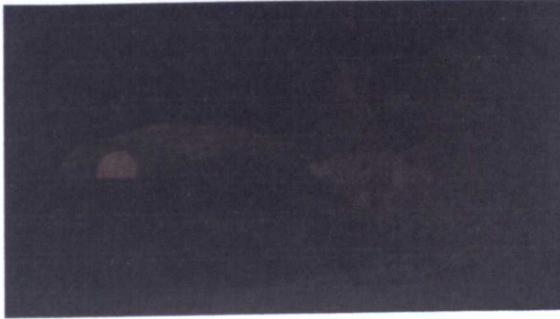
Fig. 29a.

Fig. 29b.

Carnivàle, "New Canaan" (2.12).

of the carnival (fig. 29a) that finds the exhausted Ben resting (fig. 29b). The trailer is dim with only a tenuous light coming from the right and the camera moves slowly, which lends a eerie, mysterious character to the shot. It is also an intimate and familiar environment in comparison to the spectacularity of the previous image. There is no transitional or establishing shot, the shots are made to collide because of their difference of scale, setting up two new parallel narrative threads that are stylistically demarcated. Yet we will not see the development of these threads. This *is* the ending of the series. It was not planned as such, but it has become the last piece of the show. Kermode identifies two attitudes towards the end of a narrative and the end of the world, the Apocalypse — two ends that *Carnivàle* links. The first is an acceptance of apocalyptic data, the belief in prophecy, in a predicted end. The second is a skeptical derision of such information, the opinion that the conclusion is open and cannot be forecast. Between these two attitudes, we "make considerable imaginative investments in coherent patterns which, by the provision of an end, make possible a satisfying consonance with the origins and with the middle".[48] In the same vein, the ending of the series is consonant with its *beginning* and with the *direction of its progression*, that is, consonant with the premise of an incessant and inevitable confrontation between two human beings who are goodness and evilness incarnate.

Even though the series apparently does not have self-contained episodes, and continues the same developing narrative, Ben's and the carnival's trajectory and stopping places impart a specific tone to each episode — for example, "Day of the Dead" (1.11) is set in New Mexico where the Mexican *día de los muertos* is being celebrated, gathering families and friends to pray for those who have passed away with colourful processions and offerings. This distinctiveness of the episodes and the already mentioned openness of its structure, right until the last episode, is common in contemporary series. Angela Ndalianis describes this form as *neo-baroque*, one that resists, even though it does not erase, the linearity and closure of classic Aristotelian structures. Following Eco, she salvages the term baroque from its historical context and takes it as a form that embraces instability, polydimentionality, and change — qualities that had an expression in

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48. Kermode, *Sense of an Ending*, p. 17.

the intricate and complex baroque style. Of interest here is the scheme that Ndalianis claims is prevalent today in television series,[49] which

> is characterised by dynamic narrative structures with multiple centres. [...] The episode borders of these series remain in continual states of flux [...]. They are the series as serials, in that throughout the entire series the viewer becomes embroiled in the changing lives and stories of multiple characters. These series therefore retain a sense of historicity and progress through the focus on characters that develop from episode to episode.[50]

The aesthetic characteristics of the series mirror these narrative characteristics, their flexible narrative structure is matched with a flexible aesthetic structure — a *flexi-aesthetics* as it was called in the previous chapter. Ndalianis describes episodes as pieces that coexist and interact in ways that are not stable or linear. The viewer weights the importance of multiple and distinct units, from segments to sequences to episodes, and slowly makes sense of the whole from separate units. We can easily see this labyrinthine structure when a series employs "previously on" segments to recover shorts scenes from distant episodes because they are more relevant to the episode that is just starting than the scenes from the episode immediately before. Even Ndalianis concedes that this neo-baroque structure is mainly, but not merely narrative. She writes, for example, that this model "is driven by a concern with formal experimentation with the narrative

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49. See Angela Ndalianis, "Television and the Neo-Baroque", in *The Contemporary Television Series*, ed. Michael Hammond and Lucy Mazdon (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp. 88-96. This essay develops out of her *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004). Following Omar Calabrese's *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times* [1987] (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), she presents five evolving narrative schemes of television series that have these characteristics:
    (1) unlinked self-contained episodes;
    (2) linearly linked self-contained episodes with a single narrative goal;
    (3) linearly linked self-contained episodes with overlapping story lines and character progression;
    (4) linked self-contained episodes that are variations on a similar structure creating a palimpsest effect;
    (5) continuing episodes with fluctuating boundaries that lead to dynamic narrative formations.
These prototypes, as Ndalianis calls them, increase in complexity. She mentions *Boomtown* (2002-3), a series that during its first season revisits the same events successively centring on different characters, as an example of the fourth scheme (pp. 97-98). (The second season abandoned this discontinuous structure, because NBC thought that the low ratings were due to the difficulty of this complex narrative system.) This fragmentation within each episode is clearly laid out in relation to a specific episode, "Reelin' in the Years" (1.04), which presents different narrative segments around a man, wrongfully imprisoned for the killing of an off-duty police officer, concentrating successively on a reporter, on the dead officer's partner, on his son, on the officer who was killed, and finally, on the actual killer.
    50. Ndalianis, "Television and the Neo-Baroque", pp. 95-96. She is referring to the fifth scheme, which is prevalent in contemporary television series.

possibilities of the series".[51] This points towards how narrative interconnects with aesthetics in serial works, an aspect that this thesis has developed in depth. In television fiction series, aesthetics is narratised, that is, based on the position, relation, and array of the aesthetic properties of the pieces of the work.

The aesthetic details of each piece are similar to the *independent variables* of series that Eco brings up.[52] Serial independent variables are described as elements that escape the invariants of a system of repetition and that are most of the times "microscopic", easy to go unnoticed. Television series are also works that are mainly based on repetition, but that contain such variables in the form of variations or exceptions. These variables are introduced throughout the making of a series and sometimes dilute the original features. In extreme cases, the original features completely disappear in the course of the series. Schematically, this extreme progression may be represented in this way:

$$AB - ABC - (A)CD - CD - CDX$$

(A) is a weaker, less salient, version of A. In the third piece, B has disappeared, and perhaps (A) will too and a later piece would be something like CDX, where X is any new element. There have been series where, at a later point in the series, even the characters and their performers have all changed. Long-running series like *Law & Order* (1990-2010) are such cases in which there is not a single character and performer that is present throughout the entire series. Sometimes, series even add a name to signal the newness of some of its parts, but maintaining a fundamental continuity — this is what happened when the two last seasons of *Baywatch* (1989-2001) were renamed *Baywatch Hawaii*, signalling the change of location. In this final part of the show, some characters and performers from the first part of the programme remained in order to *relate* the two parts. My focus on performers and characters has to do with the fact that they and their performance motifs are what more obviously connects the episodes of a series, even when there is a change in location — in this case to a vacation destination that is more

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51. Ndalianis, "Television and the Neo-Baroque", p. 98.
52. Eco, "Interpreting Serials", in *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 97. For this idea, like Ndalianis, Eco also draws on Calabrese's work.

exotic than the ordinary beach in Santa Monica with more Californians than tourists. Mitch Bucannon, played by David Hasselhoff, the main protagonist, only appears in the first of the two seasons of *Baywatch Hawaii*. What connects the first episode of *Baywatch* with the last episode of *Baywatch Hawaii* is not the fact that they share most of their aesthetic elements — they do not, even if they share the same narrative premise around the daily life of County Lifeguards. As the schematic representation has showed, what connects them and what connects AB to CDX is the fact that they are part of a string of pieces, in which a piece follows another piece in succession, so that the connection of CDX with AB can be traced back, not directly, but through the pieces in-between them. All episodes are related to the first episode through this chain of relations. It is the formal aspect of this chain that allows us to understand the integration of new elements and the disappearance of old elements, like the last two episodes of *Carnivàle*, in which for the first time there is no double story and stylistic thread, and in which there are no longer the images from dreams and visions that are an intromission of the past in the present. The series is arrayed, *directed towards* this intersection where the two protagonists, Ben and Justin, and the two times, past and present, meet.

3. Singular Advances

Exception and progression are about singularity and advances. Exceptional elements are components that are unique, singular, within the aesthetic structure of a series. Progression is the advance of this structure over time, based on the repetition, variation, and exception of units and motifs. It is worth making clear that because of the intricacy of the serial form that these concepts bring to the fore, there is an overlap of structural relations that we can only unravel by focusing on one of them at the time and then refining it as a specific type of repetition, variation, or exception.[53] We may take *The Wire* (2002-8) as an illustrative example.

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53. As the previous chapter demonstrates, these can also overlap. A remade repetition, for example, is also a strict or a loose repetition. What these concepts allow us to do is to make descriptive claims and analytical discriminations between the various types of structural relations of the aesthetic elements and features of a show.
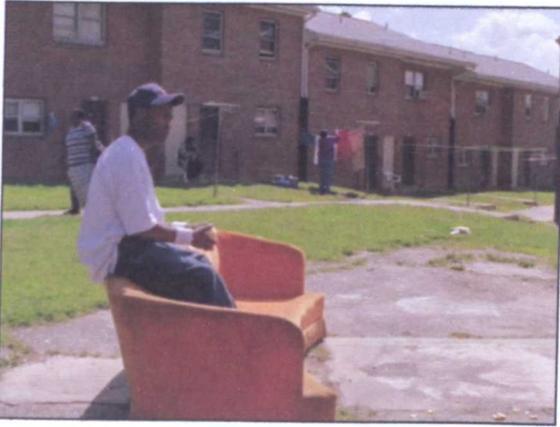
Fig. 30.

The Wire, "Lessons" (1.08).

Fig. 31.

The Wire, "Home Rooms" (4.03).

Each of the five seasons of the series concentrates on a different facet of the life of Baltimore. They are positioned in this way: the first focuses on the drug trade, the second on the harbour, the third on the municipal government, the fourth on the public school system, and the fifth on the print news media. Despite this division, there are some recurrent characters, like dedicated Detective Jimmy McNulty (Dominic West) or the mugger of dealers Omar Littleteacher (Michael K. Williams). This divided composition of the series, which creates a multifaceted portrait of the city, in turn leads to singular features. The seasons are related as its distinct narrative foci and its distinct aesthetic properties are related: in order to complement each other in their difference. Compare, for instance, the open space of the public square used as a market square for dealing drugs (fig. 30) from episodes of the first season such as "Lessons" (1.08) with the enclosed and packed space of the high school (fig. 31) from episodes of the fourth season like "Home Rooms" (4.03). *The Wire* demonstrates that seasons, as structural units, can be as exceptional as episodes, the units analysed in *Supernatural, Lost,* and *Angel.* In this case, each season is a motivated exception. In principle, any unit can be an exception either aesthetically or narratively — or both, when aesthetic and narrative exception coincide. As the example from *Supernatural* makes clear, narrative continuity may also be combined with aesthetic exception, which shows the independence of aesthetic and narrative exceptionality *as* variables. In addiction, *The Wire* confirms the overlapping nature of the entangled aesthetic connections of fiction series, since inside each singular season we find patterns of repetition, variation, and exception.

One intra-season unit that is strictly repeated and used to signal the contrast between seasons is the credit sequence. Every season has a specific sequence connected with its main narrative focus that is accompanied by variations of the same song, Tom Waits's "Way Down in the Hole" whose original version is used in the second season, from the gospel cover by The Blind Boys of Alabama in the first season to the concluding rock rendering by Steve Earle in the fifth and last season. This succession of credit sequences and variations on a song exemplifies the arraying of aesthetic progression as following a nondirectional principle that produces mere change — instead of the directional principle followed in *Carnivàle* that results

in development. C. W. Marshall and Tiffany Potter claim further that the "five seasons, each of which coheres as a unit, together form a super-narrative".[54] This higher structure may be investigated in the series as conflated story lines, but also as blended *style lines*. They add that this super-narrative

> shows the progress of time in a fictionalized Baltimore, but not any clear moral or narrative advance. Faces change, characters enter our awareness or drop from view, but the drug problem [...] persists. There is change rather than advance: whatever closure offered is, painfully, only temporary.[55]

It is true that *The Wire* eschews what Marshall and Potter call "episodic conclusions" and complete closure. In fact, this strategy is declared at the end of each season with a distinctive montage that shows how little has changed — the distinctiveness of which is emphasised with the use of non-diegetic music, which is avoided throughout the series because it comes from outside the world that the show is committed to capturing and projecting. Yet the opposition between *change* and *advance* lacks precision. "Progress of time" entails change and change *is* some kind of advance; pinning down exactly what kind of advance it is, is the role of analysis. Of course, as it has been stressed, this advance does not necessarily entail development — this seems to be Marshall and Potter's point. Whenever a piece is added to a series, the size of the series increases and the number of relations among the pieces comprising the series also increases. This is because the added piece will relate to all the other pieces through the serial chain. These relations need not take the form of development. The piece that is added may be, for example, a strictly repeated element — like the quotes of lines spoken by characters that follow the credit sequence in all the episodes of *The Wire*.

This chapter and the previous two substantiate the claim that every piece, a unit that divides or a motif that unifies, adds something to the serial work that is a fiction series. What it

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54. C. W. Marshall and Tiffany Potter, "'I Am the American Dream': Modern Urban Tragedy and the Borders of Fiction", in *"The Wire": Urban Decay and American Television*, ed. Marshall and Potter (New York: Continuum, 2009), p. 9.
55. Ibid.

adds is not merely its presence, but also the relations of repetition, variation, or exception with other pieces that its presence generates. These relations reveal how the pieces of a series are strung together. These connections arise from the position of a piece within the series and result in the creation of a particular sequential array.

Conclusion:

Pieces to Strings

Musing on a possible future when only one episode of a series has survived, Umberto Eco asks "how would we read a piece of a series if the whole of the series remained unknown to us?"[1] This question that Eco leaves unanswered at the end of an essay is addressed in this thesis. In such circumstances, we would look at this surviving episode as if it were a single work. We would establish connections between this work and other works, but remote connections, for instance, based on generic conventions. On the contrary, the kind of connections that have been examined here are close connections that are internal to the overall work (the series), links that string pieces together. The answer to Eco's question is that, without the rest of the pieces, we could not read it as a *serial piece*, but only as a work that we are told is a piece of a series. A specific episode may be considered in isolation as an individual television programme. Yet, in that case, it is no longer seen as an episode of a television series. It is not taken as a piece with particular aesthetic properties as well as with a spot in a serial chain, establishing relations with other pieces, and adding to this chain.

This dissertation has argued that television fiction series are televisual works with a sequential aesthetics, constructed piece by piece. It has presented and developed a constellation of concepts, providing ample demonstration that these concepts facilitate the systematic study of the way in which the aesthetics properties of these series are composed over time. From pieces to strings, it has described two serial elements (units and motifs) and then the four relations that arise between them (repetition, variation, exception, and progression). Each of these terms has been further detailed with additional distinctions. Therefore, at this point, it is easier to point out their primary functions: units segment, motifs unify, repetition generates familiarity, variation introduces diversity, exception creates singularity, and progression makes the

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1. Umberto Eco, "Interpreting Serials", in *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 100.

programme advance. The combination of these serial elements and serial relations playing these functions, or engendering these effects, brings about the wide range of aesthetics possibilities that has been unveiled throughout this text.

It is obvious that the people who create and produce television series do not use the terms that have been expounded here — except for some of the sequences, such as teasers. However, my argument is not that they do or will employ such terminology, but that the aesthetics of these works is structured along the lines that these concepts describe. This research has yielded abundant evidence that supports this contention, gathered from detailed analyses of a multitude of shows. Since the first chapter that theorisation has gone hand in hand with analysis. This thesis has been written in a spirit that takes theoretical concepts and categorisation as useful insofar as they allow us to understand the object of study — in this case, the aesthetic properties of television fiction series.

Accordingly, the findings of this investigation may also reinvigorate the practice of historical research, which played a small but fundamental role in my arguments, leading to a more rigorous conceptualisation of television spectatorship and to a consideration of the place of television shows in the broader context of visual culture.[2] The close analysis of television series is one practice that could obviously benefit from the use of the theoretical framework that results from this research. Each chapter contains examples of meticulous scrutiny of aspects of particular series based on this framework, which demonstrate the fruitfulness of its use. Specifically, criticism could gain from employing the insights into the aesthetic structure of series contained in the previous chapters.

Writing about television aesthetics and criticism, Jason Jacobs reaffirms what he had affirmed elsewhere,[3] defending that the evaluation of television programmes should come from an acknowledgement of their *variety*. This thesis, which has focused on fiction series and has detailed their aesthetic potential, springs from such an acknowledgement. Jacobs argues for a criticism that stems from a deep engagement with the details of the works[4] and is not "generated

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2. For an essay that proposes these aims for the research on television aesthetics, see David Thorburn, "Television as an Aesthetic Medium", *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, vol. 4, no. 2 (1987), pp. 161-73.
3. See Jason Jacobs, "Issues of Judgement and Value in TV", *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 4, no. 4 (2001), pp. 427-47.
4. Cf. Victoria O'Donnell, *Television Criticism* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2007).

as an effect of theoretical searching for examples or illustration".[5] His point is not that we should refrain from illustrative examples, but that we should avoid theorising ahead of experience. In other words, we should not trivialise the programmes, simply using them with no regards for their individuality. This research project has kept away from such trivialisation. As the first lines of this dissertation, on *The Shield* (2002-8) and *Nip/Tuck* (2003-10), indicate: it was the series that prompted the creation of the concepts. It becomes clear from what it is written, and how it is written, all through these pages about specific shows that there are more to them, that my words to not exhaust them.

Jacobs confesses his great admiration for the criticism of scholars that are quoted in this dissertation: Stanley Cavell, David Bordwell, Andrew Klevan, and Deborah Thomas. This may serve as confirmation of a link between the work that has been conducted here with the practice of criticism — even if my use of these authors' ideas and remarks was for theoretical purposes only. This link results from the reliance of criticism on detailed analysis. Yet criticism utilises analysis to make evaluative claims whereas theory utilises it to make theoretical claims. As a work of theory, this thesis does not include assertions about the oeuvre of particular television creators or about the achievements of specific series. My analyses may certainly serve as evidence for evaluative claims, but such claims would need to be articulated in a way different from the theoretical points that conclude each analysis. The concepts that this thesis has proposed are valuable for criticism because they allow us to see more clearly the aesthetic structure of series, directing our attention to certain elements and their relations within these long and layered works. This study has not only celebrated the plurality and possibilities of the aesthetics of these programmes, but has examined them methodically, breaking them down into their structuring constituents and relationships. As Jason Mittell declares, "There is no singular aesthetics of television [...]. However, even if televisual aesthetics are plural rather than universal, we can still explore how a show fits into a particular set of aesthetic possibilities and judge how it fulfils its ambitions."[6] The introduction of this thesis mentions that criticism is a thriving area in

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5. Jacobs, "Television Aesthetics: An Infantile Disorder", *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2006), p. 24.
6. Jason Mittell, "*Lost* in a Great Story: Evaluation in Narrative Television (and Television Studies)", in *Reading "Lost": Perspectives on a Hit Television Show*, ed. Roberta Pearson (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), p. 125.

television studies. My descriptive concepts can lead the scholars who focus on this area to a deeper understanding of the intricate aesthetic structure of these serial televisual works, before they return to them as objects of criticism.

The findings of this dissertation suggest these possible applications and are not tentative. Yet, as it has been made explicit, they are a response to series as they have been created until now. Shows will certainly present new forms that will demand an expansion of what is offered here. It is in conformity with this project to encourage scholars to be more responsive, it is an intended effect of this research to instigate researchers to be more attentive — responsive and attentive to the always renewed creativity of the aesthetics of television fiction series.

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Sin City, dir. Frank Miller, Robert Rodriguez, and Quentin Tarantino. US: Dimension Films, 2005.

Sjunde inseglet, Det (The Seventh Seal), dir. Ingmar Bergman. Sweden: SF, 1957.

Spider-Man, dir. Sam Raimi. US: Columbia Pictures, 2002.

Spider-Man 2, dir. Sam Raimi. US: Columbia Pictures, 2004.

Spider-Man 3, dir. Sam Raimi. US: Columbia Pictures, 2007.

Stella Dallas, dir. King Vidor. US: The Samuel Goldwyn Company, 1937.

They Shoot Horses, Don't They?, dir. Sydney Pollack. US: ABC Pictures, 1969.

Three Kings, dir. David O. Russell. Australia/US: BVI/Warner Bros. Pictures, 1999.

Teleography

24, cr. Joel Surnow and Robert Cochran. US: Imagine Entertainment, 20th Century Fox Television, 2001-10 (Fox).

"12:00 a.m. - 1:00 a.m." (1.01), wr. Surnow and Cochran, dir. Stephen Hopkins. Aired 6 Nov. 2002.

"7:00 a.m. - 8:00 a.m." (1.08), wr. Surnow and Michael Loceff, dir. Hopkins. Aired 15 Jan. 2002.

"11:00 p.m. - 12:00 a.m." (1.24), wr. Surnow and Loceff (story: Cochran and Howard Gordon), dir. Hopkins. Aired 21 May 2002.

"Day 2: 8:00 a.m. - 9:00 a.m." (2.01), wr. Surnow and Loceff, dir. Jon Cassar. Aired 29 Oct. 2002.

"Day 2: 9:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m." (2.02), wr. Surnow and Loceff, dir. Cassar. Aired 3 Nov. 2002.

"Day 2: 1:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m." (2.06), wr. Elizabeth M. Cosin, dir. Cassar. Aired 3 Dec. 2002.

"Day 3: 3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m." (3.03), wr. Gordon, dir. Ian Toynton. Aired 11 Nov. 2003.

"Day 6: 7:00 a.m. - 8:00 a.m." (6.02), wr. Manny Coto, dir. Cassar. Aired 14 Jan. 2007.

"Day 8: 2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m." (8.23), wr. Coto, dir. Shauna McGarry and Geoff Aull. Aired 24 May 2010.

"Day 8: 3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m." (8.24), wr. Coto, dir. Gordon. Aired 24 May 2010.

30 Rock, cr. Tina Fey. US: Broadway Video, Little Stranger, 2006- (NBC).

"Corporate Crush" (1.19), wr. John Riggi, dir. Don Scardino. Aired 12 Apr. 2007.

"Episode 210" (2.10), wr. Robert Carlock and Donald Glover, dir. Richard Shepard. Aired 10 Jan. 2008.

"Generalissimo" (3.10), wr. Carlock, dir. Todd Holland. Aired 5 Feb. 2009.

704 Hauser, cr. Norman Lear. US: Embassy Productions, 1994 (CBS).

Alias, cr. J. J. Abrams. US: Touchstone Television, 2001-6 (ABC).

"Truth Be Told" (1.01), wr. and dir. Abrams. Aired 30 Sept. 2001.

"Masquerade" (1.18), wr. Alex Kurtzman and Roberto Orci, dir. Craig Zisk. Aired 7 Apr. 2002.

"Phase One" (2.13), wr. Abrams, dir. Jack Bender. Aired 26 Jan. 2003.

"Double Agent" (2.14), wr. Kurtzman and Orci, dir. Ken Olin. Aired 2 Feb. 2003.

All in the Family, cr. Norman Lear. US: Tandem Productions, 1971-79 (CBS).

"Lionel Moves Into the Neighborhood" (1.08), wr. Don Nicholl and Bryan Joseph, dir. John Rich. Aired 2 Mar. 1971.

"Cousin Maude's Visit" (2.12), wr. Phil Mishkin, Bernie West, and Michael Ross (story: Mishkin), dir. Rich. Aired 11 Dec. 1971.

"Henry's Farewell" (4.06), wr. Nicholl, dir. Bob LaHendro and Rich. Aired 20 Oct. 1973.

Ally McBeal, cr. David E. Kelley. US: David E. Kelley Productions, 1997-2002 (Fox).

Angel, cr. Joss Whedon and David Greenwalt. Japan/US: Kuzui Enterprises/Mutant Enemy, David Greenwalt Productions, Sandollar Television, 1999-2004 (WB).

"Belonging" (2.19), wr. Shawn Ryan, dir. Turi Meyer. Aired 1 May 2001.

"Over the Rainbow" (2.20), wr. Mere Smith, dir. Frederick King Keller. Aired 8 May 2001.

"Through the Looking Glass" (2.21), wr. and dir. Tim Minear. Aired 15 May 2001.

"There's No Place Like Plrtz Glrb" (2.22), wr. and dir. David Greenwalt. Aired 22 May 2001.

Archie Bunker's Place, cr. Norman Lear. US: Embassy Productions, 1979-83 (CBS).

Arrested Development, cr. Michael Hurwitz. US: Imagine Entertainment, 2003-6 (Fox).

Battlestar Galactica, cr. Glen A. Larson. US: Glen A. Larson Productions, 1978-79 (ABC).

Battlestar Galactica, dev. Ronald D. Moore. US: R+D Television, 2003-4 (Syfy), 2004-5 (Sky One), 2005-9 (Syfy).

"Miniseries", wr. Moore, dir. Michael Rymer. Aired 8 Dec. 2003.

"You Can't Go Home Again" (1.05), wr. Carla Robinson, dir. Sergio Mimica-Gezzan. Aired 15 Nov. 2004.

"Litmus" (1.06), wr. Jeff Vlaming, dir. Rod Hardy. Aired 22 Nov. 2004.

"Home, Part 1" (2.06), wr. David Eick, dir. Mimica-Gezzan. Aired 19 Aug. 2004.

"Collaborators" (3.05), wr. Mark Verheiden, dir. Rymer. Aired 27 Oct. 2004.

Baywatch, cr. Michael Berk, Douglas Schwartz, and Gregory J. Bonann. US: GTG Entertainment, Baywatch Production Company, 1989-90 (NBC), 1991-2001 (syndicated).

Berlin Alexanderplatz, cr. Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Italy/West Germany: RAI/Bavaria Film, WDR, 1980 (WDR).

Big Bang Theory, The, cr. Chuck Lorre and Bill Prady. US: Chuck Lorre Productions, 2007- (CBS).

"The Big Bran Hypothesis" (1.02), wr. Robert Cohen and David Goetsch (story: Lorre and Prady), dir. Mark Cendrowski. Aired 1 Oct. 2007.

Big Love, cr. Mark V. Olsen e Will Scheffer. US: Anima Sola Productions, Playtone Productions, 2006-.

Black Donnellys, The, cr. Paul Haggis and Robert Moresco. US: NBC, 2007 (NBC).

"God Is a Comedian" (1.03), wr. Mick Betancourt and Rafael Alvarez, dir. Anthony Hemingway. Aired 2 Apr. 2007.

"The Only Thing Sure" (1.07), wr. Jeff F. King and Moresco, dir. Dan Lerner. Unaired.

Bones, cr. Hart Hanson. US: Far Field Productions, Josephson Entertainment, 2005- (Fox).

Boomtown, cr. Graham Yost. US: NBC Studios, 2002-3 (NBC).

"Reelin' in the Years" (1.04), wr. Laurence Andries, dir. Bobby Roth. Aired 20 Oct. 2002.

Boston Legal, cr. David E. Kelley. US: David E. Kelley Productions, 2003-8 (ABC).

"Head Cases" (1.01), wr. Scott Kaufer, Kelley, and Jeff Rake, dir. Bill D'Elia. Aired 3 Oct. 2004.

Brothers & Sisters, cr. Jon Robin Baitz. US: ABC Studios, 2006- (ABC).

"Patriarchy" (1.01), wr. Baitz, dir. Ken Olin. Aired 24 Sept. 2006.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer, cr. Joss Whedon. Japan/US: Kuzui Enterprises/Mutant Enemy, Sandollar Television, 1997-2001 (WB), 2001-3 (UPN).

"Original Pilot", wr. and dir. Whedon. Unaired.

"Welcome to the Hellmouth" (1.01), wr. Whedon, dir. Charles Martin Smith [and Whedon]. Aired 10 Mar. 1997.

Carnivàle, cr. Daniel Knauf. US: 3 Arts Entertainment, 2003-5 (HBO).

"Milfay" (1.01), wr. Knauf, dir. Rodrigo García. Aired 14 Sept. 2003.

"After the Ball Is Over" (1.02), wr. Knauf and Ronald D. Moore, dir. Jeremy Podeswa. Aired 21 Sept. 2003.

"Tipton" (1.03), wr. Henry Bromell and Knauf (story: Bromell), dir. García. Aired 28 Sept. 2003.

"Black Blizzard" (1.04), wr. William Schmidt, dir. Peter Medak. Aired 5 Oct. 2003.

"Babylon" (1.05), wr. Dawn Prestwich and Nicole Yorkin, dir. Tim Hunter. Aired 12 Oct. 2003.

"Pick a Number" (1.06), wr. Moore, dir. García. Aired 19 Oct. 2003.

"The River" (1.07), wr. Toni Graphia, dir. Allison MacLean. Aired 26 Oct. 2003.

"Lonnigan, Texas" (1.08), wr. Knauf, dir. Scott Winant. Aired 2 Nov. 2003.

"Insomnia" (1.09), wr. Schmidt, dir. Jack Bender. Aired 9 Nov. 2003.

"Hot and Bothered" (1.10), wr. Prestwich and Yorkin, dir. Podeswa. Aired 16 Nov. 2003.

"Day of the Dead" (1.11), wr. Graphia, dir. John Patterson. Aired 23 Nov. 2003.

"The Day That Was the Day" (1.12), wr. Moore, dir. García. Aired 30 Nov. 2003.

"Los Moscos" (2.01), wr. Knauf, dir. Podeswa. Aired 9 Jan. 2005.

"Alamogordo, NM" (2.02), wr. Schmidt, dir. Bender. Aired 16 Jan. 2005.

"Ingram, TX" (2.03), wr. John J. McLaughlin, dir. Patterson. Aired 23 Jan. 2005.

"Old Cherry Blossom Road" (2.04), wr. Prestwich and Yorkin, dir. Steve Shill. Aired 30 Jan. 2005.

"Creed, OK" (2.05), wr. Tracy Tormé, dir. Podeswa. Aired 6 Feb. 2005.

"The Road to Damascus" (2.06), wr. Prestwich and Yorkin, dir. Tucker Gates. Aired 13 Feb. 2005.

"Damascus, NE" (2.07), wr. McLaughlin (story: Schmidt), dir. Alan Taylor. Aired 20 Feb. 2005.

"Outskirts, Damascus, NE" (2.08), wr. Daniel Knauf, dir. Tim Hunter. Aired 27 Feb. 2005.

"Lincoln Highway" (2.09), wr. Schmidt, dir. García. Aired 6 Mar. 2005.

"Cheyenne, WY" (2.10), wr. Tormé, dir. Todd Field. Aired 13 Mar. 2005.

"Outside New Canaan" (2.11), wr. Prestwich and Yorkin (story: McLaughlin), dir. Dan Lerner. Aired 20 Mar. 2005.

"New Canaan" (2.12), wr. Knauf, dir. Winant. Aired 27 Mar. 2005.

Charmed, cr. Constance M. Burge. US: Spelling Television, 1998-2006 (WB).

"Something Wicca This Way Comes" (1.01), wr. Burge, dir. John T. Kretchmer. Aired 7 Oct. 1998.

"Thank You for Not Morphing" (1.03), wr. Zack Estrin and Chris Levinson, dir. Ellen S. Pressman. Aired 21 Oct. 1998.

"Dead Man Dating" (1.04), wr. Javier Grillo-Marxuach, dir. Richard Compton. Aired 28 Oct. 1998.

"Witch Trial" (2.01), wr. Brad Kern, dir. Craig Zisk. Aired 30 Sept. 1999.

"Forever Charmed" (8.22), wr. Kern, dir. James L. Conway. Aired 21 May 2006.

Chuck, cr. Josh Schwartz and Chris Fedak. US: College Hill Pictures, Wonderland Sound and Vision, 2007- (NBC).

Cold Feet, cr. Mike Bullen. UK: Granada Television, 1998-2003 (ITV).

Cold Feet, dev. Kerry Ehrin. UK/US: Granada Television/Kerry Ehrin Productions, 1999 (NBC).

Criminal Minds, cr. Jeff Davis. US: ABC Studios, 2005- (CBS).

"Extreme Aggressor" (1.01), wr. Davis, dir. Richard Shepard. Aired 22 Sept. 2005.

CSI: Crime Scene Investigation, cr. Anthony E. Zuiker. Canada/US: Alliance Atlantis Communications/CBS Paramount Network Television, 2000- (CBS).

"Pilot" (1.01), wr. Zuiker, dir. Danny Cannon. Aired 6 Oct. 2000.

"Anonymous" (1.08), wr. Zuiker, dir. Cannon. Aired 24 Nov. 2000.

"Who and What" (8.06), wr. Richard Catalani and Cannon (story: Carol Mendelsohn and Naren Shankar), dir. Cannon. Aired 8 Nov. 2007.

CSI: Miami, cr. Ann Donahue, Carol Mendelsohn, and Anthony E. Zuiker. Canada/US: Alliance Atlantis Communications/CBS Paramount Network Television, 2002- (CBS).

CSI: NY, cr. Ann Donahue, Carol Mendelsohn, and Anthony E. Zuiker. Canada/US: Alliance Atlantis Communications/CBS Paramount Network Television, 2004- (CBS).

Curb Your Enthusiasm, cr. Larry David. US: HBO, 2000- (HBO).

Days of Our Lives, cr. Ted and Betty Corday. US: NBC, 1965- (NBC).

Deadwood, cr. David Milch. US: Red Board Productions, Paramount Television, 2004-6 (HBO).

"Here Was a Man" (1.04), wr. Elizabeth Sarnoff, dir. Alan Taylor. Aired 11 Apr. 2004.

Dear John, cr. John Sullivan. UK: BBC, 1986-87 (BBC).

Dear John, dev. Bob Ellison and Peter Noah. US: Paramount Television, 1988-92 (NBC).

Desperate Housewives, cr. Mark Cherry. US: ABC Studios, 2004- (ABC).

"Pilot" (1.01), wr. Cherry, dir. Charles McDougall. Aired 3 Oct. 2004.

Dexter, cr. James Manos, Jr. US: Showtime, 2006- (Showtime).

Diff'rent Strokes, cr. Jeff Harris and Bernie Kukoff. US: Embassy Productions, 1978-85 (NBC), 1985-86 (ABC).

Doctor Who, cr. Sydney Newman, C. E. Webber, and Donald Wilson. UK: BBC, 1965-89, 2005- (BBC One).

"The Daleks' Master Plan", wr. Terry Nation and Dennis Spooner, dir. Douglas Camfield. Aired from 13 Nov. 1965 to 29 Jan. 1966.

Dollhouse, cr. Joss Whedon. US: 20th Century Fox Television, 2009-10 (Fox).

Dream On, cr. David Crane and Marta Kauffman. US: Kevin Bright Productions, 1990-96 (HBO).

Elephant, dir. Alan Clarke. UK: BBC Northern Ireland, 1989 (BBC Two).

Ellen, cr. Carol Black, Neil Marlens, and David S. Rosenthal. US: Black-Marlens Company, 1994-98 (ABC).

ER, cr. Michael Crichton. US: Constant c Productions, Amblin Entertainment, 1994-2009 (NBC).

"Ambush" (4.01), wr. Carol Flint, dir. Thomas Schlamme. Aired 25 Sept. 1997.

Extras, cr. Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant. UK/US: BBC/HBO, 2005-6 (BBC Two), 2007 (HBO).

"Christmas Special", wr. and dir. Gervais and Merchant. Aired 16 Dec. 1995.

Fanny och Alexander (*Fanny and Alexander*), dir. Ingmar Bergman. Sweden: Cinematograph AB, 1982 (SVT).

Felicity, cr. J. J. Abrams. US: Touchstone Television, Imagine Television, 1998-2002 (WB).

"Help for the Lovelorn" (2.11), wr. Abrams, dir. Lamont Johnson. Aired 23 Jan. 2000.

Firefly, cr. Joss Whedon. US: Mutant Enemy, 2002-3 (WB).

First Person, cr. Errol Morris. US: Globe Department Store, Scout Productions, 2000 (Bravo), 2001 (IFC).

FlashForward, cr. Brannon Braga and David S. Goyer. US: Phantom Four Films, 2009-10 (ABC).

Frasier, cr. David Angell, Peter Casey, and David Lee. US: Grub Street Productions, 1993-2004 (NBC).

"The Good Son" (1.01), wr. Angell, Casey, and Lee, dir. James Burrows. Aired 16 Sept. 1993.

"Space Quest" (1.02), wr. Sy Dukane and Denise Moss, dir. Burrows. Aired 23 Sept. 1993.

Friends, cr. David Crane and Marta Kauffman. US: Bright/Kauffman/Crane Productions, 1994-2004 (NBC).

"The One with the Dozen Lasagnas" (1.12), wr. Jeff Astrof, Adam Chase, Mike Sikowitz, and Ira Ungerleider, dir. Paul Lazarus. Aired 12 Jan. 1995.

"The One with the Evil Orthodontist" (1.20), wr. Doty Abrams, dir. Peter Bonerz. Aired 6 Apr. 1995.

"The One Where No One's Ready" (3.02), wr. Ira Ungerleider, dir. Gail Mancuso. Aired 26 Sept. 1996.

"The One with Frank Jr." (3.05), wr. Scott Silveri and Shana Goldberg-Meehan, dir. Steve Zuckerman. Aired 17 Oct. 1996.

Fringe, cr. J. J. Abrams, Alex Kurtzman, and Roberto Orci. US: Bad Robot Productions, 2008- (Fox).

"Brown Betty" (2.20), wr. Jeff Pinkner, J. H. Wyman, and Akiva Goldsman, dir. Seith Mann. Aired 29 Apr. 2010.

Gilmore Girls, cr. Amy Sherman-Palladino. US: Dorothy Parker Drank Here Productions, Hofflund/Polone, 2000-6 (WB), 2006-7 (CW).

"Pilot" (1.01), wr. Sherman-Palladino, dir. Lesli Linka Glatter. Aired 5 Oct. 2000.

"Rory's Birthday Parties" (1.06), wr. Sherman-Palladino, dir. Sarah Pia Anderson. Aired 9 Nov. 2000.

"I Can't Get Started" (2.22), wr. Sherman-Palladino and John Stephens, dir. Sherman-Palladino. Aired 21 May 2002.

"They Shoot Gilmores, Don't They?" (3.07), wr. Sherman-Palladino, dir. Kenny Ortega. Aired 12 Nov. 2002.

"An Affair to Remember" (4.06), wr. Sherman-Palladino, dir. Matthew Diamond. Aired 28 Oct. 2003.

"Bon Voyage" (7.22), wr. David S. Rosenthal, dir. Lee Shallat-Chemel. Aired 15 May 2007.

Good Times, cr. Norman Lear. US: Tandem Productions, 1974-79 (CBS).

Gossip Girl, dev. Josh Schwartz and Stephanie Savage. US: College Hill Pictures, Alloy Entertainment, 2007- (CW).

"Poison Ivy" (1.01), wr. J. Miller Tobin, dir. Felicia D. Henderson. Aired 3 Oct. 2007.

Grey's Anatomy, cr. Shonda Rhimes. US: ABC Studios, 2005- (ABC).

"A Hard Day's Night" (1.1), wr. Rhimes, dir. Peter Horton. Aired 27 Mar. 2005.

"The First Cut Is the Deepest" (1.2), wr. Rhimes, dir. Horton. Aired 3 Apr. 2005.

"Winning a Battle, Losing the War" (1.3), wr. Rhimes, dir. Tony Goldwyn. Aired 10 Apr. 2005.

"Yesterday" (2.18), wr. Krista Vernoff (story: Mimi Schmir), dir. Rob Corn. Aired 19 Feb. 2006.

"What Have I Done to Deserve This?" (2.19), wr. Stacy McKee, dir. Wendey Stanzler. Aired 26 Feb. 2006.

"Deterioration of the Fight or Flight Response (1)" (2.26), wr. Tony Phelan and Joan Rater, dir. Corn. Aired 15 May 2006.

"Losing My Religion (2)" (2.27), wr. Rhimes, dir. Mark Tinker. Aired 15 May 2006.

"From a Whisper to a Scream" (3.09), wr. Kip Koenig, dir. Julie Anne Robinson. Aired 23 Nov. 2006.

"Don't Stand So Close to Me" (3.10), wr. Carolina Paiz, dir. Seith Mann. Aired 30 Nov. 2006.

"Lay Your Hands On Me" (4.11), wr. Allan Heinberg, dir. John Terlesky. Aired 10 Jan. 2008.

"Stairway to Heaven" (5.13), wr. Mark Wilding, dir. Allison Liddi-Brown. Aired 22 Jan. 2009.

"Elevator Love Letter" (5.19), wr. McKee, dir. Ed Ornelas. Aired 26 Mar. 2009.

"What a Difference a Day Makes" (5.22), wr. Rhimes, dir. Corn. Aired 7 May 2009.

"Goodbye (2)" (6.02), wr. Vernoff, dir. Bill D'Elia. Aired 24 Sept. 2009.

"Give Peace a Chance" (6.07), wr. Peter Nowalk, dir. Chandra Wilson. Aired 29 Oct. 2009.

"State of Love and Trust" (6.13), wr. McKee, dir. Jeannot Szwarc. Aired 4 Feb. 2010.

"The Time Warp" (6.15), wr. Zoanne Clack, dir. Corn. Aired 18 Feb. 2010.

"Suicide Is Painless" (6.18), wr. Jeannot Szwarc, dir. Tony Phelan and Joan Rater. Aired 25 Mar. 2010.

"Death and All His Friends (2)" (6.24), wr. Rhimes, dir. Corn. Aired 20 May 2010.

Hanging In, cr. Norman Lear. US: Embassy Productions, 1979 (CBS).

Heroes, cr. Tim Kring. US: Universal Media Studios, 2006-10 (NBC).

"Genesis" (1.01), wr. Kring, dir. David Semel. Aired 25 Sept. 2006.

"Don't Look Back" (1.02), wr. Kring, dir. Allan Arkush. Aired 2 Oct. 2006.

"Company Man" (1.17), wr. Bryan Fuller, dir. Arkush. Aired 26 Feb. 2007.

"Lizards" (2.02), wr. Michael Green, dir. Arkush. Aired 1 Oct. 2007.

"The Butterfly Effect" (3.02), wr. Kring, dir. Greg Beeman. Aired 22 Sept. 2008.

Hill Street Blues, cr. Steven Bochco and Michael Kozoll. US: MTM Enterprises, 1981-87 (NBC).

House M.D., cr. David Shore. US: Universal Media Studios, 2004- (Fox).

"Epic Fail" (6.02), wr. Sara Hess and Liz Friedman, dir. Greg Yaitanes. Aired 28 Sept. 2009.

How I Met Your Mother, cr. Carter Bays and Craig Thomas. US: Bays & Thomas Productions, 2005- (CBS).

"Pilot" (1.01), wr. Bays and Thomas, dir. Pamela Fryman. Aired 19 Sept. 2005.

"Wait for It..." (3.01), wr. Bays and Thomas, dir. Fryman. Aired 24 Sept. 2007.

I Dream of Jeannie, cr. Sidney Sheldon. US: Sidney Sheldon Productions, Screen Gems Television, 1965-70 (NBC).

I Love Lucy, cr. Desi Arnaz. US: Desilu Productions, 1951-57 (CBS).

"Lucy Does a TV Commercial" (1.30), wr. Madelyn Pugh Davis, Jess Oppenheimer, and Bob Carroll Jr., dir. Marc Daniels. Aired 5 May 1952.

In Treatment, dev. Rodrigo García. US: Closest to the Hole Productions, Leverage Management, 2008- (HBO).

Jeffersons, The, dev. Norman Lear. US: Embassy Television, 1975-85 (CBS).

Joey, cr. Shana Goldberg Meeha and Scott Silveri. US: Bright-San Productions, Silver & Gold Productions, 2004-6 (NBC).

Larry King Live, cr. Larry King. US: CNN, 1985- (CNN).

Law & Order, cr. Dick Wolf. US: Universal Media Studios, 1990-2010 (NBC).

Lost, cr. J. J. Abrams, Jeffrey Lieber, and Damon Lindelof. US: ABC Studios, 2004-10 (ABC).

"Pilot, Part 1" (1.01), wr. Abrams and Lindelof (story: Abrams, Lieber, and Lindelof), dir. Abrams. Aired 22 Sept. 2004.

"Pilot, Part 2" (1.02), wr. Abrams and Lindelof (story: Abrams, Lieber, and Lindelof), dir. Abrams. Aired 29 Sept. 2004.

"Maternity Leaves" (2.15), wr. Dawn Lambertsen-Kelly and Matt Ragghianti, dir. Jack Bender. Aired 1 Mar. 2006.

"Three Minutes" (2.22), wr. Edward Kitsis and Adam Horowitz, dir. Stephen Williams. Aired 17 May 2006.

"Flashes Before Your Eyes" (3.08), wr. Lindelof and Drew Goddard, dir. Bender. Aired 14 Feb. 2007.

"Exposé" (3.14), wr. Edward Kitsis and Adam Horowitz, dir. Stephen Williams. Aired 28 Mar. 2007.

Mad Men, cr. Michael Weiner. Canada: Lions Gate Television, 2007- (AMC).

"The Hobo Code" (1.09), wr. Chris Provenzano, dir. Phil Abraham. Aired 6 Sept. 2007.

Man About the House, cr. Johnnie Mortimer and Brian Cooke. UK: Thames Television, 1973-76 (ITV).

Marion and Geoff, cr. Hugo Blick and Rob Brydon. UK: Baby Cow, 2000-3 (BBC Two).

M*A*S*H, dev. Larry Gelbart. US: 20th Century Fox Television, 1972-83 (CBS).

Maude, cr. Norman Lear. US: Tandem Productions, 1972-78 (CBS).

Medium, cr. Glenn Gordon Caron. US: CBS Paramount Television, Grammnet, Picturemaker Productions, 2005-9 (NBC), 2009- (CBS).

"Time Keeps on Slippin" (6.20), wr. Heather Mitchell and Robert Doherty, dir. Miguel Sandoval. Aired 7 May 2010.

Monty Python's Flying Circus, cr. Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones, and Michael Palin. UK: BBC, Monty Python Pictures, 1969-73 (BBC One), 1974 (BBC Two).

"Dinsdale!" (2.01), wr. Chapman, Cleese, Gilliam, Idle, Jones, and Palin, dir. Ian MacNaughton. Aired 15 Sept. 1970.

NCIS: Los Angeles, cr. Shane Brennan. US: CBS Television Studios, 2009- (CBS).

Nip/Tuck, cr. Ryan Murphy. US: Shephard/Robin Company, 2003-10 (FX).

"Oona Wentworth" (2.13), wr. Sean Jablonski and Jennifer Salt, dir. Scott Brazil. Aired 14 Sept. 2004.

Northern Exposure, cr. Joshua Brand and John Falsey. US: Finnegan-Pinchuk Productions, 1990-95 (CBS).

Numb3rs, cr. Nicolas Falacci and Cheryl Heuton. UK: Scott Free! Productions, 2005-10 (CBS).

"Pilot" (1.01), wr. Falacci and Heuton, dir. Mick Jackson. Aired 23 Jan. 2005.

NYPD Blue, cr. Steven Bochco and David Milch. US: Steven Bochco Productions, 1993-2005 (ABC).

"Pilot" (1.01), wr. Milch (story: Bochco and Milch), dir. Gregory Hoblit. Aired 21 Sept. 1993.

"From Hare to Eternity" (1.11), wr. Milch and Burton Armus, dir. Eric Laneuville. Aired 14 Dec. 1993.

"Rockin' Robin" (1.22), wr. Jody Worth and Ted Mann (story: Worth), dir. Hoblit. Aired 17 May 1994.

"Dead and Gone" (2.04), wr. Leonard Gardner, dir. Daniel Sackheim. Aired 1 Nov. 1994.

O.C., The, cr. Josh Schwartz. US: Wonderland Sound and Vision, 2003-7 (Fox).

Odd Couple, The, dev. Jerry Belson and Garry Marshall. US: Paramount Pictures, 1970-75 (ABC).

Office, The, cr. Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant. UK: BBC, 2001-3 (BBC Two).

"Downsize" (1.1), wr. and dir. Gervais and Merchant. Aired 9 Jul. 2001.

"The Quiz" (1.3), wr. and dir. Gervais and Merchant. Aired 23 Jul. 2001.

"Training" (1.4), wr. and dir. Gervais and Merchant. Aired 30 Jul. 2001.

"New Girl" (1.5), wr. and dir. Gervais and Merchant. Aired 13 Aug. 2001.

"Judgment" (1.6), wr. and dir. Gervais and Merchant. Aired 20 Aug. 2001.

"Christmas Special, Part 1", wr. and dir. Gervais and Merchant. Aired 26 Dec. 2003.

Office, The, dev. Greg Daniels. US: Deedle-Dee Productions, Reveille Productions, 2005- (NBC).

"Pilot" (1.1), wr. Ricky Gervais, Stephen Merchant, and Daniels, dir. Ken Kwapis. Aired 24 Mar. 2005.

"Diversity Day" (1.2), wr. B. J. Novak, dir. Ken Kwapis. Aired 29 Mar. 2005.

"Health Care" (1.3), wr. Paul Lieberstein, dir. Ken Whittingham. Aired 5 Apr. 2005.

"Basketball" (1.5), wr. and dir. Daniels. Aired 19 Apr. 2005.

"Dunder Mifflin Infinity" (4.02), wr. Michael Schur, dir. Craig Zisk. Aired 4 Oct. 2007.

"Company Picnic" (5.26), wr. Jennifer Celotta and Lieberstein, dir. Kwapis. Aired 14 May 2009.

Oprah Winfrey Show, The, cr. Oprah Winfrey. US: Harpo Productions, 1986- (syndicated).

Perfect Strangers, dir. Stephen Poliakoff. UK: TalkBack, 2001 (BBC Two).

Practice, The, cr. David E. Kelley. US: David E. Kelley Productions, 1997-2004 (ABC).

Prison Break, cr. Paul Scheuring. US: Adelstein-Parouse Productions, Original Television, 2005-9 (Fox).

"Allen" (1.02), wr. Scheuring, dir. Michael W. Watkins. Aired 29 Aug. 2005.

Private Practice, cr. Shonda Rhimes. US: ABC Studios, 2007- (ABC).

Pushing Daisies, cr. Bryan Fuller. US: Living Dead Guy Productions, Jinks/Cohen Company, 2007-9 (ABC).

Roc, cr. Stan Daniels. US: HBO, 1991-94 (Fox).

Royle Family, The, cr. Caroline Aherne and Craig Cash. UK: Granada Television, 1998- (BBC).

Scener ur ett äktenskap (Scenes from a Marriage), dir. Ingmar Bergman. Sweden: Cinematograph AB, 1973 (SVT).

Scrubs, cr. Bill Lawrence. US: ABC Studios, 2001-8 (NBC), 2009-10 (ABC).

    "My First Day" (1.01), wr. Lawrence, dir. Adam Bernstein. Aired 2 Oct. 2001.

Seinfeld, cr. Larry David and Jerry Seinfeld. US: Shapiro/West, 1990-98 (NBC).

Sex and the City, cr. Darren Star. US: Darren Star Productions, 1998-2004 (HBO).

Shield, The, cr. Shawn Ryan. US: 20th Century Fox Television, 2002-8 (FX).

    "On Tilt" (3.15), wr. Ryan and Glen Mazzara, dir. Scott Brazil. Aired 15 Jun. 2004.

Singing Detective, The, cr. Dennis Potter. UK: BBC, 1986 (BBC One).

Six Feet Under, cr. Alan Ball. US: Greenblatt/Janollari Studios, Actual Size, 2001-5 (HBO).

    "In the Game" (2.01), wr. Ball, dir. Rodrigo García. Aired 3 Mar. 2002.

Sopranos, The, cr. David Chase. US: Chase Films, Brad Grey Television, 1999-2007 (HBO).

    "Meadowlands" (1.04), wr. Jason Cahill, dir. John Patterson. Aired 31 Jan. 1999.

    "The Test Dream" (5.11), wr. Chase and Matthew Weiner, dir. Allen Coulter. Aired 16 May 2004.

    "Join the Club" (6.02), wr. Chase, dir. David Nutter. Aired 19 Mar. 2006.

    "Mayham" (6.03), wr. Weiner, dir. Jack Bender. Aired 26 Mar. 2006.

    "Made in America" (6.21), wr. and dir. Chase. Aired 10 Jun. 2007.

Star Trek, cr. Gene Roddenberry. US: Paramount Television, 1966-69 (NBC).

Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip, cr. Aaron Sorkin. US: Shoe Money Productions, 2006-7 (NBC).

    "Nevada Day, Part I" (1.07), wr. Sorkin (story: Mark McKinney), dir. Lesli Linka Glatter and Timothy Busfield. Aired 6 Nov. 2006.

    "Nevada Day, Part II" (1.08), wr. Sorkin (story: David Handelman and Cinque Henderson), dir. Busfield. Aired 13 Nov. 2006.

    "K&R, Part I" (1.19), wr. Sorkin (story: Mark Goffman), dir. Busfield. Aired 7 Jun. 2006.

    "K&R, Part II" (1.20), wr. Sorkin (story: Jack Gutowitz and Ian Reichbach), dir. Dave Chameides. Aired 14 Jun. 2006.

    "K&R, Part III" (1.21), wr. Aaron Sorkin and Mark McKinney, dir. Busfield. Aired 21 Jun. 2006.

Supernatural, cr. Eric Kripke. US: Wonderland Sound and Vision, 2005-6 (WB), 2006- (CW).

    "Ghostfacers" (3.13), wr. Ben Edlund, dir. Philip Sgriccia. Aired 24 Apr. 2008.

    "Monster Movie" (4.05), wr. Edlund, dir. Robert Singer. Aired 16 Oct. 2008.

Three's Company, dev. Don Nicholl, Michael Ross, and Bernie West. US: DLT Entertainment, 1977-84 (ABC).

Tru Calling, cr. Jon Harmon Feldman. US: Original Television, 2003-5 (Fox).

True Blood, cr. Alan Ball. US: Your Face Goes Here Entertainment, 2008- (HBO).

Twilight Zone, The, cr. Rod Serling. US: Cayuga Productions, 1959-64 (CBS).

Twin Peaks, cr. Mark Frost and David Lynch. US: Lynch/Frost Productions, 1990-91 (ABC).

"Pilot", wr. Frost and Lynch, dir. Lynch. Aired 8 Apr. 1990.

"Episode Two" (1.2), wr. Frost and Lynch, dir. Lynch. Aired 19 Apr. 1990.

"Episode Three" (1.3), wr. Frost and Lynch, dir. Tina Rathborne. Aired 26 Apr. 1990.

"Episode Twenty-Nine" (2.22), wr. Frost, Harley Peyton, and Robert Engels, dir. Lynch. Aired 10 Jun. 1991.

Two and a Half Men, cr. Chuck Lorre and Lee Aronsohn. US: Chuck Lorre Productions, The Tannenbaum Company, 2003- (CBS).

Ugly Betty, dev. Silvio Horta. US: ABC Studios, 2006-10 (ABC).

Veronica Mars, cr. Rob Thomas. US: Silver Pictures Television, 2004-6 (UPN), 2006-7 (WB).

"Pilot" (1.01), wr. Thomas, dir. Mark Piznarski. Aired 22 Sept. 2004.

"Cheatty Cheatty Bang Bang" (2.03), wr. Phil Klemmer and John Enbom, dir. John T. Kretchmer. Aired 12 Oct. 2005.

Weeds, cr. Jenji Kohan. US: Showtime, 2005- (Showtime).

"You Can't Miss the Bear" (1.01), wr. Kohan, dir. Brian Dannelly. Aired 7 Aug. 2005.

"Lady's a Charm" (4.02), wr. Victoria Morrow, dir. Craig Zisk. Aired 23 Jun. 2008.

West Wing, The, cr. Aaron Sorkin. US: John Wells Productions, 1999-2006 (NBC).

Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?, cr. Celador. UK: Sony Pictures Entertainment, 1998- (ITV).

Wife Swap, cr. Stephen Lambert. UK: RDF Television, 2003- (Channel 4).

Will & Grace, cr. David Kohan and Max Mutchnick. US: KoMut Entertainment, 1998-2006 (NBC).

"Moveable Feast" (4.09), wr. Kari Lizer, dir. James Burrows. Aired 22 Nov. 2001.

Wire, The, cr. David Simon. US: Blown Deadline Productions, 2002-8 (HBO).

"Lessons" (1.08), wr. Simon (story: Simon and Ed Burns), dir. Gloria Muzio. Aired 28 Jul. 2002.

"Home Rooms" (4.03), wr. Richard Price (story: Burns and Price), dir. Seith Mann. Aired 24 Sept. 2006.

Without a Trace, cr. Hank Steinberg. US: Jerry Bruckheimer Television, 2002-9 (CBS).

"Pilot" (1.01), wr. Steinberg, dir. David Nutter. Aired 26 Sept. 2002.

"Where and Why" (6.06), wr. Jan Nash and Greg Walker, dir. Jonathan Kaplan. Aired 8 Nov. 2007.

X Files, The, cr. Chris Carter. US: Ten Thirteen Productions, 1993-2002 (Fox).

"Anasazi (1)" (2.25), wr. Carter (story: David Duchovny and Carter), dir. R. W. Goodwin. Aired 19 May 1995.

"The Blessing Way (2)" (3.01), wr. Carter, dir. Goodwin. Aired 22 May 1995.

"Paper Clip (3)" (3.02), wr. Carter, dir. Rob Bowman. Aired 29 May 1995.