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TV Series or Not?

Abstract: The paper deals with the new phenomenon related to the complexity of TV series production after 2000, recently theorized by many authors. The common denominator for most of them is the blurring of boundaries between film and TV. How can we explain the complexity of recent TV production? Is it related to blurring the boundaries between television and film, art and entertainment? The primary objective of this paper is to demonstrate that we are dealing with a completely new, hybrid form, which incorporates not only film aesthetics but also the visual arts experience and contemporary theory.

Keywords: film; series; arts; entertainment; narrative complexity; visual complexity; analytic complexity; visual art; contemporary theory; hybrid form; algorithm

Since 2000 the production of popular TV series has drastically changed. This change is related neither to some specific genre nor to any existing category such as American or British TV series. As a matter of fact, even the notion “TV series” is not appropriate because it has no much in common with television series such as Showtime original series or BBC series. Reference could be made to Netflix series, even though it is not related to Netflix production only. One can assume that we are dealing with a completely new phenomenon because it differs from the standard TV series as we know them from the so-called “golden age of television”.¹ This new phenomenon is widely recognized as blurring the boundaries between film and TV, and has become the subject of theoretical analysis. The notions introduced in these analyses are *narrative complexity* or *novelistic television* (J. Mittel), or *cinematic television* or *three-dimensional television* (S. Lyons). There is no doubt whatsoever that the current production of TV series has many similarities with feature films. The primary question arising from that point is: could we say that these new TV series are, in some way, elongated films, which instead of lasting for two hours last for ten or even twenty? Is this its only new feature? If this is so, why should we watch something ten hours long

¹ The “golden age of television” is a generally accepted notion which refers mainly to the eighties, so called the second wave of the “golden age of television”. The first wave is related to the sixties, and even earlier, but it is basically related to television production in the United States and UK. In the eighties, besides them, a lot of other national televisions had their “golden period”.

instead of only two? The objective of this paper is to show that recent production of TV series is a completely new hybrid form, which incorporates not only film aesthetics but also contemporary visual arts experience and contemporary theory.

In order to show what is 'new' in this new TV series production, we should first explain what indeed standard TV series are, those we used to watch on TV screens decades ago. As indicated by the abbreviation, standard TV series is utterly different from film, on many levels: production, distribution and perception. Additionally, in 20th century popular culture a common notion is the classification based on the difference between mere entertainment and the loftier idea of 'art'. On the one hand, TV series and television in general are widely recognized as entertainment. On the other, films are mostly related to arts. It is obvious that TV series are not considered art because of their often very simple narratives and shallowness, and their primary function of pastime and entertainment. That is typically the opposite to film in general, which has a more ambitious goal: as to not only entertain but to show something artistic, aesthetic or more demanding. For this "lack of complexity" of television, Marshall McLuhan had a technological explanation: "For the TV camera does not have a built-in angle of vision like the movie camera."² It could be understood that a medium as television has no depth, so everything is going on at the "surface" which leads to superficial effects in narrative, representations, content and form. It is interesting that McLuhan insisted on these differences between film and television, which were not arbitrary but according to him technologically justified. If we take into consideration this technological level and the fact that in 20th century mass culture TV series are related to entertainment, their key features are: intelligibility, simplicity and accessibility to the broadest audience. These lead us to the classical Hollywood narrative and mainstream film production as its main characteristic, from the 1920s to the 1960s, the so-called "golden age of Hollywood". During the 1960s emerged numerous alternatives, from European neorealism to experimental film. At the same time, it became a model for TV series for decades to come, because of its ease in communication ideas to the audience.

Most authors agree that the point of departure from conventional TV series happened with the series *Twin Peaks* (1990–1, first season):

Not only did the 1990s witness a gradual shift in the status and quality of American television, with *Twin Peaks* (1990–1), *The X-Files* (1993–2016), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) and later *The Sopranos* (1999–2007) transforming the uses, techniques and reception of the medium, but David Lynch in particular imbued television with remarkable three-dimensional space that has since made it one of the most influential television shows in the twentieth century and beyond. Indeed, what separates *Twin Peaks* from other television shows, as various critics note, is that it was seen as the first instance of cinematic television, with Lynch

² Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 273.

as a televisual auteur [...] *Twin Peaks* marked a crucial point between the mediums of film and television, allowing Lynch and other directors to have more artistic control as directors.³

As we can see from this extract, the crucial argument for destabilization of the standard format of TV series is approaching film aesthetics, labeled *cinematic television*. The cinematic use of filters, long takes, low-angle shots, expressive sound and music – these are some practices used by Lynch to extend and broaden the conventional format of TV series and brought “the three-dimensional space” in television.⁴ It could be explained by Lynch himself as a film director, but also as an auteur. That implies a great amount of autonomy in the process of making decisions which is very different from typical television productions where producers are decision makers. One more aspect of the standard TV series is genre classification. It almost completely disappeared in *Twin Peaks* in favor of mixing all kinds of genre components: drama, comedy, fantasy, detective film, melodrama, *film noir*, horror... Not least, the distinctiveness of *Twin Peaks* is its extension across multiple platforms and mediums: film, music, and books.⁵ Each of these extensions has their independent walks of life.⁶ “As a result, *Twin Peaks* became a complex phenomenon including many stories and media.”⁷ As a such, *Twin Peaks* marked the beginning of a new era in a production of TV series not necessarily related to previous ‘opposite’ categories like television and film, art and entertainment.

I.

The distinction between the ‘new’ (after 2000) and the ‘old’ (before 2000) TV series could be recognized on, at least, three levels: technological, productional and theoretical. These are, simultaneously, the major arguments that we are dealing with basically a new phenomenon, which does not have much in common with the standard TV format. First, the technological level has changed entirely: the digital environment has transformed 20th century television and film technologies into digital media. As we recall McLuhan arguments about television as a two-dimensional and a

³ Siobhan Lyons, “Between Two Worlds: *Twin Peaks* and the Film/Television Divide,” *Open Library of Humanities* 3, 1 (2017): 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Books: *The Secret Diary of Laura Palmer* (1990) by David Lynch’s daughter Jennifer Lynch, and *The Autobiography of Special Agent Dale Cooper* (1991) and *The Secret History of Twin Peaks* (2016) by brothers Scott and Mark Frost. Film: *Fire Walk with Me* (David Lynch, 1992).

⁶ One of the very interesting ‘extensions’ in that sense was the announcement of the second season of *Twin Peaks* (2017). This was not the standard announcement like a trailer or an interview, although it was an interview. But, not with actors. That was an interview with characters from the series who were interviewed by Lynch himself. So, it was something in between the series and reality – something closest to the conceptual artwork.

⁷ Andreas Halskov, *TV Peaks: Twin Peaks and Modern Television Drama* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2015), 14.

film as a three-dimensional medium, that difference is disappearing with digital technologies. Moreover, we are witnessing the shift from physical media to a high-definition streaming video platforms. The death of physical media and “streaming video has fundamentally altered the ways in which we watch, discuss and generally consume media.”⁸ They allowed watching online, on demand, on YouTube, on computers, tablets, iPads, iPhones and androids, platforms that are no longer related to television. Those platforms have nothing in common with television either. Now, there are media companies as Netflix, Amazon, HBO, Apple TV, and Hulu. Most of those companies were founded during the 1990s with distribution and hardware production as their basic facilities. However, recently they have expanded their activities toward production of media content, especially series and films. That trend has been present specifically after 2000. For instance, Netflix, which was founded in 1997, was primarily a company for renting and selling of DVDs, and in just two years it became successful Internet company. Until today, it is still one of the most successful businesses, a so-called *game changer*, because of experimenting with new technologies, innovative models of production, distribution and presentation of media content. With Netflix and other similar Internet companies, the transition to the production of high-quality media content has changed the existing centralized order dominated by Hollywood and its studios.

This process of decentralization of Hollywood could be recognized in many walks of life. First of all, a common notion of bipolar division – film industry on the one hand, and television on the other – still exists, but does not seem applicable when we talk about new TV series production. Previously, there were film directors and television directors, film actors and television actors, film stars and television stars and there were clear boundaries between those two areas. Now, these boundaries are rather fluid, which can be seen in many aspects. For example, one of them is the disappearance of existing categories: big Hollywood stars, on the one hand, and television actors who are as less popular, and paid less, on the other. Nowadays, it seems that a lot of unknown actors appear in a series and they are soon-to-be-stars. (for example, Elisabeth Moss /*Mad Men*, *Top of the Lake*, *The Handmaid’s Tale*/, Bryan Cranston /*Breaking Bad*/, Jon Hamm /*Mad Men*/, Rami Malek /*Mr. Robot*/, Claire Foy /*The Crown*/, James Gandolfini /*The Sopranos*/, etc.; they were completely unknown before their appearance in those TV series). Besides that, what is more interesting is that appearing in a new series production is, in some way, a matter of importance for big Hollywood stars, too.

The same applies to directors: there are plenty of examples of cinema’s most celebrated auteurs who have transferred from cinema to series: Spike Lee (*She’s Gotta Have It*, 2017), the Coen brothers (*The Ballad of Buster Scruggs*, 2018; they are also producers of the series *Fargo*, inspired by their film with the same title, 1996), David Fincher (first two episodes of *House of Cards*, 2013), Italian film-maker Paolo

⁸ Cory Barker and Myc Wiatrowski, ed., *The Age of Netflix: Critical Essays on Streaming Media, Digital Delivery and Instant Access* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2017), 21.

Sorrentino (*The Young Pope*, 2016), Steven Soderbergh (*The Knick*, 2015), Michael Haneke (*Kelvin's Book* – in preparation).⁹

The most interesting aspect nevertheless is the new production model in which those who are related to the creative process as actors, screenwriters or directors are, at the same time, producers or directors. So, an actor is no more just an actor, but a full-time participant of the project or even its initiator. For instance, Matthew McConaughey and Woody Harrelson (*True Detective*, 2014, first season), James Franco (*Deuce*, 2017), Robin Right (*House of Cards*, 2017) or Elisabeth Moss (*The Handmaid's Tale*, 2017) not only star, but are also producers and often directors of some episodes. In this way, all participants, whether they are actors, producers or directors, are more involved in the process of production. They are all auteurs in a sense, which means they have more freedom to make decisions and to improvise and experiment. These new production models are very close to filmmaking, which is another level of disturbing a strict distinction between films and series, arts and entertainment. This is quite the opposite of the standard Hollywood and television production models, too. Both are hierarchical, segmented, specialized and on top of that, there are producers who make the final decision depending on what they consider financially viable. Then, if we take all of this into consideration, is the 'TV' prefix still adequate, when we talk about new series production? Perhaps the only justification for the use of this prefix is our habit to watch these series not on 'big screens' traditionally related to film, but on small ones. But, those small screens are not necessarily TV screens. Arguably, so many changes have swept the industry in the past two decades that very few components of traditional television remain. Nowadays, talking about series does not include mentioning the terms such as television, broadcasting, primetime and pastime. Instead, we need to use utterly new terms, as algorithms, metadata, big data, monitoring, tracking and narrowcasting. What precisely has changed?

The key attributes of standard television broadcasting are liveness, simultaneity and immediacy, which "generate its reality effect".¹⁰ Real-time transmission is emitted from one point centralized in a television network. On the contrary, streaming video platforms connect media content with software Internet companies, plus hardware and software producers. These are nodes in a complex network. "One example of this is Apple's iTunes, the digital distribution platform that proved the importance of linking popular media to accessible, user-friendly computer software that operates across multiple devices."¹¹

⁹ Lanre Bakare, "Oscar-winning director Michael Haneke to make 10-part TV series," <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/jan/31/michael-haneke-kelvins-book-10-part-english-language-tv-series>, acc. April 27, 2018.

¹⁰ "Television, as a format designed for live, real-time transmission, is saturated with the live presence of the things it puts on display. It is as if it were a window that tunneled through to another place, opening directly onto the event shown. In this it is closer, both rhetorically and technically, to the present tense of theatre than to film [...]. Paradoxically, it was the intervention of video as a means of recording that produced 'the live' in live television, as liveness became an ideological as much as a technological limit condition." William Kaizen, "Live on Tape: Video, Liveness and the Immediate," *Art and the Moving Image: A Critical Reader* (2008), 263–4.

¹¹ Kevin McDonald and Daniel Smith-Rowsey, ed., *The Netflix Effect: Technology and Entertainment in the 21st Century* (Bloomsbury: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 3.

The next step was made by Netflix which incorporated software with the interface for content distribution: “This strategy typified the way in which many web-based businesses began to rely on user-generated information or metadata – details about how users interact within and between different websites.”¹² This enables tracking and monitoring of users (no longer just viewers) as well as access to a wide variety of information, so-called metadata or user-generated information about the movements, habits and behavior of users on the network. Huge amounts of data – so called big data – generated in this way, are beginning to be collected and processed (data mining) using algorithmic technologies that detect patterns in user behavior. Interfaces with recommendation systems (monitoring similar content) have introduced an interaction with each user in particular: they can track each user, collect information about their online behavior and even have an effect on it, thus becoming the main tools for tracking and modifying user behavior.¹³

What public opinion analysis was in the “television era” has now been transformed into a personalized control system and computer analysis involving research teams working on software collection, performance improvement and data analysis. What broadcasting was in the “television era”, now has an alternative – narrowcasting. Narrowcasting as a model of addressing profiled audiences (as opposed to broadcasting strategies directed to the broadest public) is not new or exclusively related to new technologies. However, new algorithm systems for big data analyses have become the “force of change”¹⁴. Narrowcasting technologies are considered to be the primary form of artificial intelligence. The user (formerly, the viewer) does not only use certain services from different online platforms, in order to fulfill its time of leisure or fun, but at the same time is used as metadata to generate information.¹⁵ What *primetime* was in the “television era” is now *anytime*. Temporal regularity, reflected in the most common one-week-per-episode rhythm is largely abandoned. Instead, an individual model of watching is introduced, such as “my time is prime time”. Availability has largely changed the way of watching the series and this may be best seen in the phenomenon

¹² Ibid.

¹³ “In 2006, Netflix announced a \$1 million prize for research teams who could successfully help them improve their rating algorithm. The goal was to use the large amounts of data collected from users to make better film and television suggestions for individual users. By 2012, researchers dedicated over 2,000 hours to combine 107 algorithms that would produce automated recommendations for users. Netflix branded this addition to the platform as a feature of personalization, control, and convenience, and remarked on its innovation in the online streaming world. Regarding Netflix’s ongoing push towards improving the automated system, scholars noted that while the improvements were innovative, the practice of making suggestions to viewers was already in place as a far-reaching trend known as ‘narrowcasting.’” Alison N. Novak, “Narrowcasting, Millennials and the Personalization of Genre in Digital Media,” in *The Age of Netflix: Critical Essays on Streaming Media, Digital Delivery and Instant Access*, ed. Cory Barker and Myc Wiatrowski (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2017), 989.

¹⁴ Ibid, 991.

¹⁵ “This algorithmic determinism – collecting data on the user’s movement and behavior – produces so-called ‘algorithmic identity’ that is not related to a particular person, but with a digital identity.” Sarah Arnold, “Netflix and the Myth of Choice/Participation/Autonomy,” in *The Netflix Effect: Technology and Entertainment in the 21st Century*, ed. Kevin McDonald and Daniel Smith-Rowsey (Bloomsbury: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 56.

labeled as binge-watching.¹⁶ By introducing a completely new strategy – publishing all episodes of one series at a time – the previous linear way of tracking series was disrupted. A previously conducted research has shown that television watching habits have declined. In a fact, Netflix’s strategy changed the technological framework of media functioning in relation to the standard TV format. Like it or not, binge watching has become the new ‘normal’. For modern online audiences, the notion of a return to the ‘weekly’ regime of TV watching would seem completely inconceivable.¹⁷ For all these reasons, it seems that very little of television is left, so to speak. Considering the above, it is inappropriate to insist upon a relation between TV and series. We are dealing with a completely new phenomenon, which has nothing in common with the standard TV format, except our habit to name it so.

II.

Apart from the differences in technological and production, drastic changes have also occurred in the content of series that could be theoretically elaborated. Mittel introduced the notion of *narrative complexity* to pinpoint that change.

Yet just as 1970s Hollywood is remembered far more for the innovative work of Altman, Scorsese, and Coppola than for the more commonplace (and often more popular) conventional disaster films, romances, and comedy films that filled theaters, I believe that American television of the past twenty years will be remembered as an era of narrative experimentation and innovation, challenging the norms of what the medium can do.¹⁸

The main feature of the narrative complexity is the departure from conventional forms of TV series adjusted to the broadest audience. Complexity defined as “using an innovative cluster of narration techniques”¹⁹ is in direct opposition to conventional narrative. That means switching focus from serial or master narratives (actions that

¹⁶ “Binge television: n. any instance in which more than three episodes of an hour long drama or six episodes of a half-hour comedy are consumed at one sitting.” Emil Steiner, “Binge-Watching in Practice: The Rituals, Motives and Feelings of Streaming Video Viewers,” in *The Age of Netflix: Critical Essays on Streaming Media, Digital Delivery and Instant Access*, ed. Cory Barker and Myc Wiatrowski (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland&Company, Inc., Publishers, 2017), 891.

¹⁷ A particularly interesting detail for binge-watching fans is the post-play option that Netflix has introduced at its service and which allows it to be automatically completed as soon as one other second episode begins after a very short ending stop so no interruption is observed. Djoyimi Baker, “Binge-Viewing as Epic-Viewing in the Netflix Era,” in *The Age of Netflix: Critical Essays on Streaming Media, Digital Delivery and Instant Access*, ed. Cory Barker and Myc Wiatrowski (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2017), 244.

¹⁸ Jason Mittel, “Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television,” *The Velvet Light Trap* 58, 1 (2006): 29.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 30.

connect all the episodes) to episodic narratives (so that each episode obtains distinctive features not necessarily related to the main narrative), combination of different genres and different narrative strategies. Mittel's primary thesis is based on linking the aesthetics of film with the format of TV series, because most of his arguments are based on the assumption of applying certain elements of film, whether formal or narrative, to series. My opinion is that the complexity of series is much wider than just the narrative. The narrative puts the story told by words in the foreground. The story could be told by images, too, but the dominant understanding of narrative is related to verbalization. This can be perceived when the narrative itself is analyzed as it is in *Narration in the Fiction Film* by Bordwell.²⁰

In it, Bordwell introduced three principles of classical film narrative. First, the role of classical narrative is transmitting information of the fabula. Characters are, in that context, the main transmitters of information. The second principle is that classical narrative is coherence, which consists of consistency in time and place for the story action enabling a linear timeline of events that are easy to follow and understand. Sometimes, there are deviations from linear construction, for the purpose of "seducing" viewers and raising their attention. However, it cannot disturb the main flow of events and fabula. The use of style conventions intuitively recognized by the viewer – from framing to sound mixing, composition and lighting – are the third principle of classical narrative. The main component of film as a visual medium is moving images. But, it seems that in some way in a film medium, and that is most obvious in a classical film narrative, the main component of the story is verbal one. For that reason, everything related to visuals, and that is called the style or stylistic dimension of film, is reduced in order to advance the storyline – information related to fabula. In that case, it is not strange that the common denominator for all these three principles is the verbal component.

The starting point for Bordwell's extensive analysis are two conceptions of narrative inherited from the ancient times: mimetic narrative and diegetic narrative. "Diegetic theories conceive of narration as consisting either oral or written... Mimetic theories conceive of narration as the presentation of a spectacle: a showing."²¹ Diegetic theories are based on the assumption that narration is fundamentally a linguistic activity, "pure narrative" in contrast to "imitative narrative". For Plato, both pure and imitative narrative "presuppose the priority of the poet's voice" meaning the dominance of a linguistic component. Although in mimetic theories the act of watching and visualizing itself is in the foreground, it is mostly reduced to the scenography. In that way, they are mostly applied to the theatre and the theater is inseparable from literature. Literature, oral or written, is the main feature of diegetic theories, so the verbal moment is of crucial importance, too.

Film theory is basically much closer to the diegetic approach. The reason for that is structuralism, which was the dominant theoretical paradigm during the

²⁰ David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press 1985).

²¹ *Ibid*, 3.

constitutive period for a film theory. Even before structuralism, the Russian Formalists were the first to exploit the analogies between language and film in a detailed way.²² With structuralism, complete equalization between language and film as a system is achieved. Roland Barthes declares that every narration depends upon linguistic codes.²³ Even in mimetic art such as visual arts, it has begun to be seen as analogous to verbal language systems. The main components of that system are fabula, syuzhet and style. Fabula is “a pattern which perceivers of narratives create through assumptions and interferences”²⁴ in order to establish a connection between the various events and link them to a logical and chronological action. It is never materially present on the screen. Syuzhet, on the other hand is “the actual arrangement and presentation of the fabula in the film [...] it names the architectonics of the film’s presentation of the fibula [...] syuzhet patterning is independent of the medium; the same syuzhet patterns could be embodied in a novel, a play or a film.”²⁵ Style “simply names the film’s systematic use of cinematic devices. Style is thus wholly ingredient to the medium.”²⁶ It accompanies a story, so it is usually neutral and consisting of schemes and templates. It could also deviate from the story, not to be related to the main narrative, but that is an excess – another possible component of narrative. We could assume that a key feature of new series production is, in fact, excess that is not any more excess, but a completely new level of story told by images.

In addition to a narrative complexity, notions of visual complexity should be also introduced. By visual complexity it is presumed, not just style, but the expression of a certain concept, opinion, and ideas by visual means. It is not necessarily in the function of narrative and could even function completely out of narrative. That experience goes from visual art, above all video art. The most striking example in which could be recognized the direct experience of video art is *Breaking Bad’s* episode titled “Fly” (season three, episode ten, 2010). This episode is not only a complete break from main narrative, but a complete break from narrative at all. The episode is almost completely without dialogue, and the main “story” concerns the flight of a fly. It is very close to video art, and that is not excess, but is implicitly present in almost every episode. Another example is the second season of *Fargo*, which also relies heavily on the experience of visual arts: split screens, parallel images and simultaneous actions imply spacious and fragmented experience of video installations. One more striking example connected to visual arts is *Utopia* (2013–2014): it could be easily noticed that almost every frame functions as staged photography, which implies conceptual art and conceptual photography. That is stressed by nuance of green (whether it is an object, clothing, light or background) which is an integral part of literally every frame.

²² “Yuri Tynianov likened the shot to a line of verse and sought the cinematic equivalents of epithets, similes, metaphors and other poetic devices.” Ibid, 17.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid, 49.

²⁵ Ibid, 50.

²⁶ Ibid.

III.

Besides technological complexity, mentioned and analyzed previously in this paper as technological innovations, and visual complexity defined as an impact of visual arts on series, the term analytical complexity could also be introduced. Unlike the standard TV format of series, based on conventional formal schemes and conventional screening time (two hours), new complexities – narrative, visual – introduce open space for analytical approach. Many authors have noticed that watching series is very similar to reading a novel due to the ability to develop parallel narrative flows, and to deepen the psychological profiles of the main characters. Every supporting role has a chance to develop as a main role, as actually happens in *Better Call Saul* (2015–18), in relation to *Breaking Bad* (2008–13). It seems that analytical complexity is not accidental, but grounded on new technological and production frames which include research teams for collecting and analyzing data (data mining), programming teams for software, design teams for visualization, plus engagement of professional viewers for analyzing habits and behavior of users online.²⁷ All these facts imply that an analytical approach is present in many different levels and is compatible with digital environments. In that sense, it is not strange that this analytical complexity is present in content, too.

One of the first ‘analytical’ series is *The Wire* (2002–08). This series differs from a number of similar crime dramas. It is often compared to the novel in the way it is conceived: each season deals with a certain phenomenon, namely a particular institution (police, maritime trading systems, bureaucracy and education) and their connection to degenerative phenomena in society such as illegal trade, drugs and corruption. The case study is the city of Baltimore, Maryland. The series provides perhaps the most accurate insight into the phenomenon of the Afro-American subculture in USA in one of its extreme manifestations. One of the theses of the series is the paradox in its functioning. It is a part of a broad network of interest-linked individuals, groups, institutions and politics. But, at the same time, it is constituted as almost a completely separate ‘reality’ inside the city, in this case Baltimore, with its own rules and way of living.

In a similar way, in the *True Detective* (season one, 2014), the investigation of an extremely gruesome murder is in fact a cause for social analysis of the American province in the period following the collapse of the ‘American Dream’ marked by the pauperization and disintegration of the system of politics and values in pre-Trump America. One of the most direct analyses of the ‘insanity’ of neoliberal capitalism, packed in a recognizable, conservative American ideological pattern of the ‘happy family’ is found in *Ozark* (2017). Profit, as the only unquenchable value of modern man, here is fully matched with care and sacrifice for the family. So, whatever the

²⁷ Clarisse Loughrey, “Netflix is hiring professional binge-watchers to rate their shows,” *Independent*, https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/netflix-binge-watcher-job-opening-career-rate-original-tv-and-film-series-watch-a8283626.html?utm_campaign=Echobox&utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Facebook, acc. April 29, 2018.

main hero is doing – and he is constantly in money laundering and other financial malversation – is, in fact, to protect his family.

In the *Deuce* (2017), the beginning of commercially produced pornography and an explosion in investment in pornography, which changes the way of production, distribution and perception of pornography, is portrayed through a case study of street prostitutes in a Bronx neighborhood in the mid-1960s. The Fordist model of production, the dominant feature of high capitalism, was analyzed on the example of local street prostitutes and their pimps soon to be replaced by entertainment industry under the umbrella of state institutions. The famous Marshall McLuhan quote, “the medium is the message”, here is analyzed through the separation of sexual experience and the body. In this case, photography or film becomes the medium of sexual experiences independent of the body. This series maps the beginning of *screen culture*,²⁸ too: a prevalence of images over text and dominance of screen images.

The Knick (2015) describes the emergence of a modern western society throughout the multiple phenomena constituent to it, such as the emergence of modern medicine, hospitals, early capitalism, nazism, bureaucracy, eugenics, psychoanalysis, and narcotics to name just a few. *The Knick* series is a result of very systematic research of the early modern period, which represent the transition from the 19th to 20th century and allows the connection of seemingly unrelated phenomena. In addition, *The Black Mirror* (2011–17) is the most elaborated analysis of the effects of digital culture on our daily life. It envisions disastrous consequences of familiar technologies in some kind of dystopian science fiction. This kind of systematic analysis of changes induced by digital technologies is still without its theoretical background.²⁹ Perhaps we could say that this kind of series includes theoretical thinking or demonstrates its own theoretical framing. David Cronenberg compared a Netflix series to a novel and spoke of it as a new art form. For him, “cinema is already dead... However, filmmaking is not dead. Image-making is not dead.”³⁰ One of its manifestations is definitely new series production.

²⁸ Jovan Čekić, *Izmeštanje horizonta* (Beograd: Fakultet za medije i komunikacije, 2015).

²⁹ Pattie Maes, the founder and director of influential Fluid Interfaces research group in the MIT Media Lab gives her new grad students an unusual assignment: watch every episode of the show *Black Mirror*. “I just think that as designers of computer technologies that will get into the hands of 2.5 billion people, that anyone who was involved in designing new services and new interfaces should really think carefully about what impact the technologies they develop will have on society and on people’s lives”, she said. “*Black Mirror* is of course a very negative version of how things can go wrong, but I think it’s useful for all of the students and anyone involved in the development of new digital services and systems to look at that and keep that in mind as something to avoid.” Jon Christian, “MIT Students are being scared straight with episodes of ‘Black Mirror’,” *The Outline*, January 31, 2018, <https://theoutline.com/post/3167/black-mirror-mit-class?zd=2&z=gu2ixbew>, acc. February 27, 2018.

³⁰ Geoffrey Macnab, “‘Cinema is already dead’, says David Cronenberg,” *Screendaily* (2018), https://www.screendaily.com/news/cinema-is-already-dead-says-david-cronenberg-/5130906.article#.W09YYglqk_I.face-book, acc. July 17, 2018.

Conclusion

Although the term TV series is still used in many different contexts, from magazines and popular blogs to theoretical essays, in most of the cases in fact, its use is not really applicable. Bearing in mind changes that have occurred, it could be concluded that the standard TV format is, basically, derelict. These changes are related to different realms: technology, production and in its content. We are witnessing the process of developing an innovative, experimental and hybrid form, especially after 2000. Key terms for the understanding of this new hybrid form are algorithm, metadata, big data, monitoring, tracking and narrowcasting. These terms refer to digital culture, digital surroundings and involvement of digital technologies in almost every aspect of our everyday life: from the way we read, learn, behave to the way we consume different media content.

As already recognized, this novelty is related to the blurring of the boundaries between film and television. But, the production of series after 2000 is innovative, experimental and hybrid because it incorporates film and television techniques, but also contemporary visual arts experience as well an analytical approach typical of scientific research. Therefore, besides narrative complexity, a notion introduced by Mittel, we should take into consideration visual complexity and analytical complexity of the new series as well.

It could be also assumed that we are dealing with completely new phenomenon recently recognized as the “networked image”. The main characteristic of the networked mode of functioning is a departure from inherited, settled and fixed systems, structures, and matrices towards complex, interwoven and fluid networking of different realms including mass media, new technology, art, entertainment, research, and theory, to name a few. Only if we approach the phenomenon as a part of a network there is a chance to understand it and analyze it. That space for the critical reflection is opened with a new model of series production.

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Article received: March 29, 2018

Article accepted: May 10, 2018

Original scholarly paper