

CINEMATIC TV SERIES

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A Thesis  
presented to  
the Faculty of Humanities  
at Notre Dame University-  
Louaize

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In Partial  
Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the  
Degree  
Master of Arts in *Television Mgt  
& Production*

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by

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JUNE 2019

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## CINEMATIC TV SERIES

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**Abstract**

While some film theorists are talking about a presumed death of cinema, others discuss a second golden age for TV. The current study proposes an argument that contemporary television series (as a product of post-modernism) are benefiting from cinema's previous achievements in order to upgrade their quality. To illustrate this idea, selected scenes and episodes from some narrative quality TV series are textually analyzed and compared to film theories of the three main film traditions in cinema's history (classical, modern, and post-modern). The genres of these shows follow the formulaic distinctions of the film genres and hold a function of echoing dominant myths. The narrative complexity of such shows is complemented with non-linear narrative, and a narration that patterns the events in an out of chronological order manner and represents the subjectivities of the characters. These series have a visual style (mise-en-scène, cinematography, and editing) that is found to be communication intellectually in addition to prevailing story information. Therefore, an expressive artistic quality can be attributed to the cinematic TV series through providing a fantasmatic representation of reality. By that quality TV series, as a genre of TV, would be providing an escape from reality in a more economic friendly, time flexible, and comfortable way.

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction -1 .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Significance of the Study -2.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Literature Review -3 .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>3.1 Quality TV Series.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>3.2 The Death of Cinema .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>3.3 Art in Film .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Methodology -4.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Content 5.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>5.1 Genre in Film.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>5.2 Genre in TV .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>5.3 Narrative in Film.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>5.4 Narrative in TV .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>5.5 Cinema Narrative in TV.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Structure -6.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>6.1 Narration in Film .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>6.2 Narration in TV.....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Style -7.....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>7.1 Mise-en-scène in Film .....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>7.2 Mise-en-scène in TV.....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>7.3 Cinematography in Film .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>7.4 Cinematography in TV.....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>7.5 Editing in Film .....</b>	<b>71</b>

<b>7.6 Editing in TV .....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Conclusion 8 .....</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>8.1 Cinematic TV Series .....</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>8.2 Reality and Cinematic Representation .....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>89</b>

## 1- Introduction

In an era that is described as the "television's second golden age" (Thompson, 2007, p. 18) TV stations (e.g., HBO, FX) and online streaming platforms (e.g., Netflix, Hulu) are competing to produce TV series with intriguing plots, sophisticated filming techniques, and high production values (Dominick, 2013). In addition to the economic success of these products, some TV series combined rich plots with stylized storytelling, acquiring both critical acknowledgment and vast viewership (Garcia, 2016). This led to the creation of what one might designate as cinematic TV series, or quality TV that has a cinematic look. As established film directors, producers and actors are venturing in TV series, one might say that the line between cinema and TV is blurring, but what differentiates those two mediums in the artistic sense?

Technology made it possible for the audience to choose among several platforms to watch films. An individual can now choose to watch a movie in the traditional way by going to a movie theater, buying a ticket and watching the film on the giant screen in the dark, or a choice can be made to watch the film on a TV set at home with available options of considerably big 4K high definition screen and 5.1 surround system. Of course, the movie going rewards a different experience, but it would be rather easier, cheaper, time efficient, more flexible, and more accessible to watch a film on a DVD, VOD (Video on demand), online streaming, or even a broadcasted film. It can be observed that the film industry is going to the extent of producing films exclusively for the online streaming platforms where, certain quality films produced by Netflix are not screened in movie theaters. In such cases, what would be the difference between watching a film or an episode of a quality series on Netflix? And why wouldn't both productions be considered cinematic? Such questions may bring up the thought that TV, and online TV, is taking over the traditional conceptualization of cinema, and may also introduce the idea of the decline of cinema and the rebirth of TV.

## 2- Significance of the Study

The assumption that TV series are becoming cinematic opens a discussion about art in TV similar to the numerous theories and arguments about the art of film. Although, there are numerous research and articles in television studies about the television, but TV shows are often studied based on their ideological, social and cultural effects rather than their “artistic achievements” (Cardwell, 2006, p.75). Thompson and Mittell (2013) seem to agree about this, where in the introduction of their book “*How To Watch Television*” the authors explained that because of the lack of academic comprehensive critical analysis on TV series, they decided to edit a book that answers this lack in the field of TV studies. Although there exists some books and academic articles that critically analyze individual TV series, but their researchers “usually [write them] to condemn it (TV) (Thompson & Mittell, 2013, p.7).” A possible explanation for the concentration of TV scholars on understanding the “industrial, regulatory, and perception contexts” (p.3) of TV rather than critically analyzing its content is that TV studies had entered the academic field in the 1980’s and 1990’s under the approach of the Anglo-American cultural studies, which itself “emphasizes context over texts ” (Thompson & Mittell, 2013,p.3). Most of the scholars and critics that are noting the deficiency in studies about the aesthetics of television and its artistic qualifications, little research has been done on the relation between the art of cinema and TV series in the sense that the audio/visual art can be present in TV productions as well as cinema productions. Hence the significance of the current study since little research is done on the aesthetics of TV series in comparison to cinema. This type of research (critically and comprehensively analyzing quality television series) would be needed in order to keep track of the advancements taking place in television productions especially at a time that such TV content is being produced at a frequent pace and with large quantities amongst technological improvements that are allowing new cinematography and graphic techniques to be explored. Pointing out and understanding the aesthetic achievements in



television series (concerning its content, structure, and style) would initiate a discourse to acknowledge the presence of an artistic value in quality TV series; one that is highly comparable and competitive to cinema. By examining popular TV series of high quality such as *Game of Thrones*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *West World*...etc. (just to name a few) it might become evident that these series integrate cinematic elements into their serialized narrative format. Therefore, an argument can be made that contemporary TV series are differentiated from the conventional soap operas and sitcoms and that they lean towards the art of film. By elevating its quality, TV would be considered to gain legitimacy as an expressive medium among the more tasteful audience and film critics who previously considered cinema as the only worthy visual medium of storytelling. By that, TV would have ceased an opportunity especially after new technologies opened the door for more innovative techniques and widely accessible platforms. If such relation between film and quality TV series can be established, then this would give insight on the type of TV spectators, where watching such quality TV content would be similar to the cognitive and intellectual watching of cinema (such as art films). This connection would also change the perspective of criticizing TV series and might stand as an invitation to study quality TV using film theory. The artistic association between the two mediums would direct the attention to TV as a medium for the creation of new forms and styles for fictional narrative content (films and series).

### **3- Literature Review**

#### **3.1 Quality TV Series**

Regarding TV, the medium has long been considered by its “communicative, not artistic, functions” (Cardwell, 2006, p.76), in the sense that its primary function is to deliver information rather than communicating intellectually or artistically. With the rise of quality TV, a term that began to be used since the early 90s (Fricker, 2004), critics started to

acknowledge an artistic function of TV. Cardwell (2007) defined some features that characterize American quality TV series such as the theme, visual style, editing, acting, and target audience. Concerning the theme and tone, quality American TV series tend to have a “high production value” and to tackle more serious themes that reflect on contemporary issues (Cardwell, 2007, p.26). Each show uses filming and editing techniques and music to create a unique style. They use “serious themes and include details that may be read “symbolically, reflexively or obliquely” (p. 26) to comment on life or social issues. These shows are created with “complex narrative structures” (p. 26) and are executed with a “developed creative vision” (p. 27) proposing that the viewer should designate more concentration on the show, or have a “higher level of engagement” (p.27) in order to interpret and understand its meaning and grasp its narrative (Cardwell, 2007). TV stations tend to produce shows with higher sophistication and pay more attention to visual and narrative details in order to achieve maximum “re-watchability” (Mittell, 2006, p.31).

Concerning aesthetics, Cardwell (2007) pointed out that the use of “fragmentation in the form of abstraction” (p.28) is an important factor to consider when studying the so-called quality TV series. Fragmentation and de-familiarization give a queue to the viewer that the scene has a staged quality and needs to be interpreted to find a symbolic significance rather than passively watching it (Cardwell, 2007). In some instances, the opening credits of a TV series could hint on a “structural reliance on cinema” (Feuer, 2007, p.150) and thus serve as a queue to the viewers and an invitation to shift the mood of watching into a critical and cognitive one. These queues do not only tell the viewer how much attention he or she should be giving the show in order to understand it, but also they give the impression that the scenes may be holding a meaning beyond the superficial and apparent one and consequently would be inviting the viewer to dive deeper in the comprehension of the scene. For example, in the first episode of the second season of *Six Feet Under* (Ball, et al., 2002), a fantasy of Nate (played by Peter

Krause) depicts a scene of two characters (named Life and Death) playing chess game and then start to engage in sex (Feuer, 2007). This scene obviously has deeper layers of meanings on a conceptual and ideological level where interpretations can be made about the duality of life and death, and on a dramatic level where the scene can also stand as a foreshadowing for the character's death especially when Death shook his hand and invited him to the table.

In an attempt to define the quality in TV series, concerning aesthetics, form, and content, Feuer (2007) used HBO's slogan "It's not TV, its HBO" to state that quality TV series, in their essence, differentiate themselves from the rest of television programs by claiming that they are closer to art cinema than to television. By textually analyzing two quality series *The West Wing* (Wells, Schlamme, & Sorkin, 1999) and *Six Feet Under* (Ball, et al., 2001) the author came up with distinctions of contemporary quality TV series; these shows are similar to soap operas in terms of narrative, but not in terms of melodramatic style, meaning that they include interwoven plot threads and large ensemble cast, but "identify stylistically with non-television genre of European art cinema (p.150)" (Feuer, 2007).

The evolution of the aesthetics in TV series and the introduction of new ways to consume its shows can be read as an answer for an increased demand among the audience for such material and as a competitive strategy from television stations to keep trying to lure cinema's audience to their smaller screens. An estimation of the number of scripted original series in the US was done by FX Networks Research and showed that this number increased steadily from nearly 200 scripted original series in 2009 to about 500 in 2016 (Rodriguez, 2018). A possible explanation for the abundance of TV series would be that people are preferring TV as a source of entertainment over cinema after the rise of the cinema admission prices (Boggs & Petrie, 2008). Within this fierce competition, subscribers to cable TV or to online streaming platforms would most probably expect to get access to material that is worth the monthly subscription and that differentiates the shows that they are paying for from those

available on free network TV (Feuer, 2007). High quality TV series are tailored for a target audience that can be described as “upscale educated viewers” (Mittell, 2006, p.31). Sophisticated and cinematic TV shows make the TV “more worthy for monthly subscribers” by adding to the prestige of the TV station’s brand, and setting it apart from the negative perception of traditional TV (Mittell, 2006, p.31).

### **3.2 The Death of Cinema**

The death of cinema is not a new concept and contemporary TV series are not to be blamed for this assumed death. Throughout its history, cinema has faced technological advancements, such as the introduction of sound and then the wide screen formats, all of which had changed the way films were produced and distributed, but the notion of the hypothetical death of cinema that concerns the current study is the impact of television on films, or the “post-television apocalypse scenario” (Witt, 1999, p. 336). The effect of television as a medium on cinema has long been discussed where the invention of TV can be considered as a starting point for the death of cinema (Gaudreault & Marion, 2015). The death of cinema does not mean the vanishing of cinema as a medium where films cease to exist and cinema theaters close their doors. It would rather refer to a shift in the “dominant narrative medium” where cinema loses its hegemony in being the main source of audio/visual storytelling to TV (Gaudreault & Marion, 2015, p.13). On a different note, the French film theorist and director Jean Luc Godard relates the popularity of television with a decrease in the quality of films produced, thus a contribution to the death of cinema (Witt, 1999). For Godard, television is compared to “contagious cultural rein” (Witt, 1999, p.338) where “cinema has been occupied by television both economically and aesthetically” (p.339). In this perspective, not only the television affected the audience, but also decreased the enthusiasm of people who work in the film industry and had an impact on the creativity of filmmakers (Witt, 1999). But, as the quality of television (mainly narrative TV series) had developed, and is arguably continuing to develop,

one might be able to think of this phenomenon as if television is being occupied by cinema (in a positive sense) where artistic value of film is being contagious to TV series. Though, this idea may be problematic since film critics (e.g. Bellour (2013), Aumont (2012), and Self (2010)) tend to be defensive about cinema and refuse to transcend its artistic legacy to TV. Gaudreault and Marion (2015) proposed that the big screen is essential for the existence of cinema, and that only the films that are watched in a movie theater projection, in the dark, without the ability to interrupt or modify the experience can be regarded as cinema, and whatever is shown on other screens is merely a “vortex of moving images” (Gaudreault & Marion, 2015, p.14).

The improvement of TV’s content should not mean that one medium would replace the other, an optimistic point of view would consider that cinema “is more alive than ever” through the nourishment of TV because of the presence of the same type of moving images yet on a different platform (e.g., television) where the viewer has greater flexibility as to the preferred time and place to engage in viewing a film (Gaudreault & Marion, 2015). The point that concerns the current study is that content and style that would be considered cinematic can be observed to be finding a place in TV. Traditional TV programming contained mainly soap operas and sitcoms, which characterized the medium (Bignell, 2007). But during the 1980s and 1990s, the style and content of these programs went through a considerable change where TV series started to “stand in opposition of the mass-audience popular forms” (Bignell, 2007, p.162), this led to rise of “cultural niche programs” (p.169) and the development of the visual aesthetics of these series (Bignell, 2007).

### **3.3 Art in Film**

In the endeavor to outline the filmic characteristics of TV, it would be helpful to first discuss the so called art film; if film as art can be defined clearly then this definition would

stand as a foundation to define art TV by comparing the "art" in these two mediums. In general, the term "art" can be defined "as an imitation or representation (Plato, 1955), (and) as a medium for the transmission of feelings (Tolstoy, 1995)" (Davies, 2013. P.2). Regarding art in audio/visual mediums specifically in film, Prinz (2007) discussed this subject in a talk at the Pacific APA, where he suggested that almost all films can be considered as art, but a distinction can be made such as "high-art/low-art." Art films are usually intellectually challenging rather than emotionally entertaining, and they have some defining features such as ambiguity, realism, a distinctive directorial style, and characters lacking clear goals (Prinz, 2007). The speaker added that in order to consider a film (or any other form of art) aesthetic, the spectator should look for "beauty, originality, solutions to artistic problems, use of metaphors, sensitivity to emotions, highly graphic cinematography, violation of narrative conventions, etc." (Prinz, 2007).

In "*Aesthetics and Film*", Thomson-Jones (2008) laid out different arguments that aimed to defend film as a medium for art; these arguments would serve the current study and help in identifying the components of film style. Cinema's main and distinctive function in capturing what's in front the camera turns out to be the grounds of film-as-art arguments. Rudolf Arnheim, the German author and film theorist, worked under the assumption that art should be expressive (Thomson-Jones, 2008, p.8), meaning that the input or the subjectivity of the artist ought to be present in the work rather than being a mere copy of reality. In this sense, expression is achieved when a film fails to accurately record the action (Thomson-Jones, 2008, p.8). For example, watching an event on screen is governed by technical limitations and artistic decisions that prevent the images on the film to be accurate. That is because the depth of the camera lens is different from that of the human eye, the size and shapes of the objects are optically manipulated, and the range of vision is defined by the frame and camera movement (Thomson-Jones, 2008, p.9). Exploiting these "discrepancies" in film is what makes the

medium artistic and what gives meaning to the images (Thomson-Jones, 2008, p.10). To further illustrate this idea, consider a close-up low-angle shot of a character, the resulting image will be distorted by having the character's head seem small with respect to the body and the character would seem to be towering above the viewer, but this distortion is considered to be communicating forcefulness what yields the shot to be expressive (Thomson-Jones, 2008, p.10). But by just accounting "to the limitations of film to achieve expressiveness is to miss another capacity of film as a representational art" (Thomson-Jones, 2008, p.12). Bazin, who seems to be an advocate for the argument that realism is the core of film art described realism in film by recording what is helping in front the camera through the use of filmic techniques that include medium-long shots, long takes, and deep focus imagery (Thomson-Jones, 2008, pp.18-19). No matter how theorists defend the art aspect in film, and whether they gave it an expressive or a presentational aesthetic value, they seem to be mostly considering how the meaning of films is created in relation to how the objects, characters, and events are presented on screen.

#### **4- Methodology**

To back up the argument that film as art is finding a home in contemporary TV series, a comparison between cinematic techniques and the TV series made. To be able to condense 120 years of cinema history and to get an overview of film theory and cinematic techniques, the current study proposes to follow dominant film trends and major changes in its approach of representation through out three major shifts in film history, that is the classical, modern and post-modern era.

A qualitative methodology is adapted for this research to investigate a number of series through textual analysis. This type of methodology is used because the purpose of this study is to point out cinematic elements (e.g. genre, content, plot, visual style) in TV series and to open

a discourse about an artistic value in this type of TV content, where the research does not claim to generalize its findings on all quality TV series, nor it assumes to conclude with an affirmative statement about the cinematicity of all television series.

Textual analysis allows the researcher to study the series concerning their content and the way they are conveying dramatic and conceptual messages. In order to answer the main subject that is guiding the current study (the presence of an expressive art form in TV series as compared to film), the studied texts (selected films and TV series) are analyzed considering their content, form, and structure, and then TV series are compared to cinema according to the respective topic in discussion.

The study is divided into three main chapters: content, structure, and style. Every section starts by identifying film theory and cinema's previous artistic achievements that relate to the theme of the chapter. In discussing film, secondary recourses are used to illustrate certain points through examples from film analysis executed by film critics. After this overview, certain TV series are selected for the reason that they entail some of the elements that are mentioned in the discussion on film. The selection of TV series that are studied in the current research is based on the shows that researcher had watched prior to the study, and on recommendations from online articles about the subject. The examples used in this study focus mainly on American TV series, that is because America is considered the main supplier of entertainment content and most of television formats generates from the country (Bednarek, 2010). By studying the look, structure and content of some prestigious TV drama series, this study uses film theory, aesthetics and narratology in order to reveal the filmic aspects of the now most watched and enjoyed entertainment product. The main TV series that this study uses for the analysis are *Breaking Bad* (Gilligan & Johnson, 2008) as a gangster genre, *Westworld* (Nolan, et al., 2016) as a western genre, *Game of Thrones* (Benioff, Weiss, Doelger, & Caulfield, 2011) for its complex narrative, narration and use of long shots, *The Affair* Treem, )



(et al., 2014 as an example of non-linear narrative, *American Gods* (Cegielski, et al., 2017) for its complex narration, and *The Haunting of Hill House* (Averill, Falvey, Flanagan, & Frank, 2018) as an illustration for mise-en-scène. Moreover, *Mr. Robot* (Esmail, Golin, & Hamilton, 2015), *The Handmaid's Tale* (Miller, et al., 2017), and *Daredevil* (Chory, et al., 2015) are used as examples for cinematograph in TV series, and finally, *The Young Pope* (Amoroso, et al., 2016) is used as an illustration for editing techniques and for a semiotic analysis. This selection is believed to include TV series from various genres, various American TV cable channels and streaming platforms, and shows of varying degrees of popularity and artistic values. This list excludes series on network TV channels (except for *Scandal* (Rhimes, Beers, & Wilding, 2012) which is mentioned briefly in the mise-en-scène subsection of the seventh chapter), that is because, and to the knowledge of the researcher, quality TV series are more abundant on platforms that require a subscriptions fee due to the type of the target audience of these platforms. Despite that, it is out of the scope of the current study to make a distinction between the series produced on cable, network, or online television stations. After the selection is made, episodes of the chosen show were re-watched in order to analyze them, use them as examples to compare their content, form, and style with that of cinema's. The chapters conclude with an assessment of the relation of cinematic elements and the discussed series.

The current study will recognize the narrative TV series that are produced prior to the 90s and those that can be easily categorized as traditional sitcoms and soap operas, as conventional TV. Whereas the more recent, and more aesthetically ambitious fictional narrative shows will be referred to as contemporary TV series. And since the paper will be discussing contemporary TV, one can not but take into consideration the different technologies and platforms that the series are being distributed or watched on nowadays, whether on the screens of tablets, laptops, or TVs, and whether they are being streamed online or broadcasted. For that, Thompson's and Mittell's (2013) conceptualization of television will be adapted in

this study where, as the authors stated, television is considered as “remote seeing and hearing of images and sounds from a distant time and place” (p.5) and not as the physical piece of furniture, and through this conceptualization many of the new media interactions will be considered as a type of TV (Thompson & Mittell, 2013).

It could be that the first thought that would come to mind when considering a TV series as cinematic is the fancy cinematography, big battle scenes, sophisticated visual effects, big cast members, and expensive looking sets... these aspects, among others, may help in achieving a cinematic look for a TV series, but in this paper the core of filmic style (e.g., how its filmed) and story-telling (e.g., narration) as well as content are considered main criteria to categorize a TV series as cinematic.

## **5 Content**

Concerning the content of the considered TV series, cinema’s influence can be evident through borrowing film genres into quality TV series. As every genre differs from the other through its generic distinctions, the narrative of these shows, that belong to different genres, would be changed and improved along the way, impacting the character development, plots, and themes accordingly. The development of the narrative of cinema will be traced throughout the classical, modern, and post-modern eras and then compared with the narrative of television series. Likewise the genres in film, their functions and properties in cinema will be explored, and then it will be proposed that the generic functions may be valid for contemporary TV series as well.

### **5.1 Genre in Film**

A genre film is a type of film that presents familiar characters, acting out a predictable story pattern, within a specific setting and space, and ending with a predictable resolution

(Schatz, 1981). Although genres are used in cinema to organize movies according to their types, it can also refer to the expectations and hypothesis of the spectator (Hayward, 2000). For example, viewers would expect to see war and fight scenes in war or action films, and they would predict that the lovers in a romantic movie would end up together in the end. There are various elements to look at in a film in order to distinguish its genre. For example, a gangster film is identified by its theme that usually centers around crime, whereas musicals are detected through the way they are presented (music, singing and dancing), and other genres, such as the detective films, are defined by their plot pattern of investigating crime and ending up in solving the mysteries (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008). However, a general definition indicates that the genre is a broad concept that film theorists did not reach a unified and solid distinction of; in other words, there is no agreed upon list that indicates a fixed number of generic characteristics of a specific genre (Chandler, 2007). With the early history of film, genre studies were condemned and associated with commercial and low art films since it was merely regarded as a restrictive formula to replicate financially successful films (Berry-Flint, 1999). Up until film theorists, including Andre Bazin, Andrew Sarris, and Lawrence Alloway, and “under the influence of the Cahiers du cinema (p.26)”, started to consider these formulaic distinctions as “significant aspects of cultural self awareness” that genre films started to be considered as “high-art” films that acquire an aesthetic value and worth of critical analysis (Berry-Flint, 1999, p.30).

Altman (1999) adapted from John Cawelti (1986, p.200) and Jane Feuer (1993) their analogy that genres follow a life cycle similar to human life starting with birth, then maturity and ending with death. According to this analogy, a genre film first starts at the stage of exploration and experimentation where its specific characteristics are identified over time, then the genre enters the stage of maturity where it becomes “self conscious”, here reflexivity can be identified as an aspect of modernism. When the generic patterns become well known and

predictable, and the films in its category become repetitive, then the genre is said to be dead (Altman, 1999).

The western film can be used as an illustration of the development of the genre from the classical age, with films such as *Stagecoach* (Wanger, 1939) and *My Darling Clementine* (Engel, 1946), to the modern era, *Little Big Man* (Lasko & Millar, 1970), until the post-modern age that presented westerns such as *No Country for Old Men* (Coen & Coen, 2007).

Bazin (1971) considered that the perfection and maturity of the western genre is represented by John Ford's *Stagecoach*. This film portrays the expedition of a group of characters on a stagecoach across the frontier. The genre maturity of *Stagecoach* is embodied by Ford's concentration on the characters of the film, as Bazin (1971) noted that the characters who were viewed as respectable turned out to be cowards and frauds and vice versa. For example, "the prostitute can be more respectable than the narrow-minded people who drove her out of town" (Bazin, 1971, p.146). As Martynuska (2009) interpreted and cited from other film scholars, *Stagecoach* entails the values of the American nation and their history pre-World War II, where it resonated a problematic of racial representation, and the "fear of the other." Analyzing the film symbolically, the Native Americans symbolize the enemy or "the other," and the group of people from various social backgrounds represent the American society (Martynuska, 2009). Ford's *My Darling Clementine* contributed, as well, in sustaining the myth of the dominant ideology as it focused on the necessity of establishing order.

The western genre had to re-invent itself and introduce new elements in order to survive, thus in the second generation of the Westerns, the genre had to be more self conscious and thematically diverse (Bazin, 1971). For the sake of illustration, consider *Little Big Man* (Millar & Lasko, 1970), a western that responds to the modern age and that was directed by Arthur Penn. The film tells the story of Jack Crabb, played by Dustin Hoffman, who was adopted by the Native Americans. This film came after the Vietnam War, and it could be argued

that it was a response on this historical event. Martynuska (2009) saw that the cowboys fighting the Indians in *Little Big Man* represent the American and Vietnamese soldiers. Penn broke the rules of the classical western in his “anti-western” film and the Hollywood standards of the genre were reversed where the Native Americans or the “others” were portrayed as the “good guys” by showing them as peaceful and civilized people who are facing a systematic extermination by representatives of the US government (Martynuska, 2009). Thus, Martynuska (2009) concluded that *Little Big Man* is a metaphor of the American imperialism, and echoed the value crisis in the country. Reflexivity, a trait of the modern film, is translated in *Little Big Man* by showing Ed-Tom, as the old Westerner, telling his story. The film started with a voice over of an old man, and ended by revealing that the main character is being interviewed on a tape player which can be regarded as a modern technology. By having the main character narrate his story to an interviewer, the film is reflecting on it self and emphasizing that the film is just a story or a myth and not reality.

Categorizing movies into genres may serve several functions depending on the purpose of the study. For example, film scholars may use genres for film interpretation, while industry analysts would use this categorization for tracking the market tendencies and audience preference (Berry-Flint, 1999). But genres could also serve a sociological function by linking them to a specific time and space in history, thus relating genres to myths (Altman, 1999). Here, the word “myth” is to be conceptualized in the logic of semiotics. For semioticians such as Roland Barthes, a “myth” is regarded as a “higher order of signification” (Chandler, 2002, p.143) that can help to make sense of cultural behavior, thus are considered as “the dominant ideologies of our time” (Chandler, 2002, p.144). The function of a myth is to “make dominant cultural and historical values, attitudes and beliefs seem natural, normal, and obvious common sense;” (Chandler, 2002, p.145) in other words a myth serves as a reflection of the way things are (Chandler, 2002). In comparison to myth, film genres would hold the same function in

reflecting common ideologies, relating to social self expression, and finding answers to questions of origin (Berry-Flint, 1999).

Bazin adapted such a way of regarding genres, where, in his article *The Western: Or The American Film Par Excellence* (1971), he discussed the western film as a representation of the American history, and linked the semiotics of the genre to the American reality. Westerns are films of which basic themes revolve around conflicts between the civilized whites and the savage Native Americans, within plots about establishing and maintaining the order on the frontier. The western hero can be described as a “courageous, masculine, moral, and self-sufficient” man that faces the villain in a good versus bad scenario in order to re-establish the order of law (Martynuska, 2009, p.60). The typical setting of a western is the American west, and these films usually include “galloping horses,” fights, strong and brave cowboy characters. Those ingredients of such film formula, as Bazin (1971, p.142) pointed out, can be recognized as signs and symbols of the western reality, namely the myth. In that sense, an important function of film genre is, to shed light or find solutions for contemporary problems. For example, Warshow (1954) pointed out that the cowboys with guns represent the “American fascination with violence,” and the western hero encompasses the idea of the “last gentleman” (Berry-Flint, 1999, p.30). Following the lead of Warshow and Bazin, the western genre can be linked to the contemporary climate and it would be logical to assume that the American western film come as a response for the chaos and violence in the country where the westerner character takes upon his self to re-enforce the law in order to neutralize the chaos of America.

Cawelti (1975) suggested mythical relations other than the myth of the west, and that can explain the origins of the fascination with genres that deal with violence. The myths discussed include the myth of “an eye for an eye” (p.530), where the criminal in the narrative responds to murder with murder, the “myth of the vigilante” (p.532), where the protagonist uses violence as a last resort after the failure of the law, and the “myth of equality through

violence” (p.534), where characters from the lower class use criminal skills to achieve social equality and gain power and wealth.

Nevertheless, these myths are not exclusive to westerns, in fact some of them can define the boundaries of others genres such as the gangster genre. In a gangster film the narrative typically is about a character that is placed in a situation where criminality becomes a necessity due to poverty (Cawelti, 1975). This criminality is the character’s means to succeed and to ascend the social ladder, and the genre’s expected resolution is the fall of the protagonist (Leitch, 2002), endorsing the motto that one must pay the price for his anti-social activities.

It could be argued, as well, that the essence of the gangster genre is the pursue for the lost American Dream. The American Dream is on the most prevalent American cultural myths that upholds concepts of individuality and equality for the upward mobility in the social ladder where any one can achieve his or her goal in the “land of opportunity” regardless of their financial and social status (Smith, 2009).

Fisher (1973) proposed that the myth of the American Dream is composed of two competing ideologies, one that favors individual success, and another that favors brotherhood, or moral values, and these two ideologies coexist in the myth. So, it can be said that the gangster genre correspond to the American Dream where the low social class protagonist works hard on achieving social and financial gain, but the equilibrium between the myth’s ideologies of individual success and moral values is shaken in the sense that the protagonist loses the moral values by resorting to crime and murder in favor of individual success. But that is not to say that the genre promoted the criminal ideology since this generic formula included a kind of embedded awareness represented by the fall of the character (Leitch, 2002), for example the protagonist that chooses the outlaw path would rather end up dead in the gutter, self-destructed, or imprisoned.

As the ideology of the American dream encompasses the possibility for almost any

individual to achieve financial and social success through hard work (Fisher, 1973), capitalism may come to mind as a complementary social and economic ideology to the American dream.

The ideology of capitalism favors individualism by acknowledging the capability of individuals in achieving their “independently-set goals” (Douthwaite, 2013), which contributes to the core of the gangster genre. Leitch (2002) considered the crime genre to provide critique on capitalism by portraying it as an “economic system that cannot distinguish successful business men from criminals” (Leitch, 2002, p. 111). As an example of the gangster film’s criticism on Capitalism, Leitch (2002) discussed *Scarface* (Bregman & Saphier, 1983) as a film that features an “anti-capitalist protagonist who ends up as the ultimate capitalist.” Tony Montana, played by Al Pacino, resembles the audience’s aspiration for economic power, and their desire to “avenge themselves on the system that kept them down” (Leitch, 2002, p. 111). Crime and murder may be considered as the natural consequences of the economic suffering, therefore, through the acquired lust and wealth of the gangster and his rise and fall, the gangster film would be an illustration of a mythical genre that answers problems of origin.

For the relation between genre and myth to stand, the genre would be expected to develop as the dominant cultural ideologies do so and the life cycle of the genre would be expected to mirror the prevalent myths in its time.

If Andre Bazin was to write about the western in the post-modern age, he would have suggested that the genre had yet to re-invent itself another time. Bazin stated that the western resurfaced after the end of the WWII (Bazin, 1971), and Carter (2018) suggested another revival of the genre after the 9/11 events and explored the post-modernism of the Coen brothers film *No Country for Old Men* (2007) in relation to the American myth in this age. Under the light of a dominant ideology of a “war on terror”, the myths of “extreme masculinity” and “the heroic individualism” gained increased cultural acceptance. In this sense, the classical western myth of the struggle between civilization and savagery had contemporary roots to revive the



genre (Carter, 2018). Carter (2018) considered *No Country for Old Men* as a critique on the Hollywood western's elevation of myths like "the cult of gunfighter" and "the domestication of the wilderness".

The westerner (Tom Bell played by Tommy Lee Johns) felt that this role as a representative of the law is fading away because he is out-forced by the forces of the villain, he does not understand the reason behind killing and murder in a world of irrational crime. For example, Chighar (the character played by Javier Bardem) had no true reason for killing Carla Jean except for the fact that he promised her dead husband that she will die. Actually Chighar decided the faith of Carla Jean by a flip of a coin. The film ends with Bell leaving his community and stepping down from his role as a sheriff, a sign of him giving up or "an incorporation into the myth of Anglo-America's experience of defeat and disappointment" (Slotkin, 1992, p.655). Although the film still possess main aspects of the western such as the setting, and its association of savagery with the "racially other", and having the American white male as the protagonist, it diverges from the traditional conventions of the genre by tampering with the expected resolution of the western formula where the hero does not win in the end, and the villain gets away (Carter, 2018). These deviations from the western formula can be read to be echoing dominant contemporary ideologies such as the war on terror, and the struggle and defeat of the "civilized" in the face of the uncivilized other.

Laying on the analysis of the mentioned films (e.g. *Stagecoach*, *My Darling Clementine*, *Little Big Man*, *No Country for Old Men*, and *Scarface*) in relation to the concept of genre echoing dominant myths of the time, it can be noticed that the generic formulas tend to change in accordance with contemporary concerns (e.g. the evolution of the western genre). As film genres comment on cultural myths, it would be predictable that TV series, as products of the popular entertainment medium, to be mirroring the social, cultural, and economic contemporary concerns of its audience as represented in cinema.

## 5.2 Genre in TV

Since the development of television, it started to attract the viewers of cinema where it can be said that since the 60s, television had started to win the battle over the movies in being America's chief audio/visual mass entertainment medium (Leitch, 2002). This observation is what mainly lead critics to think about a hypothetical death of cinema (Gaudreault & Marion, 2015). Laying on the argument that the cinema, as we know it, is dying, TV can be considered to be picking up on cinema's elements and employing the film genres to fulfill the needs of its spectators and answer their contemporary crisis and dilemmas. In this sense, quality TV series could be regarded as a new, or additional, home for these generic formulas in the form of a series instead of film. These series may be referred to as "genre series" since they inherited the film's generic components. In order for these series to upgrade the quality of their narrative it was natural to build upon already established genres that the spectator is familiar with. Thus, those borrowed genres can be considered as a vehicle to tackle contemporary problems and existential crisis in the cinematic fashion.

To illustrate this idea, two contemporary TV series belonging to the genres mentioned above are studied as post-modern genre TV series that function as social myths and that project recent common ideologies. *Breaking Bad* (Gilligan & Johnson, 2008), a gangster series, and *Westworld* (Nolan, et al., 2016), a Western TV series, are considered because they revolve around themes of addiction, self-identity, materiality, free will, and immortality etc. All of which are notions that could relate to contemporary social concerns.

**5.2.1 Gangster genre: *Breaking Bad*.** *Breaking Bad* is one of the contemporary quality TV series that gained both popularity among audience and critical acclaim. The series, created by Vince Gilligan, uses, what Cawelti (1975) identifies as, the myth of equality through violence where its protagonist Walter White, played by Bryan Cranston, uses his skills as a chemistry

teacher in a criminal form to create and sell crystal meth and by that he achieved social equality and wealth. The moral justification of the character's immoral actions is to secure his family after he was diagnosed with lung cancer.

The actions of the series take place in the contemporary time in New Mexico, America, and the five seasons of *Breaking Bad* follow the progression of the protagonist as he climbs the social and criminal ladder from being a citizen of the lower-middle class until gaining a big financial fortune and fearful reputation, and juggling, along the way, between his criminal work and family affairs. The series clearly belongs to the gangster genre as it portrays the predictable rise and fall of a protagonist who is morally ambiguous and materialistic and who chooses the path of crime in order to achieve his version of the American Dream.

In a conversation with the creator of *Breaking Bad* at ACMI, Gilligan stated that for him the show is about change, the change of a person from good to bad (Gilligan, 2017). This concept of change is embodied in the American Dream, as for it is possible for every individual to change his or her current situation into, hopefully, a better one. The reason for the need for that change is initial low financial and social status of the character, here the ideology of capitalism comes in. Walter White had to work two jobs and accept the humiliation from his students and boss in order to be able to provide for his family, and still, despite all that effort, his pregnant wife and disabled son would be left with no financial security after his death. The system failed the "good" Walter White so he had to break bad, in a good example of a critique on capitalism. Another main theme is the series is the family, at the beginning of the show, White had to do what he had to do for his family, and as the story progresses, his family deteriorates and grows what could be seen as shadowing the loose family ties in most capitalistic and individualistic developed countries. Individualism, a trait of the gangster genre and the American culture, is significantly portrayed in the series. In his attempt to secure his family, Walter White finds himself submerged in the criminal life, and as his family started to

get hurt by him and his new life he gets cured from cancer. After he attains more than enough money for his family and their generation to come, White chose not to stop his meth business, and when asked about the reason for continuing his criminal activity and coming up with different justifications to continue his criminal endeavor, the character bluntly says: “I did it for me, because I was good at it”, which is a clear manifestation that the protagonist had a selfish and individualistic goal. The show tackled other contemporary issues such as cancer, and addiction, whether to drugs or even to power. In addition to that, one of the main themes in the series was the existential problem of self-worth and self-satisfaction, where Walter felt that he had a meaning for his life and that he is contributing to his family through manufacturing meth.

The resolution of the series is, as would be expected from such formulaic series, by Walter’s fall, he gets shot and dies after loosing his money and family and after his cancer reoccurs. But it should be noted that the protagonist, after all, accomplished a fair amount of his initial goals. He managed to secure a safe fund for his family, he is not regarded as a loser insignificant man, but rather his reputation as the fearful gangster and genius scientist/meth cooker lives after his death through the persona of Heisenberg, and he saved Jesse (the character that accompanied him through out his criminal journey).

This example of *Breaking Bad* as a gangster series illustrates how quality TV series can have the same generic distinctions as film, and how they can comment on or echo contemporary concerns of its audiences. The next example about *Westworld* ,a western series, would complement the argument that film genres can have a place in TV and would add to the idea of the evolution of such genres by deviating from the generic formula.

**5.2.2 Western Genre: *Westworld*.** *Westworld* (Nolan, et al., 2016) is a series that is based on the concept of a film of the same title: *Westworld* (Lazarus, 1973). The show is set in the

near future, in a theme park that is inhabited by human-like androids. It revolves around relations of these robots with their “creators” and the park visitors as they start to gain consciousness due to a technological malfunction. Although the series is not a typical western and can rather be classified primarily as science fiction, but the theme of the park of the first season is of a western genre. This first season includes the elements of the western genre such as a landscape similar to that of the American Wild West (Dickerson, 2017), galloping horses, gun fights, and western stock characters, mainly the sheriff, the westerner hero, the prostitute, the savage inhabitants etc.

*Westworld* reflects humans long quest for immortality (Dickerson, 2017), and answer the myth of defying death and rebirth. In the series, the androids bleed when they get shot and die, as humans do, but the corps robots are then “fixed” and reprogramed and put back in the theme park. These, almost human, characters not only defy nature’s cycle of birth and death, but only do not age. In fact, Dolores, the main android/character of the show, is present in two different time lines of the narrative that are thirty years apart and is still as young and beautiful as she was first created. *Westworld* can be considered to be answering this societal quest that is represented in real life by the different attempts in the fields of technology and medicine to cure people from deadly diseases and to stop or slow people’s aging. Another dominant social ideology that the show reflects is free will as it continuously raises questions about the ability of the androids to change the narratives that their creator have written for them.

Dolores indicates at the beginning of the series that the visitors come to this theme park “looking for a place with unlimited possibilities, and a place to be free.” But this freedom is represented in the narrative by excessive violence and animalistic sexual encounters. The visitors abused the opportunity to act immorally without feeling guilty, because after all these characters are not human, and by that, *Westworld* can be regarded to be criticizing today’s “cold and unfeeling” civilization and as being critical on people’s enjoyment from violence

and sex on TV and film (Dickerson, 2017).

Old William or the Man In Black, who is the villain of the series, considers the theme park as a game, and he is absorbed by this game and stuck on a hard level, which is finding the maze. The realness of the androids adds to the pleasure in playing this game to an extent that the line between the real and fake is blurred. In the second episode, when young William first entered the park, he asked the hosting android if she was real, her answer was that if he can't tell the difference then it doesn't matter whether she is a human or a robot. This echoes a very contemporary dilemma about the real and un-real in a world where social media is blurring the line between human acquaintances and Facebook friends, and technology is becoming more real than reality itself.

*Westworld*, the series, presented some deviations from the "normal" western formula by altering some of its ingredients and by mixing science fiction with it in a hybrid-genre TV series. The series have a setting that is complementary with that of the western, and it has the genre's stereotypical stock characters such as the westerner hero, his opposite villain, the innocent girl that needs to be saving, the prostitute, and the sheriff etc. But the deviation from the genre could be characterized by the sheriff as a passing character that does not acquire a major role in the events and does not take actions in restoring the order, and what seemed to be the hero at the beginning of the narrative, turned out to be the villain (William and the man in black). As for the restoration of the order of law, the series altered the norms where the humans, the civilized, arrive to the "Wild West" in order to make use and abuse the lack of law and not to restore it. As it would be expected from a post-modern series, *Westworld* presented multiple perspectives of the story, humans are considered as "new comers" for the androids and are, in a way or another, the villainous representation because their entertainment involves having sex with the androids and killing them. While considering the perspective of the humans, which is clearly presented towards the end of the first season, those androids, the

“uncivilized others”, turn into killing machines. By blurring the lines between the good and the bad, and by constantly challenging the agreed upon stereotypes of the western characters, *Westworld* could be regarded as a critical commentary on the genre and as a step into evolving the western.

That is not to say that genre TV series are necessarily all an evolution of the genre film. Using *Breaking Bad* as a contrary example to *Westworld*, the gangster series which gained a good amount of praise among audiences and critics built on the gangster genre, but it could be regarded as imitation of the original work and does not reflect or critically comment on the genre, for that it can be said that its association with cinema is merely pastiche. References to the gangster genre can be spotted in *Breaking Bad* by having Walter White to be a descendant of *Scarface*'s Tony Montana, and by including “recycled” scenes from other gangster films. Although it could be argued that *Breaking Bad* remains at a stage of mimicking of the gangster genre, it can't be denied that show presented evolution in the quality TV series with its psychologically rich characters, complex narrative, and mise-en-scène.

Being considered as a product of post-modernism, TV series borrowed the generic formulas of films, therefore, it would be plausible to consider genre TV series as a replication to genre films in a longer-duration format, in which they acquire similar formulaic components and serve the same function as a myth that reflects contemporary and common ideologies. As genres have distinctive formulaic elements such as common themes, settings, stock characters...etc., the exploration of the content of the films (e.g. the story), that embodies the genre's characteristics, would be the next logical step in the attempt to find the common grounds between cinema and TV series.

### 5.3 Narrative in Film

Bordwell and Thompson (2008) defined a narrative as a “chain of events in a cause-

effect relationship occurring in time and space” (p. 75). A typical narrative would begin with one situation followed by a series of changes and ending with the establishment of a new situation (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008). These events are arranged within a structure to give meaning to them (Benyahia, Gaffney, & White, 2006), an action that does not lead to a counter action would not be playing a role in advancing the whole narrative. Two interrelated and undividable aspects of the film narrative should be taken into consideration, that of the story and plot. The story of a film can be considered as the main tale, or the chronological events that drive its actions towards the ending, whereas the plot is the re-arranged events in the film narrative (Benyahia, Gaffney, & White, 2006).

As it occupies, or occupied, the role of the dominant medium of storytelling, cinema can not be considered as a mere audio visual representation of a film narrative, but through their content, it can be said that films managed to project different messages and ideologies of their time. Griffith was a pioneer in using cinematic storytelling to convey moral and political stands, whether on a conscious or unconscious level (Fabe, 2004). For example, D. W. Griffith in *The Birth of a Nation* (Griffith, 1915) morally justified the violent extermination of black power by portraying black men as dangerous rapists who abuse freedom in order to sexually violate white women (Fabe, 2004). Hence, a film narrative is not to be considered an “innocent” or objective representation of the events, and when it comes to studying cinema, those subjective influences imposed by the filmmaker through cinematic techniques are to be contemplated as this is what could distinguish film as a medium from other narrative mediums.

The basic, or rather classical, narrative structure consists of three phases or acts. A film narrative is expected to begin with introducing the characters and setting, followed by a disruption of the normality of the world of the film where the characters face obstacles that seemingly prevent them from achieving the dramatic goal of the film. In the final act, the plots are resolved (Benyahia & Gaffney & White, 2006) and “narrative closure is presumed” (Isaacs,



2005, p. 127). In the classical age, Hollywood films tend to focus on a central psychological character who wants to achieve a goal within a limited amount of time, and this quest sets off a chain of cause and effect events that progresses the narrative (Fabe, 2004). Fabe (2004) pointed out that such films tend to have two lines of action that intertwine throughout the narrative, one involving a love plot and the other involving work and public success. The narrative of classical films are designed to give the impression of an “unconstructed” world (Fabe, 2004, p. 88). In this sense, Fabe (2004) identified another trait of the classical Hollywood film narrative that is the “omniscient narrator” (p.88), meaning that the narrator of the film, the hidden filmmaker, knows the whole story and chooses what events to present for the spectator and in what order. The camera of this omniscient and “omnipresent” narrator is, thus, not limited to the point of view of the film’s characters, but it is capable of revealing information for the viewer that is not even acquired by those characters (Fabe, 2004).

This straightforward causal narrative of the classical model was defied and developed with films such as Orson Welles’s *Citizen Kane* (1941) which could be considered as a turning point towards a “post-classical narrative film” (Isaacs, 2005, p.129). The film presents the quest to find the meaning of “rosebud,” the last word that Charles Foster Kane, the publishing tycoon, spoke before he died. The story of the film is told from the perspective of six narrators by a series of flashbacks. This way of storytelling added complexity and ambiguity to the film narrative (Fabe, 2004). The power that the viewers of the classical film had through the “omniscient perspective” was thus challenged (Fabe, 2004). Welles kept on the classical tradition of conveying a sense of realism by creating the illusion the viewers are watching real events, but the spectators no longer have access to information that the characters are unaware of. Another modification in the typical narrative is that the film presented the ending of Kane since the beginning, the spectator knows that Kane will be successful and rich and that he will die at an old age. The enjoyment that the audience get from the narrative is no longer through

suspense about what will happen to the character, but rather from understanding why his life turned out the way it did (Fabe, 2004). Viewers may have a sense of achievement and fulfillment from understanding the narrative, and as Roland Barthes, the French theorist, philosopher and semiotician, puts it, the narrative sets up mysteries for the “reader” to solve (Benyahia & Gaffney & White, 2006). In *Citizen Kane*, the spectator needs to put together bits and pieces presented by the six different narrators in order to get a hold up on the whole narrative (Fabe, 2004). Towards the end of the film, Welles went back to being the omniscient and omnipresent narrator where the characters did not succeed in knowing the significance of the word “Rosebud”, but the spectator is given additional information that Rosebud was engraved on a sled that belonged to the young Kane before he was taken from his parents. By that, Fabe (2004) concluded that the film has two endings.

The classical conventions of the cause/effect linear order of events and of representing the characters and the events of the plot in an objective manner are undercut by films of the modern era through telling the story in a complex and often difficult form of representation, and through foregrounding the subjectivity of the narrator (Fabe, 2004).

Another characteristic of modern films is that they draw the attention to the medium highlighting that the spectator is watching a cinematic representation of life (Fabe, 2004). This cinematic representation of life or, as Stam (2000) named it, the “non-representational art (p.151)” is induced through reflexivity that is identified under the modern tradition through abstraction, fragmentation, and foregrounding the process of art (Stam, 2000). For example, in *Day for Night* (Berbert, 1973), Truffaut foregrounds the film’s production process through playing the role of the director in the film that he directed. The narrative of the more elitist film of the modern era tends to be more interested in describing the psychology of the characters and the relation between character and environment than on developing a classical linear plot (Kovacs, 2007, p.75).

Being mostly in accordance with modernism (Fahimifar & Gholamali, 2013), post-modern films tend to draw attention to their artificiality and showcase life as it is presented in other films rather than real life (Fabe, 2004). For instance, the modernistic film reflexivity becomes a norm of the post-modernistic tradition rather than the exception (Stam, 2000). Post-modernist reflexivity, in the form of intertextuality, tends to offer the spectators enjoyment through recognizing the recycled texts, thus flatter their narcissism by displaying their cultural capital (Stam, 2000, p. 305; Constable, 2004, p.59).

#### **5.4 Narrative in TV**

The basic formula of a TV series narrative consists of a three-act structure of beginning, middle and end where the interaction between the protagonist and the antagonist create the dramatic conflict (Varotsis, 2015). One of the main differences between a series and a film is the “narrative specificity” of TV where the latter dictates a specific narrative format of breaking the episode down into acts due to commercial breaks (Garcia, 2016). Although online streaming platforms and premium cable channels can allow the episode to run without the commercial disturbance, but they are still, generally, limited by a specific episode duration and number of episodes per season which also define and shapes the whole narrative of the series (Garcia, 2016). This episode format directly affects the narrative and the narration of the series, here three types of “seriality” should be taken into consideration to better understand the specific features of TV series narrative. Stand alone episodes, or series, are TV dramas that present the plot and its closure in the same episode, an example to that would be procedure dramas such as medical or legal drama. While serials have a continuing story over the episodes and are “anticlimactic”, the third type of seriality is the anthological series where each episode, or season, has different plot and characters linked by a main theme (Garcia, 2016).

Before the emergence of the so called quality TV series, televised fictional drama was typified as soap operas and sitcoms (Dominick, 2013). In the early 1980s, TV series started to

include ongoing story arcs within the episodic format (Mittell, 2006). This format still exists and is most evident in procedural dramas where, as in soap operas, relationship stories are extended among multiple episodes and even seasonal arcs, but the procedural plot line is resolved within the same episode, or it can be serialized as a two-parts (Mittell, 2006).

**5.4.1 Narrative complexity in TV.** In the 1990s and around the same time that cinema was turning towards narrative complexity (Cameron, 2008), TV introduced series with a complex narrative that are regarded as “an alternative to the conventional episodic and serial forms” (Mittell, 2006, p.29) and, as well, an opposition to the classical Hollywood narrative (Kozloff, 2016). Narrative complexity can be conceptualized as the way the narrative is presented to the viewer, through the implementation of some narrative devices such as flashbacks, flash-forward, time jumps, and cold opens (Kroener, 2013). On the other hand, Varotsis (2015) pointed out that when the number of narrative components in script increase, the interactions among them will tend to be more complex and thus the overall narrative complexity increases. In such narrative, multiple plots develop simultaneously in every episode (Zagalo & Barker, 2006), and it is expected to have a relationship between those multiple story lines leading to “interweaving stories that often collide and coincide” (Mittell, 2006, p.34).

Maybe the most obvious, and popular, example of a complex narrative TV series is HBO's *Game of Thrones* (Benioff, Weiss, Doelger, & Caulfield, 2011). In this series, multiple families fight over a mythical throne. The plot made it possible for the series to have many narrative components such as different families and their members, the kingdoms they live in, the people who live in those kingdom, moral codes and priorities of each character... It is safe to categorize *Game of Thrones* as a complex narrative according to Varotsis's (2015) definition. But it is not sufficient to label a narrative as complex just according to the number of narrative components, there should be a sort of interrelation among them or the narrative would turn out to be confusing and lacking a unified story arc. Here Varotsis (2015) made a

distinction between complex and complicated, where in a complicated narrative the components have a “degree of independence” meaning that if a component was to be removed the whole narrative would not only remain functional, but also less complicated, while in a complex narrative the components are dependent on one another and are vital for the interactions among them where the exclusion of one of these components would disturb the function of the whole system.

Mittell (2006) used the term narrative complexity to describe the narratives of the contemporary TV quality series where he took into consideration the content of the series and its storytelling techniques. Mittell (2006) regarded narrative complexity in TV series distinct, and agreed upon set of norms of narrational construction. Such narratives are the result of the hybridization of episodic and serial forms, meaning that they tend to refuse plot closure at the end of every episode resulting in an ongoing story. But a complex narrative is not to be mistaken with a soap opera narrative that could, as well, be complex and exhibit intersecting story arcs. The distinction between those two narrative forms is that narrative complexity requires, most of the time, the restriction of the melodramatic style by having more evident plot developments that lead to the character drama and relationships in contrast to the soap narrative that reverses this formula (Mittell, 2006).

A distinction between complex narratives and conventional TV is that narrative complexity offers a more “self-conscious mode of storytelling” (Mittell, 2006, p.34). Self reflexivity can be evident in *House of Cards* (Fincher, et al., 2013) when Frank Underwood (played by Kevin Spacey) breaks the forth wall and talks to the camera, or in *The Handmaid’s Tale* (Miller, et al., 2017) when June Osborne’s (played by Elisabeth Moss) voice over reflects her inner thoughts as if she is narrating to the audience. According to Mittell (2006) this reflexivity can as well be evident when the spectators become aware that they are watching a complex narrative and favor an “operational aesthetic” (p.35) meaning that they follow the

series to see how did the writers and directors of the show will pull of a certain story line rather than being only involved in what will happen to the characters. Back to the example of *Game of Thrones*, the show's fans would have been anxious to see how will the producers bring John Snow (played by Kit Harington) back from the dead. For many members of the audience the return of the character after his assumed death at the end of the fifth season was certain, and, in this case, the anticipation was not about what will happen to the character but about how will they (the producers) bring him back. Such important and drastic dangling plots (open-ended episodes) and turning points in the narrative are what Mittell (2006) described as "narrative special effects" (p.35). These effects are presented through climactic moments that "push the operational aesthetics forward" and suggest to reconsider the information that was presented prior to it (Mittell, 2006).

Plot twists or narrative special effects are not the only aspects that deliver pleasure in a complex narrative, narrative complexity entails de-familiarization of the storytelling techniques (Mittell, 2006). Audiences appreciate breaking the conventions of TV and telling stories in new ways as much as they value the story itself (Mittell, 2006). Showtime's *The Affair* (Treem, et al., 2014) tells the typical soap opera story of an extra marital affair, but the narrative complexity is achieved through twisting the conventions of traditional TV and telling the story from two points of view by having half of every episode of the first season dedicated to presenting the events from the perspective of Noah Solloway (played by Dominic West), and the next half featuring the same events from the perception of Alison (played by Ruth Wilson) resulting in a two-sided narrative within the same series.

In addition to the development of TV series on the plot level, the character development is regarded as a main attribute for narrative complexity (Zagalo & Barker, 2006). Allrath, Gymmick and Surkamp (2005) attributed the traditional representation of a one-dimensional and under developed TV character to the "episodic closure" of conventional TV series, where,

as cited from Thompson (2003), the protagonist makes a mistake in a weekly episode, learn a lesson, and tend to forget the lesson learned in future episodes. The contemporary TV scene accepted that the TV audience can have a higher cognitive interpretation of the series, and the new “consumption pattern” made it easier for the audience to keep track of complicated narrative plots and of large number of characters (Ionita, 2014). With the help of their anti-closure narrative nature, contemporary TV series tend to dive in the characters psychology and past by referencing events from previous episodes resulting in “rounder” characters (Allrath, Gymmick and Surkamp, 2005). This conceptualization of a “round” or complex character is defined by Bordwell and Thompson (2008) as a character that “possesses several traits, some at odds with one another”.

Zagalo and Barker (2006) observed that contemporary TV series have a bigger number of main characters than that in conventional TV and considered “multiple characterization” as a trait for TV’s complex narrative where the web of character interactions has a larger scope enabling to have “intra and inter-group” relations in addition to the “intra and inter-personal relations”. For example, in *Game of Thrones*, negotiations are present between different houses where alliances or wars are launched between them, in addition to story lines between characters of the same family and others from different affiliations.

As technology is advancing, interactive narrative can be introduced as an additional aspect of narrative complexity. An episode of *Black Mirror* was launched on Netflix under the title of *Bandersnatch* (Brooker & Jones, 2018), this episode offered the viewer a unique TV experience where her or she can pick decisions for the main character and by that altering the narrative of the episode that they are watching. This technique presents multiple narrative options and takes the narrative complex series to a new level by favoring the re-watchability of the episode, and self reflexivity where the audience are not only aware of the narrative tools

but are taking part in it as well, and it favors the operational aesthetic where viewers would be curious about how the writers were able to provide such variations on the narrative.

Finally, narrative complexity can not be limited to innovative storytelling techniques and high cognitive involvement for understanding overlaying plot lines. As Mittell (2006) ended his discussion on the topic declaring that narrative complexity employs elements of “traditional pleasures” (p.38) through character depth, plot resolution, action oriented excitements, and humor while providing the discussed operational pleasures. Such elements of “traditional pleasures” (Mittell, 2006, p.38) are important when it comes to defining a cinematic aspect in TV, since the discussed elements of narrative complexity (e.g. non-linear narrative, subjective narration, reflexivity etc.) can result in an ambiguous and unclear story due to the modern narration techniques that require more mental effort and knowledge of cinematic techniques in order to reconstruct the full story of the series. Therefore, narrative complexity in TV series can be summarized by having a complex non-linear narrative, told through modernistic narration (subjectivity and reflexivity), and, at the same time, acquiring narrative and narration elements that makes the series enjoyable and engaging for a mass audience.

### **5.5 Cinema Narrative in TV**

Against this background, one can clearly conclude a relation between the narrative techniques of the three eras of cinema and contemporary TV series. From the classical narrative, TV used the two intertwined lines of actions where narrative complexity allowed the existence of even more related and colliding story plots. The omniscient perspective of the classical narrative is expanded in TV series by making use of the long narrative structure and episodic format allowing the audience to have access to more information about the characters. In relation to the narrative of the modern film era, the complex way of storytelling can be detected in the studied TV series through the use of different storytelling techniques of the non-



linear narrative and that requires mental work for the audience to decode the whole narrative arc. Contemporary TV series tend to draw attention to their artificiality, a trait of the modern and post-modern film narrative (Fabe, 2004), through favoring the “operational aesthetics” and using “narrative special effects” (Mittell, 2006). And by abandoning the linear storytelling, quality TV series may take queue from the mind-game film genre and choose to tell the story in a narrative puzzle where the viewers have to be alert on the cognitive level to decode the narrative. Although a complex narrative might frequently be deceptive and misleading to the audience (Kroener, 2013), but series with such narrative form tend to address a more “committed and intellectually engaged” audience (Garcia, 2016). What differentiates TV series from cinema, and maybe what gives TV series an upper hand is that narrative complexity is based on aspects of storytelling that best suits TV’s “long-form narrative structure” and that distinguishes it from film, since, as Mittell (2006) indicated, “the extended character depth, ongoing plotting, and episodic variations are simply unavailable options within a two-hour film.” Despite the vast difference in the narrative between contemporary quality TV series and conventional TV, the former may not be regarded to be the product of pure innovation (Zagalo & Barker, 2006). A better assessment of contemporary TV series would be that it is a fusion of older styles, quality TV is the result of blending the open plot structure for soap operas and the “realistic Hollywood drama content” into a new TV drama format that brings the best of both worlds (Zagalo & Barker, 2006). By comparing the evolvement of the film narrative as indicated by Fabe (2004) and the conceptualization of the narrative complexity in TV series as discussed by Mittell (2006), the notion that contemporary quality TV is a sub product of cinema would be more evident.

## **6- Structure**

Cinema and Television are mediums of audio-visual storytelling. In the previous chapter of this study the content of films and TV series was discussed as in how the genres

reflect social dilemmas and the evolution of the cinematic narrative and its relation to the narrative of TV series. This chapter will discuss the narration or the “telling” aspect of cinema and TV. The objective of studying the narration in a film is to understand how the narrative is represented on screen, which will be referred to in this study as the structure, rather than “what” is presented, or the content of the film (Branigan, 1992, p. 65).

### **6.1 Narration in Film**

Bordwell (1985) divided the film narrative into three elements: *fabula*, *syuzhet*, and *style*. The *fabula*, or the story, is regarded as the chronological cause-effect chain of events that can be represented in a synopsis (Bordwell, 1985, p.48-62). The *syuzhet*, or the plot, is conceptualized as the representation and patterning of the events of the *fabula*, whereas the *style* would be the cinematic devices (such as editing, cinematography, *mise-en-scène* etc.) used in a film to represent those events (Bordwell, 1985, p.246). In the light of these definitions, Bordwell (1985) defined narration as “the process whereby the film’s *syuzhet* and *style* interact in the course of cueing and channeling the spectator’s construction of the *fabula*” (Bordwell, 1985, p. 251). The plot can arrange the events of the story in a structure that gives information to the spectator, enlisting by that expectations and suspense, or it can withhold information, thus create curiosity and surprise (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.88). These audience responses are achieved through manipulating the amount and timing of the *fabula* information presented, meaning that when the character of the film knows more information than the spectator, the surprise effect will be achieved, and when the information flow is reversed, suspense will be the expected response from the audience, and mystery is the result when the spectator and the character have equal information about the story (Branigan, 1992, p. 75). It would seem that the plot has two contradicting purposes, one is to help the audience to construct the story, and the other is to withhold information or create, what Bordwell (1985) calls, “narrative gaps” in order to provoke specific reactions from the audience.

Varying the degree of spectator information versus character information, and that of the dominance of the plot and style over the story seem to define the film tendencies of each era. For instance, the “canonic” narrative of cinema’s classical age serves as a clear example of how the relation between plot and story can serve the “narrative comprehension” (Bordwell, 1985, p. 247). For films in that era, the spectator is said to have a “superior position of knowledge”, where he or she have access to information of the story that the characters of the film might not have (Branigam, 1992, p.74), and the story is dominant over the plot and style where narration is used in favor of the story in order to enhance the narrative comprehension (Bordwell, 1985, p. 251).

The character in the classical narrative is the “causal agent” of the film, where the actions of the protagonist lead to a sequence of cause-effect related scenes that guide the construction of the story (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.94). In order to make the spectator more knowledgeable about the story, the classical omniscient narration tends to have more than one character as a source of information (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p. 89,95). D.W Griffith’s *Birth of A Nation* gives a clear example about the “unrestricted narration” of the classical age where the multiple families act as multiple sources of information, and by that the director projected the intertwined destinies of the film’s characters (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.89).

The dominance of the story in the classical film can be evident by the linear narrative that consists of a chain of chronological cause-effect events (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.95). This linear narrative is described by Kovacs (2007, p.79) as a “problem solving narrative” where the events flow from beginning, middle and end, resulting in a resolution of the main problem and the closure of the narrative gaps. That is not to say that the flow of events is not interrupted by narrative gaps. Bordwell and Thompson (2008) acknowledged that the classical plot may develop temporal gaps, but only in order to present “events of causal

importance” (p. 95). In other words, the spectator can consider the story time that is not represented on screen as insignificant time in the story events where nothing of causal importance had happened.

As discussed earlier, the classical narrative tends to portray the film events in ways that seem “unconstructed” or similar to real life events (Fabe, 2004). The classical narration supports this real life reproduction by narrating the events objectively, meaning that the film “represents objective story reality” where the subjective thoughts of the characters are usually not represented visually (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008, p.95).

In the 1950’s and 1960’s a filmic tradition that is now known as modernism developed in opposition of the classical cinema mainly through a narration that made it hard for the spectator to construct the story of the film (Kovacs, 2007, p.56). In the modern “non-classical narrative cinema”, as Kovacs (2007) described it, the plot and the style are dominant over the story. By loosing the principle of the classical linear narrative that is characterized by a chain of cause-effect related events (Kovacs, 2007, p. 61), modern narration is said to be presenting the events in a “disarranged” pattern what leads to “de-familiarization” in the narrative and thus a “complex narrative logic” (Stam, Burgoyne & Flitterman-Lewis, 1992 p.72,75). This de-familiarization is achieved through temporal gaps in the story, disturbing the “flow of information,” or presenting certain actions and events multiple times through different perspectives (Stam, Burgoyne & Flitterman-Lewis, 1992, p. 72). The story information that would explain such narrative gaps, whether temporal, spatial, or causal (Bordwell, 1985, p. 248), tend to be delayed in a modern film, or even may be left unresolved (Kovacs, 2007, pp. 61-62). This increases the ambiguity in the modern narration and makes the spectator’s task of interpreting the story harder (Kovacs, 2007, pp. 61-62). For example, in Fellini’s *8 ½* (Rizzoli, 1963) the narrative structure is made complex and ambiguous though its frequent interruption of the narrative by dreams, visions, and memories without giving the spectator a clear

distinction between the story events and the character's subjective visualization (Fabe, 2004, pp. 152-156).

Despite the fact the such plots tend to over impose on the story of the film which would seem, as Kovacs (2007, p.56) puts it, "unappealing," but in theory, and according to Bordwell (1985, p. 254), such modern narration technique would arouse anticipation and curiosity at the level of the audience. Moreover, "permanent narrative gaps" lead to a narrative that is not resolved at the end, or an open ended narrative. Kovacs (2007, p. 77) considered withholding the closure of the plot as a trait of modernism, although the theorist pointed out that it is not a condition for films belonging to the era.

Modern cinema, or as Kovacs (2007) tends to refer to it in his book "Screening Modernism" as "art films," came as an opposition for the so called "commercial entertainment films" (Kovacs, 2007, p. 21). Post-modernism proceeded this trend as a way of responding to the "American-style liberalism" by breaking the "low-high art distinction (Stam, 2000, p. 299-301). Thus, films belonging to the post-modern school are considered to be enjoyable and understandable by the "common people" while accepting and benefitting from modernism's art films (Fahimifar & Gholamali, 2013). One of the main traits of the post-modern cinema concerning its narration techniques is the fragmentation, instability, and the "disruption of the narrative flow" (Stam, 2000, pp. 301-303).

This manipulation of the film's narration by altering the conventional pattern of events is evident in Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (Bender, 1994). The film revolves around four stories in which the lives of their characters intertwine. Belonging to the post-modern school, *Pulp Fiction* defies the classical norms of representation by manipulating the temporal construction of the film (Thanouli, 2008). In other words, the chronological order of events is manipulated resulting in a confused structure that requires the spectator's attention to re-build the deformed story. Despite this, the tampering of the pattern of narration of *Pulp Fiction* does not mean that

it is hard to understand the story, the postmodernity of art film/commercial movie fusion might be evident in the way that the fragmented scenes can be rebuilt in the minds of the audience with some attention to the film, thus the film story can be reconstructed easily.

Subjectivity is a basic trait of modernism, along side with reflexivity and abstraction, (Kovacs, 2007, p. 52), and is present as well in post-modern films, as Stam (2000, p. 300) indicated, where subjectivity is nomadic and schizophrenic. In this sense, schizophrenia in the subjectivity is defined by Jameson (1991, p. 119) as “an experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence”. This definition brings back to mind the concepts of fragmentation and may come hand in hand with the un-chronological and ambiguous narration of both the modern and post-modern cinema. Subjectivity was explained extensively in Bordwell’s and Thompson’s “*Film Art*” (2008) where they explored the concept of the “depth of knowledge” in the narration. According to the theorists, subjectivity is achieved when the spectator is allowed to see, hear, or experience the character’s subjective point of view (here the theorists are considering point of view as the perception of the character and not his/her optical point of view through the camera) through hearing voices and seeing events the way the character is experiencing them or through dreams, hallucinations, and fantasies etc. (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p. 91-92). As subjectivity holds the function of explaining the inner thoughts of the character, it might as well be a tool to render the narration as unstable and discontinuous when there is no clear distinction between the real film events and the subjective scenes. For example, David Fincher’s *Fight Club* (Bell, Chaffin, & Linson, 1999) does not reveal that Tyler Durden (played by Brad Pitt) is actually a subjective manifestation of the un-named protagonist (played by Edward Norton) until the end of the film.

In brief, as narration is the plotting of events of the film, the main difference between classical cinema and the modern one is that the former tends to sequence the events objectively

and in a chronological order that favors the comprehension of the story, whereas modern film tend to tell presents the events in an out of chronological order, leaving the task for the spectator to reconstruct it. Moreover, modern films require a higher level of attention and interpretation from the audience because they tend to tell the story from the character's subjective perception while blurring the distinctive line between what is happening to characters and their subjective fantasies, dreams, hallucinations etc. Post-modern narration infuses the modern structure mainly through reflexivity and multiple subjectivities, while pertaining a level of narrative comprehension that delivers enjoyment from a less cognitive viewing.

## **6.2 Narration in TV**

Against this background, and in order to further support the argument that the contemporary quality TV series can be described as cinematic for their descendance from film traditions, elements of narration specific to film can be identified in this relatively new form of TV content. It would be helpful to study the over-all narration of a TV series by considering the show as a whole entity, as if it is a long film, and the narration of single episodes would be considered as well as an independent chapter. That is because of the nature of the studied series that hybridize the notion of an episodic plot linked by a "running plot" that is extended through out the whole season(s) (Immocenti & Pescatore, 2014). In the current study the narration in TV series will be studied considering Bordwell's "range of information" and "depth of knowledge" in relation to the narrational trends of the three main film traditions (classical, modern, and post-modern), and taking into account the distinction between the narration of the whole series and that of individual episodes.

As Bordwell and Thompson (2008) indicated, the unrestricted classical narrative is essential to "create the sense of many destinies intertwined." Such narration may turn out to be extremely useful for contemporary quality TV series. The complex narrative and characters of the studied TV shows, in addition to their ensemble character nature, provides solid grounds to

use the omniscient narration. For example, *Game of Thrones* tends to designate the role of “source of information” to various characters where at any particular episode the narration shifts from one protagonist to another. This gives the spectator an over view of the intertwined destinies of the characters, and a superiority of information. The audience know, for example, that Daenerys (played by Emilia Clarke) is gathering troops to take the throne, while the other characters do not get this information until later episodes. However, labeling the contemporary TV series as omniscient narrative would be an over generalization, since the narration of such shows provoke curiosity and surprise by having restricted narratives in the sub-plots of the series. For instance, Bran’s (played by Isaac Wright) sub-plot is highly restricted and even subjective. The spectator only gets information through the character and through his visions. Generally, quality TV series would benefit from the classical omniscient narration of the classical film (considering the whole series and the major story lines), while infusing modernistic restricted and subjective narration into their subplots.

It was mentioned before that contemporary quality TV series tend to use a non-linear complex narrative. This idea could be complemented by considering that this type of narrative TV uses a complex narration as well. The complex narration of quality TV series might be regarded as a combination of some narrational elements of both modern and post-modern cinema such as reflexive and out of chronological order narration. It would be plausible to consider the narration of such shows to have a post-modern tendency in the sense that they juggle between complex and understandable by the general public at the same time. This would give the contemporary quality TV series an artistic and elitist value (similar to that of the modern cinema) while pertaining the entertaining aspect of ordinary or traditional TV. For instance, events can be out chronological order in the episodes (*Breaking Bad* pilot episode) or even the episodes may not be linked chronologically (*American Gods*). That being said, one might consider that the modernist filmic traits that can be attributed to TV series, such as



ambiguity of narration, loose their artsy and elitist association by becoming mainstream, and by being “normal” modes of representation for the general audience. Kovacs (2007) hinted to this idea by pointing out that some narrative techniques that were traditionally targeted solely to intellectuals can become later “fashionable” and “appropriate for entertainment purposes” (p. 60). For example, in the 1980s and 1990s, the entertainment industry (e.g. Hollywood productions) became tolerant to the use of modern sophisticated narrative techniques, used in films such as *Fight Club*, or *Crash* (Cronenberg, 1996); a sign that the mass audience became familiarized to such cinematic tools and became able understand them easily (Kovacs, 2007).

On the other hand, toying with the chronological order of events creates what Bordwell (1985) calls “narrative gaps” which holds the function of arousing anticipation, curiosity, suspense, or/and surprise (p.254). These functions ought to be considered vital for a quality series for they can create the motivation for the viewers to binge through the next episode or wait eagerly for the next episode or season. There are numerous examples in TV series for such uses of narrative gaps, for instance, the ending of the sixth episode of the second season of *The Handmaid's Tale* where a handmaid bombs a hall full of powerful people and the episode leaves the story for the next episode to reveal who died in the explosion, or in *Game of Thrones* when season five ended with a main character (John Snow) being stabbed and not revealing his fate until the end of the second episode of the sixth season. The serial format makes it possible to withhold crucial story information at the end of an episode, leaving the events hanging for an unspoken promise to provide closure in the next episode. Therefore, when film narration creates narrative gaps, it creates anticipation to construct the story, this same narration technique holds an extra function in TV series to drive the viewers into the next episode. Here two types of narrative gaps that are specific to serial TV can be identified, one that is specific to a single episode narrative gap, and another to a multiple episode narrative gap. A single episode narrative gap would be a gap that is revealed within the same episode. The pilot episode

of *Breaking Bad* can be regarded as an illustration for such narration technique, the episode opens with an old man, who is revealed later in the scene to be Walter White, who is fleeing in a van with passed out passenger beside him and a dead man in the trunk; the driver stops for a while and when he hears the “police” sirens he raises his gun awaiting their arrival. Too many questions are raised during this scene, and clearly, it is situated out of the chronological order of events since the very next scene starts with the caption “Three weeks earlier.” The narration of the episode withholds the sufficient information that would help the viewer figure the answers to the raised questions until the end of the episode whereby the spectators are informed that the character was cooking crystal meth, as for the police sirens, it was revealed that they are actually fire fighters going to turn off the fire that he caused earlier. By that the episode would have provided closure for the narrative gap that was presented in the beginning, and at the same time left the audience to speculate about what will happen next. Other narrative gaps may not reveal the hints to their riddles until the next episode, or next multiple episodes. Starz’s *American Gods* (Cegielski, et al., 2017) would serve as a good example for narrative gaps that include multiple episodes. Briefly, the show is about Shadow Moon (played by Ricky Whittle), who accompanies the mysterious Mr. Wednesday, played by Ian McShane, in his battle with the old and new gods. Episode three of the first season ends with Shadow entering his room and seeing his dead wife sitting on the bed. The narration before that was mainly restricted to Shadow’s perspective, so the audience did not know what could have happened to the wife since Shadow knows that she is dead. The narrative gap left the audience wondering how is the dead wife back and maybe how will the protagonist react after having the chance to confront his cheating-dead-wife. The next episode shifts the perspective towards the wife and provide information about how she ended up in the last scene of the previous episode, only to cut the episode at the very same scene, and keeping the reveal of how will this assumed impossible meeting look like until the fifth episode. Here the multi-episode narrative gap served as a bridge

between the episodes and created anticipation and curiosity for many episodes rather than for one episode. The latter example also demonstrates a narration model presented by Clarke (2012, p. 139) in which the patterning of the episodes themselves is not linear, and where the episodes do not have to occur chronologically one after the other. Through these two types of narrative gaps, it can be noticed that TV can make use of its medium specificity (e.g. episodic narrative) to utilize cinema's modern and post-modern narration in a way specific to cinematic TV series by not only manipulating the chronological order of the events in an episode, but also expanding this notion to the whole series (or season) by tampering the order of occurrence of the episodes themselves.

Such "stretched narratives" encourage viewer "hypothesization" and speculation (Clarke, 2012, p. 139). Bordwell (1985, p. 256) had discussed the idea of the narration encouraging the audience to build hypothesis about the film through "delaying the exposition" of the story elements in the plot. For TV, and especially in the age of digital and social media, quality TV series seem to strive on such notion of hypothisastion. Due to the complexity of their plots and their attention to details, quality TV series become open to many interpretations. These narrative gaps may be regarded as riddles that the spectator has to solve before the correct answer is revealed in the next episode(s). YouTube channels and fan blogs feed this riddle analogy by providing theories hypothisations, and analysis created by the viewers of the show. The TV series themselves seem to capitalize on this interactive way of watching by dropping trailers for the next episode or season, sneak peaks of the upcoming episode, or interviews with the actors and creators discussing what would happen next. Therefore, narrative gaps that promote hypothisation may be considered to be taking the experience of watching TV to a new level, an interactive watching, where the spectators do not only watch to see how the story unfolds, but also they keep watching the new episodes to validate their hypothesis and whether their answer to the riddle was correct.

The notion of the “depth of knowledge” that the quality TV series plot provides, specifically the subjectivity of narration (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.91), gives insight to another narrational inheritance from cinema, mainly from the modern and post-modern traditions. Although presenting the story information from the perspective of the protagonist increases sympathy with the character (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.91), a function that is crucial for identification with the character (Carroll, 1990), the current research is more concerned with subjectivity as a narration tool that influences the construction of the story. Subjectivity in the cinematic TV series might be seen as being modernist in the sense there is no concrete distinction between diegetic and subjective scenes, and in other instances it might be regarded as post-modernist by presenting multiple and fragmented subjectivities. For instance, *The Affair* (Treem, et al., 2014) presented its plot by re-telling almost the same story information through the perspectives of its protagonist. In the first season each episode was fragmented into two parts, that of the view point of Noah and Ruth, whereas the second season multiplied this subjectivity and added the perspectives of the wife and husband of those characters. *Mr. Robot* (Esmail, Golin, & Hamilton, 2015), in its first season, on the other hand, adopted the mind twisting technique used in *The Fight Club* (David Fincher, 1999) by presenting a narration restricted to its protagonist, Elliot (Played by Rami Malek), only to reveal at the very last episode that the narration was in fact all subjective and that him and “Mr. Robot” are the same person, where the latter is a manifestation of Elliot’s mind. In this example, the narration consciously tricked the viewer by hiding the distinction between the real and subjective scenes. Another extreme example would be *American Gods*, the narration of this TV series might be closer to the definition of a modernist art film where the line between the real, fantasy, and mental subjectivity is blurred and intersecting, making it hard for the viewer to make a clear distinction when it comes to re-constructing the story. This increased ambiguity in *American Gods* did not explain itself even after the ending of the first season leaving the

viewer to hypothesize and speculate if the whole narrative is told from the narrator's subjectivity, or that of the main character, or even if any of the events is real.

A cinematic TV series has the opportunity to play numerous narration games with spectator because of its serial form. It can hybridize many styles, for instance looking at shows as a unified entity, many can be regarded as having a classical omniscient narration combined with a post-modernistic fragmented and non-linear patterning of events, with modernist/post-modernist subjective subplots, and modernist open-ended episodes. These narration techniques, naturally, are accompanied by audio/visual techniques to deliver or hide the story information. These audio/visual techniques, labeled under the style of aesthetics will be discussed in the next chapter in attempt to identify a cinematic style in TV series.

## 7- Style

Along side the content and the narration in cinema, style is another notion worth of exploring when it comes to identifying filmic traditions and to spotting the "cinematic" part of the discussed TV material. That is because, as mentioned before, the form (e.g. structure) and style define the art film when these two concepts are dominant over the story (Bordwell, 1985; Kovacs, 2007). Based on the conceptualization of the term cinematic as "a mode of engagement with film that relies upon distinctive and unique features of film media" (Thomson-Jones, 2008, p.1), the different uses of film styles, mainly *mise-en-scène*, cinematography, and editing, are to be explored in relation to film and contemporary TV series.

In an attempt to study the cinematic style, some elements can be induced from these arguments such as what is happening in front of the camera (i.e. *mise-en-scène*), how the objects are being filmed (i.e. cinematography), and how these shots are combined into a coherent scene and film (i.e. editing).

## 7.1 Mise-en-scène in Film

Mise-en-scène, a French word that literally means “putting into the scene”, incorporates all the elements that appear on screen whether the filmmaker had control over them or not (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.112). The components of the mise-en-scène can be identified by the setting, costumes and makeup, staging, and lighting (Hayward, 2000).

**7.1.1 Setting.** “The Setting is the time and place in which the film’s story occurs” (Boggs & Petrie, 2008, p.101). As the classical cinema depended mostly on the “photographic realism,” the setting and the actors were staged in a linear perspective and positioned centered with respect to the camera, whereas in the post-modern era the images tend to be more layered and special effects became available (Thanouli, 2008). In post modernism the artificiality of the image is displayed (Thanouli, 2008). Objects and elements of the setting that are used by the actor or have a narrative role are called props, and they can become a motif in the narration (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.117). This means that they can signify some thematic aspects in the narrative and guide the audience to deeper interpretations about the film (Rabiger, 2008, p.205). For example, in *Trainspotting* (Macdonald, 1996), a film that deals with drug addiction, the filmmaker visualized the character’s high on heroin by having Renton (played by Ewan McGregor) lay on the ground, on a red carpet, after injecting the drug, and his weight pushes the carpet deep into the ground. In this example (regardless of the way the scene was shot as cinematography will be discussed later) the filmmaker obviously required a setup to build this room mechanism and utilized the setting to provide subjective information about how the character feels and about the effect of the drug.

**7.1.2 Costumes.** Costumes and makeup can be utilized in a film to achieve authenticity or even to create a stylistic mood (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.119). For instance, the characters in *Braveheart* (Davey, Gibson, & Ladd Jr., 1995) wore costumes that typify the Scottish warriors of the thirteenth century what could be regarded to increase the authenticity

of the film by abiding to the costume stereotypes of its geographic and historical period. On the other hand, Stanley Kubrick resorted to a more stylized look for the characters of *A Clockwork Orange* (Kubrick, 1971) who wore unconventional wardrobe and makeup. Similar to the elements of the setting, costumes and makeup can also be a tool to deliver information about the story and characters by having a motif within the narrative (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.119). For instance, in *Game of Thrones*, when Sansa (played by Sophie Turner) was an innocent girl promised to marry the king, she wore her hair and wardrobe similar to that of Cersei, the mother of the king, and in later seasons after the character had survived captivity she dyed her hair black and wore a black costume signifying a turn in the character's personality and the motivation of revenge. Similarly, in *Scandal* (Rhimes, Beers, & Wilding, 2012), a show about a Washington political fixer, the main character Olivia Pope (played by Kerry Washington) wore a white hat (this white hat is also usually present in the setting and often talked about) as a signification of being on the good side, and in later seasons when the character turned to murder and deception she was assigned primarily black wardrobe.

**7.1.3 Staging and Acting.** Staging and acting are another main element of mise-en-scène that can help in the narration of the story and in building a style for the film. When acting is considered, it is often discussed in terms of realism (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008). Thinking of acting in these terms parallels the previous idea about authenticity and stylisity of the wardrobe. For example, the acting approach could be as near as possible to mimicking real life and real people's reactions in respective situations (such as Brayan Cranston's performance in *Breaking Bad*) or, although it might be considered rare, acting can be stylized to achieve a unique mood in the film or in the TV series such as the performance of Tom Hardy when on stage in *Bronson* (Hansford & Preston, 2008) or that of Gillain Anderson as the new god of media in the series *American Gods*.

**7.1.4 Lighting.** A dominant lighting schema in classical Hollywood films was the three-point-lighting (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.128). Such lighting design is composed of a key light (laminating the subject from the front), fill light (compensating for the shadow from the key light), and a back light (creating an outline for the subject) (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.128). The different variations of the three-point-lighting seems to be genre defining. For example, the high-key-light, a lighting design that uses fill and back lights to reduce shadows, is predominantly used for comedies and drama (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.129). Whereas, the low-key-light is used for mystery and horror films, and it defines the film noir genre due to the high contrast and harsh shadows produced from such lighting design (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.130).

## **7.2 Mise-en-scène in TV**

After defining the elements of the mise-en-scène, it is worth exploring their practical uses and functions in the narration of films and TV series. Mise-en-scène can be a tool to guide the attention of the audience to important areas in the frame (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.140). There would be numerous examples that illustrates this function through staging the important objects or characters in the center of the frame, or drawing the attention to an illuminated part in the frame, or even using color to signal out an object that has a narrative purpose. The Netflix original series *The Haunting of Hill House* (Averill, Falvey, Flanagan, & Frank, 2018) is a horror TV show that revolves around a family that lived in a house haunted by ghosts, and the narration of the series continuously jumps in time from the present to when the characters were young and living in the hill house. This show is discussed here because it frequently uses mise-en-scène, in what may be described as an unconventional way, to hide subjects in the open air rather than using the function to draw the attention of the audience to them. In each of its ten episodes, *The Haunting of Hill House* featured a couple of “hidden” ghosts, the actors playing these ghosts where staged in the background, lit with a dim light,



wore colors that merged with the background, and appeared in the wide shot of the scene. There is no foreseeable narrational function for these hidden characters in terms of story information, but their presence, if noticed by the spectator, adds to the illusion that the house is haunted. This use of *mise-en-scène* might still have an effect on the audience by increasing their attentiveness and attention to details in order to spot these hidden figures, which would probably guide the audience along the way to stay focused and better understand the complex narrative and narration of the series. Assuming that the spectator would search for the ghosts in every episode and that this would increase attentiveness leading to a better comprehension of the whole narrative, or even just getting satisfaction and gratification from simply spotting a hidden detail, the effect of these hidden figures will be neutralized if they were unnoticed. Here comes a new advantage of TV in the age of internet where the people who succeeded in noticing this detail would share it on the blogs and YouTube channels so that other people will become aware of the riddle and try to find the hidden ghosts in future episodes. This idea adds to the concept of interactive watching that was discussed earlier in the current study, where in addition to watching the series to know how the story will unfold, spectators would watch and challenge themselves to find the hidden figures in the episode. Whether the effect of the hidden objects as discussed is valid, it would still serve as an additional technique to what Mittell (2006) referred to as re-watchability of the TV series. As the complex narration leads to watching the series more than once in order to better understand the plot or see it in a new light. Using *mise-en-scène* to feature recurrent hidden objects would be an additional motivation for the audience to watch the show again to see what they missed.

Mise-en-scène can be used in ways that help arouse curiosity and suspense (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.140). Using the same series as an example, *The Haunting of Hill House* utilizes this function by hiding the identity of a main and recurrent ghost that is referred to in the series as the bent-neck-lady. Through distorting her facial features by makeup and/or

graphic effects, and having the hair of the actor cover most of her face, and by staging her in a way that prevents the viewer from getting an informed look on her, the bent-neck-lady remained anonymous until revealing her identity in episode eight where she turned out to actually be one of the inhabitants of the house. In this sense, the elements of the *mise-en-scène* could be compared to the elements of narration where narrative gaps can be created and story information can be withheld or delayed to create certain reactions from the audience.

Finally, elements of the *mise-en-scène* can add expressive qualities and give the shots an additional emotional layer by having a narrative or a narrational motif (Hayward, 2000, p. 231). In *The Haunting of Hill House*, the setting of the house included a mysterious room with a red door. Throughout the episodes of the series it was revealed that the room is subjective to each character, and it does not have a unified physical description. For example, for Luke (one of the kids in the house) it is perceived as a tree house, and for other members it was perceived as a toy room, or music room etc. The series provided some hints by having a clearly visible red object in each of the perceived settings. At the end of the series, events lead all the remaining living characters to enter the room, and then the plot supposedly jumped in time into a happy ending where the whole family was celebrating. This ending features a red cake as prop of the final set that played a key role in turning the ending of the series into a modernistic and subjective one that is open to interpretations because of the color of the cake. The spectator can think that the family actually had a happy ending or that this scene is an un-real perceived scene just as the other scenes in previous episodes that included a red object in the set, and that the family is still trapped in the mysterious room with the red door. Because of this use of *mise-en-scène*, it can be said that the show has two endings, or a modernistic open ending. It can be noticed as well that the ending scene can be read differently according to the interpretation of the spectator, for example, the spectators who did not pay attention to the queues about the red objects and the subjective room throughout the series, would conceive the resolution as happy

ending, whereas those who paid more attention to the series and who read it cognitively or semiotically, would think about the ending in a different way. This observation may add to the distinctions of the cinematic TV series, where such TV productions can be entertaining to the mass audience (e.g. providing a clear resolution) and, at the same time, enjoyed by the more cinematically curious audience through having the potential to be read symbolically and expressively.

These narrational and expressive functions of *mise-en-scène* would not be possible unless they are presented to the spectator in a way that favors the intended interpretation or reaction of the filmmaker. Therefore the ways that the objects and characters are filmed and lit are essential elements to be studied when it comes to attributing a cinematic quality to TV series, because the translation of the *mise-en-scène* into the screen through the camera is the basic distinctive feature of cinema and TV as visual narrative mediums.

### **7.3 Cinematography in Film**

As *mise-en-scène* indicates what is put in the frame, cinematography would be the how, or the way the shot is filmed (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.162). After all, the film speaks in scenes, and its images are part of its non-verbal language (Boggs & Petrie, 2008, p.125). Cinematography in film will be examined according to the conceptualization provided by Bordwell and Thompson's (2008) where the theorists identified three factors for the film cinematographic qualities which are the photographic aspect of the shot, the framing of the shot, and the duration of the shot (p.162). Studying these aspects would be vital for the current research since the cinematographic techniques and the way they are implemented in the film can define the cinematic aspect of film as art by exploiting the freedom from spoken words and gaining the ability to communicate through images, to show actions from any vantage point, and to manipulate time and space (Boggs & Petrie, 2008, p.126). So, these cinematic elements are to be explored in reference to the context and to their function or the message that they

convey, and their presence in TV series would be an additional evidence of the cinematicity of contemporary quality TV series concerning style and image, especially if these cinematic elements held similar functions in TV as they do in film.

On the level of the photographic aspect of the image, lighting and contrast can be used to direct the viewer's attention to the dramatically important parts of the frame (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008). For example, the dramatically important characters or objects would be lit in a way that draws the audience's attention to this part of the frame, or contrasted against the background to increase their presence. Contrast in the image was utilized by director Nelson Pereira dos Santos in the 1963 film *Barren Lives* for a different dramatic purpose, the director over-exposed the windows of the prison cell to convey the idea of contrast between the prisoner's internal emotional state and the freedom in the exterior of the cell (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008).

**7.3.1 Depth of Field.** Depth of field, another element that contributed to the photographic aspect of the cinematic image, determines what layers of the *mise-en-scène* are in focus (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.173). Controlling the optical focus gives filmmakers an extra tool to communicate narrative and expressive messages. For instance, a selective focus can be used to emphasize a certain element in the *mise-en-scène* while deemphasizing or blurring the surrounding (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.173). The optical focus may be utilized to communicate a subjective state for the character (Boggs & Petrie, 2008, p.155). For example, in *The Graduate* (Turman, 1967) soft focus was used when Elaine (played by Katharine Ross) learned from her son, Ben (played by Dustin Hoffman), about his affair. Elaine's face seemed blurred to convey a state of shock and despair, and the shot returns into focus when the news is comprehended by the character (Boggs & Petrie, 2008, p.155).

**7.3.2 Slow motion/fast Motion.** Another photographic aspect that is unique for cinema is the ability to control the speed of movement as seen on the screen through fast motion and slow

motion (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.166). Consider the scene in *A Clockwork Orange* where Alex (played by Malcom McDowell) had wild sex with two girls in his room, Kubrick rendered the scene in fast motion to achieve a comic effect (Boggs & Petrie, 2008, p.157). On the other hand, slow motion can function in films as an indicator of dream or fantasy sequences, or to project power such as in martial-arts films, or to emphasize on a moment of high drama, or to convey expressive purposes (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.166). An example of the use of slow motion for expressive purposes would be when the gang in the same film were walking on the marina and Alex starts a random fight, pushing a member into the water, and then cutting his hand, Kubrick used slow motion in that scene what may be read as an expression of the absurdity and violent nature of the characters.

**7.3.3 Framing.** In addition to the photographic aspect, framing the shot in films has much to do with the effect and meaning of the image. Framing is related to many factors such as the angle of the camera (e.g. low angle, high angle), and distance (e.g. close up, medium shot, wide shot) (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.190,191). Framing can help to add visual interest by stressing out on details and highlighting textures with a close up shot, or manifesting huge spaces with the aid of the wide shot (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.193). Beside creating visual balance, framing is used to suggest dramatic information or emotional attitudes (Boggs & Petrie, 2008, p.152). For example, it would be customary to consider a low angle shot to render its respective character as powerful, or to think of a character that is shot from a high angle to be defeated (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.192). But framing does not acquire such absolute meaning, for the context of the film is what determines the function of the shot (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.192). For instance, in *Touch of Evil* (1958) Orson Welles used the high camera angle on Janet Leigh (played by Susan Vargas) when she entered prison to convey a sense of helplessness (Boggs & Petrie, 2008, p.153), and the director used the same type of high angle shot in *Citizen Kane* (1941) when Kane was delivering a speech what him

seem small and insignificant in the shot (p.153). In this same scene the director used mise-en-scène to complement his expressive message by having a gigantic poster of the character placed in a way that highlighted the contrast and made the politician seem to be “looming powerfully above the world” (Boggs & Petrie, 2008, p.153). This shot illustrates how framing and mise-en-scène worked together to represent the interior conflict of the character cinematically (Boggs & Petrie, 2008, p.153).

Framing may also serve to cue the spectator to consider certain shots as subjective shots (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.192). Here three kinds of shots are to be defined in correspondence to the perceptual (and not optical) point-of-view and as indicated by Boggs and Petrie (2008) in *The Art of Watching Films*. An objective point-of-view shot can be thought of as if the camera is a window that the spectator is watching the characters and events through (p.127). This type of shots relies on straightforward camera angles without drawing attention to the filming apparatus, and correspondently, it would not comment or interpret the actions, but merely record it (p.127). A subjective point-of-view shot is synonymous to the optical point-of-view shot of a character that is characterized by a moving camera that allows the audience to see what the character is seeing (p.129). Another type of shots that is considered subjective without being from the vantage point of the character is the indirect-subjective point-of-view (p.130). This kind of shot brings the spectator closer to the action as perceived by the character, for example, a close up that conveys an emotional reaction of the character (p.130). In *Film as Art*, Bordwell and Thompson (2008) seem to merge the subjective point of view and the indirect-subjective point of view into one category. The current research will borrow the conceptualization of Bordwell and Thompson (2008) of subjective point of view as an un-objective one, and will refer to the subjective point of view as conceptualized by Boggs and Petrie (2008) as the optical point of view or POV. The shower scene in *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960) can be used as an illustration for how the director used subjective shots to communicate

the threat that the character of Lila Crane was experiencing when she was being stabbed by Norman Bates. The scene alternated between POV shots and subjective close up shots of her face and the knife, this combination is said to create a sense of danger and put the spectator in the murder scene with the protagonists (Boggs & Petrie, 2008, p. 132).

**7.3.4 Camera Movement.** A major resource for cinema is the ability to create a movement in the shot (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.195). Camera movement can be used to reframe a moving object, or character, into the shot (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.199), but they can, as well, serve to communicate visually with the spectator. For instance, by moving the camera smoothly inwards into a scene, a sense of mystery and discovery would be established where anticipation would be increased (Boggs & Petrie, 2008, p.142). Subjective shots can be, as well, created through the use of camera mobility. For example, a shaky camera movement that is mimicking the eye sight of a character would create a POV and emphasize a sense of reality (Boggs & Petrie, 2008, p.142). When this type of hand-held camera movement is not used as a representation of the character's eye sight, it would convey a sense of authenticity, as the use of this technique in pseudo-documentaries such as *The Blair Witch Project* (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.198), or it can highlight chaotic moments of violence because the random movements would fit the nature of such violent or action scenes (Boggs & Petrie, 2008, p.152).

In cinema, the mobility of the camera can function as a tool of narration. For example, in a scene of Jean Renoir's *Grand Illusion* (1937) that depicted a character who is pulling a string to signal that he is about to suffocate while digging a tunnel, an independent camera movement was used to show that the rest of his group did not notice his signal. In this example the movement of the camera presented information that the characters do not have, thus creating, somewhat, an unrestricted narration (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.202). Building on this line of thought, a POV shot, that provides information as the character is experiencing it, would be considered as a technique for restricted narration. Moreover, independent camera

movement can indicate a modernist (and post-modernist) consciousness by drawing attention to its presence by an “independent camera movement” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.202). That is, when the camera moves in a way that it is not reframing, or following the movement of the characters, the spectator would become more conscious about the apparatus and would be motivated to actively interpret the shot.

**7.3.5 Duration: long take.** After the emergence of continuity editing and the coming of sound, the average duration of a shot was about 10 seconds, shots that are extended into lengthier duration than the average are considered long takes (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.208). In some cases, a choice is made by the filmmaker to use the long take as an alternative to the notion of presenting a scene through the editing of multiple shots, in that case, when the whole scene is presented with a single long take, the shot is called a sequence shot (from the French term “plan-sequence”) (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.208). A contemporary example for a sequence shot would be the opening scene of *La La Land* (Berger, Gilbert, Horowitz, & Platt, 2016) where the whole opening scene was shot in a, about four minutes, long take following the people stuck in a traffic jam and their imaginary escape into a world of dance and music. Long takes are praised by Andre Bazin in his realist aesthetic approach that cinema records real time (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.207). But the mentioned example don't seem to be projecting a sense of realism, after all the scene depicts a musical score which is not a realist representation of the reaction of real people in traffic. Besides that, the camera in this sequence shot is strongly present, and it can be considered to be drawing attention to itself by the calculated and precise following of the dance moves of the crowd, by stopping and launching the camera movement on music cues, and by having the actors look into the lens. Due to such reasons, and for holding a nostalgic vibe for a classical musical genre, this shot can be considered post-modernistic. Putting the narrational function of *La La Land*'s long-take-opening-sequence, one cannot but notice that this technique draws attention to the “how did



they do it” factor, the spectator would most probably be thinking about work of choreographing a big number of dancers into such calculated and flawless long take. Bordwell and Thompson (2008) indicated that a long take emphasizes on the performance and other elements of mise-en-scène (p.211). And, from the analyses of this shot, and the assumption that it arises a fascination about how it was filmed at the level of the audience, an additional function of a post modernistic long take would be highlighting the process of filming it and arousing a sense of amusement about the filming technique.

#### **7.4 Cinematography in TV**

When style in film is studied, the notion of auteurism is worth to be considered in the light of the film’s aesthetic. A film auteur foregrounds his or her own creativity and style in the film (Naremore, 1999, p. 10). Although, hypothetically, any person who contributes creatively in the film would be considered some kind of author, but it is customary to consider the film’s director as the auteur since he or she would play the most crucial role in the production process (Naremore, 1999, p. 9). However, in TV series the auteur may not be clearly identified as in film because of the fact that in many series multiple directors direct few or single episodes (Bignell, 2007, p.161). The executive producers of the show, also called the creators of the TV series, tend to maintain their original ideas throughout the episodes (Shattuc, 2005, p.142), and ensure stylistic unity by providing a template of the aesthetical identity of the whole series (Bignell, 2007, p.161). Whether the creators of the TV series are to considered auteurs or not is still a debate among TV theorists, but what concerns the current study is the presence of a stylistic unity throughout the series. This is considered an important point when it comes to putting a cinematic label on a TV series because hypothetically there will be, among the whole run of the series, cinematically fueled episodes and other episodes that may be considered to belong to a traditional TV series aesthetic. For this reason, an for a better assessment of the cinematic aspect of quality TV series, the dominant and recurrent visual style

will be considered in the following paragraphs rather than singular instances of the utilization of cinematic language in TV.

In addition, Boggs and Petrie (2008) indicated that the cinematic photographic effect should be present for the sole reason of being beautiful or powerful, it should instead be justified dramatically and psychologically, and should communicate sensually or intellectually with the audience in the best way rather than showing off another new camera trick (p.125). Building on this indication, it would not be sufficient to simply spot the cinematic visual elements in a TV show to describe it as cinematic, but they should fit into the context and communicate visually with the audience. That thought in mind, a selection of some shows is made where *Mr. Robot* and *The Handmaid's Tale* are considered as examples for framing, camera angles, depth of field, and slow motion. Since, to the knowledge of the researcher, no particular TV series uses predominantly long takes as its defining stylistic feature, specific examples will be used including series such as *Game of Thrones* and *Daredevil*.

**7.4.1 Cinematography in *Mr. Robot*.** An example of a distinct visual aesthetic would be the framing of USA Network's *Mr. Robot* (Esmail, Golin, & Hamilton, 2015), created by Sam Esmail. The show revolves around Elliot Alderson (played by Rami Malek) who is an unstable vigilante hacker who gets himself involved in a complex cyber situation involving global and powerful players. Few episodes into the show, and the spectator would easily recognize a repetitive, consistent, and unique way of framing characterized by shots where the characters, or part of their body, appear on the edges of the frame, and having a significant portion of the frame dedicated to the background. To best visualize this framing style it would be helpful to think of it as a wide shot of a certain setting or environment where the characters, situated at a close distance to the camera, appear on the edges. This unconventional and somehow experimental framing yields the characters to appear small with respect to the environment. Generating from the assumption that this conscious filming technique is used cinematically to

convey information about the characters and the narrative, or to communicate with the audience intellectually and sensually, such framing could be interpreted cinematically within the context of the show. By emphasizing on the background environment, sometimes even more than on the characters themselves, the show might be positioning the surrounding as a character in the series and by that it would be commenting on the society. Many elements in *Mr. Robot* seem to strengthen the notion that the show aims to be a commentary on the society and on contemporary issues. For instance, F-Society (Elliot's group) carry a significant resemblance to Anonymous regarding their cyber hacking work and their masked figures, and E-Crop, the global company that Elliot is trying to bring down, may also resemble any similar organization such as Apple or Google for example, that in addition to a cameo of USA former president Barack Obama playing himself while still in position in the first episodes of the second season where he was seen talking on TV about the attack of F-society. Cinematography, and especially framing, seems to be complementing this idea. Consider the opening shot of the show as an example, the camera tracks away from a panoramic shot of the city to start revealing a group of business men standing in front a big glass window, the characters are almost un-identifiable because they are shot with a low-key lighting, and they are blurred, keeping the focus on the background buildings. This and numerous other examples in the series use framing to focus on the environment and make the characters less important in the shot, a visual style that the filmmakers would be communicating through with the audience, and maybe hinting to look beyond the characters and the dramatic events, and to think about the context and ideology of the show. Another contemporary concern the show might be commenting on through cinematography is loneliness and isolation. The characters appear to be alone in the vast majority of the shots, where the empty space or moving people are dominant in the shot. Even when two characters are having a dialogue, the over-the-shoulder shot is rarely used, instead the characters are situated in the lower edge of the frame with their face closer to the edge,

whereas the wider shots often isolate the characters using some elements of the mise-en-scène by having foreground objects to separate the characters or using the frame-in-frame.

**7.4.2 Cinematography in *The Handmaid's Tale*.** *The Handmaid's Tale* (Miller, et al., 2017) uses similar framing, characters are often positioned on the edges of the frame rather than in the center. Interpreting this framing into the context of the show, it would be plausible to think that the filmmakers are trying to communicate visually the series concept of marginalizing and repressing women. After all, the main concept of *The Handmaid's Tale* is the discrimination of women in the show's imagined dystopian world. Because woman, and especially the handmaids, can not express themselves freely through dialogue even when they are alone for the fear of spies, the show uses cinematography to communicate their shows and feelings visually in addition to the performance of the actors. For example, framing the handmaids in the lower part of the frame might be considered to emphasize their powerlessness and defeat, but most noticeably is the use of subjective close up shots to communicate the inner dialogue of the characters, especially that of June who is the protagonist of the show. It is very redundant in the whole series to have low angle close up shots of June where the camera seems to be very close to the actress's face in a way that may feel uncomfortable to the viewer, these shots are used to express the emotions of June, especially when she is narrating through voice over or when she is suppressing her thoughts. These close ups, most of the shots of the other handmaids, are shot from a low angle. It would be obvious that these low angle shots are not intended to convey a sense of power or control, rather they collaborate with the characters costumes, white hats that extend to above their faces, where logistically shooting from a lower angle helps to show their faces which would have been hidden by hat if were shot from a higher angle, and cinematically the hats block the area above their heads yielding the low angle shot to convey a sense of powerlessness. As subjective shots are considered, the show utilizes several uses of POV shots that illustrates what June is seeing. There are several instances in

the series where slow motion is used, as well, to portray subjective shots and highlight June's perception. For example, a scene in the first episode of the first season when the handmaids are asked to stone a rapist, June's Close up is filmed in slow motion to highlight her frustration and anger. In this scene, the shots varied between slow motion and normal speed to intensify the aggression and violence of the stoning act. The perpendicular high angle shots that was used in this scene and in the scenes where the handmaids were raped might be considered to resonate with the phrase: "under his eye" (a phrase that is frequently used in the series) and may be regarded to highlight the irony of using religion to justify violent and immoral acts by literally shooting the scenes from "under his eye". Handmaid's Tale also uses the depth of field cinematically to communicate visually with the viewers. Most of the shots, especially the close ups, have a narrow depth of field where the background is blurred to the degree that it is unrecognizable. This might be seen as a visual cue for the isolation of the characters and their narrow range of knowledge.

**7.4.3 The long take.** Bordwell and Thompson (2008) quoted director Steven Spielberg (who occasionally employs long takes in his films) when he explained using long takes by considering that "there's so much cutting and so many close-ups being shot today I think directly as an influence from television" (p.210). This statement would make the reader think that the long take, being a cinematic technique, is used as a distinction between TV and film. But, there are numerous examples of using the long take, and sequence shots, in the allegedly cinematic TV series discussed in the current research. Just to name few examples of using this techniques in TV, consider the long take in *Game of Thrones* season six episode nine titled "Battle of the Bastards" (Benioff, Caulfield, Doelger, Strauss, & Weiss, 2016) where a good portion of the war scene was presented as a one-shot, or the, almost, eleven minutes one-long-take fight season in episode four of the third season *Daredevil* under the title *Blindsided* (Chory,

et al., 2018). Other elaborated and ambitious examples that took the sequence shot into a new level would be the full episode as a long take that *Mr. Robot* used in its fourth episode of the third season *Runtime Error* (Bradstreet, Esmail, & Iberti, 2017), or, before that, the episode *Triangle* (Carter & Spotnitz, 1998) of *The X-Files* season six episode three. All of the listed examples can be considered to belong to quality TV series that have a cinematic visual style, and the use of the long take and sequence shots adds to this assertion.

As mentioned earlier, cinematic techniques are analyzed and interpreted with consideration of the context of the text that they appear in. It would be out of the scope of the current study to interpret these techniques individually, but some examples that are significant for this study and that would help make an assessment of the filmicness of the TV series would be worth exploring. The long take of *Game of Thrones*' "Battle of the Bastards" was shot using (or gave the impression of) a hand-held camera which may have added a sense of realism to the scene and emphasized on the chaotic situation of the fight. The predominantly medium shot can be considered as an objective shot following the actions and movements of John Snow from a fairly close distance. This shot can be, arguably, considered objective because it did not suffice the elements of a subjective shot as indicated earlier according to the conceptualization of Bordwell and Thompson (2008), and Boggs and Petrie (2008) such as being a POV shot or having close ups that brings the audience closer to what the character is feeling or think of. But, by being restricted to a single character, the shot may have managed to make the audience experience the situation as the character was experiencing it by narrowing the vision to the space close to the character and having the enemy's horses, swords, and arrows get in and out of the frame rapidly and continuously. It can be claimed that the use of the long take in this context increases the element of shock and anticipation, and motivates the spectator to pay more attention to the details of the shot. The use of a similar cinematic technique in *Daredevil* may not have served the same functions as that in *Game of Thrones*. While it may be tricky to

categorize the previous example as a subjective or objective shot, *Daredevil*'s long take is undisputedly an objective shot. The camera follows the action, most of the time, and varies the distance between the lens and the camera creating a mixture of wide, medium, and sometimes close-up shots. But the camera movement seem to be more conscious with a priority to gain a better coverage of the fighting moves and the character's reactions. Enemy do come in the frame suddenly, but they remain in frame until defeated. At a moment in this scene when Daredevil is on the ground, the camera tilts up to show two men beating him before they are pushed backwards by a movement by the protagonist that happened off-screen. This, and other similar moments, hint that the main function of the scene was to display the strength and skills of the character.

Far from being exhaustive, the examination of the above cinematographic techniques are a generalized observation that can be made about contemporary quality TV series that their use of long takes serve, in varying degrees, to enhance the spectacle of the show and draw attention to the sophisticated choreography and calculated camera movements rather than utilizing the technique to visually communicate with the audience or to serve the narrative.

Moreover, the interpretation of the cinematographic elements in *Mr. Robot* and *The Handmaid's Tale* may be an evidence of a unique style, and that the various elements of cinematography, at least in the mentioned series, are justified in the context of the show, and communicate either information about the characters or an ideology about the theme of the series, thus it can be said that in quality TV series the cinematography is utilized cinematically.

## **7.5 Editing in Film**

Film editing can be defined as the coordination and interaction between different shots (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.218). But the main function of editing seem to vary according to the different justifications of art in cinema. For example, Bazin, being an advocate for the representational and realistic aesthetic in cinema, identified with a subtle editing style that is

characterized by “invisible” cutting, or what is called continuity editing (Fischer, 1999, p. 67). The basic purpose of such continuity editing is to present a clear story by arranging shots coherently, and preserving the continuity of space, time, and action through out a series of shots that flow smoothly in the film (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008). Whereas, theorists who favor an expressional aesthetic for cinema, such as Rudolph Arnheim, believed that continuity of space and time should be broken to distance the cinematic representation of events from everyday reality (Fischer, 1999, p.66).

Since continuity editing is used in favor of the story to ensure “narrative continuity” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.231), it is associated with classical American films. The main objective of such editing would be to tell the story through a sequence of shots that flow seamlessly without drawing unnecessary attention to the style while being dramatically effective at the same time (Dancyger, 2011, p.371). To achieve such smooth flow a visual balance between the respective shots is established through similarity of composition and lighting (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.231), and a sense of direction is maintained (Dancyger, 2011, p.372) through preserving the direction of movement or eye sight of the characters in the scene (from the left or right side of the frame). Moreover, the shots in a continuity editing would flow in a logical sense (Dancyger, 2011, p.372), for example, if one shot depicts a character that appears shocked, the next logical shot would be a representation of the reason for the character’s reaction (Fischer, 1999, p.73). To complement the notion of telling a clear story, continuity editing deploys a rhythm that is dependent on the camera distance from the object (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.231). Under the assumption that the viewer needs more time to comprehend shots that carry more details, wide shots are given more screen time than medium shots, and the latter more time than close ups (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.231).



A typical Hollywood film may contain one thousand to three thousand edited shots, depending on the genre where action films have more shot count (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.226). Based on this observation, it can be inferred that the length of shots in a scene has a direct effect in creating the rhythm of the film and in having affecting the experience of watching the film (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.226). Mainly, shots that have more screen time tend to slow the tempo of the film, where shorter shots edited one after the other would create a accelerate the rhythm and create a sense of tension and stress (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.226). The style of rapid montage is identified in Eisentein's theory of editing, where the Russian filmmaker and director called it the metric montage (Dancyger, 2011, p.193). Metric montage is involved with the length of shots, a basic rule of this theory is that shortening the shots would increase tension since the spectator would have less time to engage with all the information presented in the frame (Dancyger, 2011, p.17). For instance, such technique was used by Alfred Hitchcock in his film *The Birds* (Hitchcock, 1963) in the scene when the birds first attacked. In this scene consecutive shots of short duration accelerated the tempo and created a tense dramatic moment (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.226). The same director controlled the rhythm in the shower scene in *Psycho* (1960) to get the required reaction from the audience. Starting with relatively longer shots of Marion having a shower while showing Norman Bates approaching through the curtain, a sense of anticipation is prevailed, after that the violent act was portrayed by speeding the tempo by oscillating between subjective shots and POV shots, and finally a slower tempo of the dead character intercut with shots of the water flowing portrayed the stillness of death (Dancyger, 2011, p.194).

Other than having a role in deepening the sense of experience of the audience (Dancyger, 2011, p.202), film editing have a major role in narration or how the story is told. Consider the classical film for instance, the omniscience narration of the classical film implies presenting story information through different characters (Fabe, 2004). This is achieved

through cross cutting, an editing technique that alternates between shots of different lines of actions, and different places (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.244). Considering *Birth of a Nation* as an example, it can be noticed that cross cutting editing between lines of actions of different families achieved the unrestricted and omniscient narration. Juggling through different spaces in classical narration would not be confusing because the shots would be linked causally (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.244). But, as cited from Carroll (1978), “the very concept of editing implies that is only partial representation” (Fischer, 2004, p.74), that is since filmmakers started to use editing in the 1900-1910s (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.231), they considered that it is not necessary to show everything happening (in contrast to the long take), rather through editing important information is presented and the spectator is expected to fill in the spatial, temporal, or causal gaps (Fischer, 2004; Dancyger, 2011).

Continuity editing is regarded as a very powerful style of editing that it is still used in films all over the world (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.231). Therefore, virtually any narrative film, or TV series in that sense, can be used as an example for the different continuity editing techniques discussed. Although this style requires minimal intellectual work on the level of the audience to follow the story of the film, there are alternative editing styles that are used in cinema, it would be helpful to regard those alternative styles as “discontinuity editing” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.251). It may be regarded that discontinuity editing and non linear narration are two sides of the same coin. Both notions can be characterized by having a, somehow, random relation between shots and scenes, and a non-causal link between the scenes (Dancyger, 2011, p.397). As the non-causal relationship between the scenes was discussed in this study as a modernist and post-modernist film narration, the editing section would be more concerned with the relations on the micro level, the relation between shots.

Some of the continuity editing alternative techniques is the jump cut. When two consecutive shots display the same object without a noticeable change in camera angle or

distance, the result would be a “jump” on the screen, from here comes the name of this editing tool (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.254). A jump cut can be used to signify a lack of importance and to accelerate the action (Dancyger, 2011, p.119). For example, one of the many easily recognizable jump cuts in Jean-Luc Godard’s *Breathless* (1960) is the scene where Patricia (the protagonist played by Jean Seberg) is crossing the street, Godard cuts from a shot where the character is on one side of the street into a shot where the character is suddenly on the other side. This might be an extreme example of jump cuts that draws the attention to the editing style, but it still may be regarded to serve as a tool to cut out dramatically insignificant parts of the scene. On a different level, a jump cut can be a tool to communicate intellectually with the audience, thus allowing further interpretation for the scene (Dancyger, 2011, p.119). For example, Dancyger (2011), analyzed the editing technique used in the final scene of Francois Truffaut’s *The 400 Blows* (1959). The studied scene depicts the protagonist who escaped from a detention center and finally reaches the seashore where he can not run anymore, at this moment the film jumps from a wide shot to slightly closer shots until reaching a close up. Dancyger (2011) read from these shots that the director is communicating the idea that the character is trapped again (p.119). This is an example where the director is deliberately drawing the attention of the audience to dig in the meaning of the edit, and there are seemingly no temporal or spatial gaps between them since the character’s position in the same. However, there are other subtle examples of jump cuts that serve as a transition, where there is a gap in time and/or space, and as an expressive cinematic tool. Maybe the most common example is the jump cut the Stanley Kubrick used in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) where he cut from a shot of a bone thrown by an ape into a shot, that is very similar in composition to the previous one, that portrayed a space ship. This edit could be signaling a comparison between a primitive weapon and a modern scientific tool, which could be read in many ways including that it is a commentary about the evolvment of humans and their destructive use of technology.

Shots and images in film can be given new meanings by having an unrealistic connection between adjacent shots, what can result in a conceptual and poetic context (Fischer, 2004, p.67,68). In Eisentein's theory of editing, this form is called the intellectual montage where ideas are introduced into emotional sequences in order to communicate new ideas (Dancyger, 2011, p.20). For example, a non-diegetic insert in Eisentein's *Strike* (1925) of the slaughtering of a bull amidst a scene depicting a massacre of workers does not have a dramatic relation with the rest of shot, but such metaphorical and symbolic insert serves as a commentary on the action and invites the spectator to interpret the scene and construct a meaning (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p.254).

After film makers had realized that it is not necessary to show everything on screen to make the story comprehensible, they started to fragment scenes into sequences of combined shots (Dancyger, 2001, p.371). As continuity editing might create some spatial and temporal gaps, the story would still be easily constructed. For instance a cut between two scenes where the character is in a different location is self explanatory that the character moved from one location to another but the film does not show it because it is insignificant to the story. But discontinuity editing may create more complex spatio-temporal gaps, as in assembling scenes in violation of the causal order in *Pulp Fiction*, or reversing the narrative actions in *Irreversible* (2002) where the film starts with the resolution events and ends with the scene where the story supposedly began. This liberation from the continuity editing norms is usually still tied closely to the conventional editing style by creating a logical unity of time and space within dramatic scenes (Fischer, 2004, p.67). So, even in the post modern films mentioned above (*Pulp Fiction*, and *Irreversible*) the spectator can still be able to construct a sort of clear story from certain scenes.

## 7.6 Editing in TV

As it could be said that the discontinuity editing is synonymous with non-linear narration, it can be also linked to the qualities and functions of the modern and post-modern cinema. Such editing style would require a cognitive and interpretational thinking from the audience to understand the story and the new layer of meaning of the shots. Since conventional and classic films that follow continuity editing require less intellectual work from the audience (Fischer, 2004, p.74), it would be considered natural for conventional series, of the communicative medium, to follow this editing style that favors the story comprehension. But it would be expected from the quality TV series that have cinematic tendencies not to shy away from a more complex and intellectually fueled editing styles.

**7.6.1 *The Young Pope*.** *The Young Pope* (Amoroso, et al., 2016) is selected in this study to be examined for its editing style that fluctuates between long takes and segmented shots. That is because the series that was co-written and directed by the film director Paolo Sorrentino, and starring established film actors such as Jude Law and Diane Keaton would serve as an illustration of the fusion of the cinematic style (mise-en-scène, cinematography and editing) into television. For that reason, a semiotic analyses of some scenes of the series would serve as an illustration of how this TV series uses the elements of style to communicate dramatic and thematic ideas, in other words how *The Young Pope* utilizes cinematic storytelling.

The *Young Pope* tells the fictional story of the first American Pope in history, the series revolves around Lenny (Jude Law), the newly elected pope, and his strange way in holding this new position. The story is told mainly through the main character, Lenny, where the scenes regularly jump in time through flashbacks and into the protagonist's perception through subjective shots and scene, often without a clear distinction between what is real and imaginary. For example, the first scene of the first episode shows a baby crawling on a pile of sleeping/dead babies, the camera travels away from the baby to reveal a man dressed in a

religious costume crawling from beneath the pile. A wide shot of Lenny standing in a vast hall is followed by an extreme close up of his eye, signaling that it was a dream. This sudden change in frame size would draw the attention to the cut, and make it clear that the previous scene was a dream. But as the scenes progress, Lenny wakes up and does his first speech to reveal later that these events did not happen and that Lenny is still dreaming. Through these sequences, the series presented information about the character, his ideologies, traits, and inner thoughts through what could be labeled as subjective scenes. What is worth noting is that almost half of the first episode turned out to be a dream and the events did not happen, therefore it can be said that until the dream sequences ended there was no narrative progression in terms of the story. This resonates with the characteristics of non-linear narrative and discontinuity editing that is “intuitive rather than purposeful... and emphasizes feelings over action... while embracing aesthetics” over the story (Dancyger, 2011, p.395).

The absurdity of the first scene (that of the pile of dead babies) may be an invitation to construct new meanings for the images and to read the scenes rather than just watching them. For example, the only baby that can move among the pile of dead/sleeping babies is differentiated from the rest. The religious man who is born from a womb-like structure is born from death. Lenny walks away, and behind him is the pile of dead babies and the church, this shot may signify that this man is rejected from the structure (the church). One cannot but notice the vertical phallic building which may signify a vertical way to god or the desire to reach god. After Lenny wakes up, a shot of his eye is followed by a POV shot, a typical causal relation between two shots. This POV reveals a statue of Jesus crucified, but this shot is a bit uncanny since the statue is upside down (since it is from the POV of the man lying on bed). This shot may signify that the order of thinking of this character will be reversed. Therefore, in this case the POV is not only showing what the character is seeing, but it is also serving as a subjective shot that is hinting about the perception of the character.

The viewer can't but notice the excessive use of opposites in the series, which could serve as an invitation to analyze the signs of the show. For example, concerning framing, an extreme wide, objective, shot is followed by an intrusive extreme close up; concerning mise-en-scène, a shot of papal robes in a closet is followed by a shot of a naked man; Concerning color and lighting, the warm colors of the interior is contrasted with cold colors in the exterior etc. Each contradiction may function as a cinematic message in the context of the scene. For instance, in a scene where Lenny is going to uphold his first speech, the contrast between the outside and the inside of the church would serve as a commentary about the church and the ritual of the papacy. In this sequence, the chandelier in the foreground of a shot draws the attention to the bourgeois of the place, slow motion is used with traveling camera movements; the opposite is the exterior shots where people are standing in the rain, protecting themselves with umbrellas and plastic coats, they are shot in normal speed, possibly signifying anticipation for the arrival and appearance of the pope, yet they are not moving what makes them look very static and robotized. These edited in contradiction may be projecting a sense of criticism about the church. What supports this observation is the theatrical next scene, where before addressing the crowd, the young pope walks to the balcony, he is actually portrayed as floating rather than walking with a medium shot and camera moving with him. He exits in a very theatrical scene where the curtains open and he stands on the "stage" with the audience are cheering for him. These contradictions continue and become very evident in the speech that the pope gives when he tells the crowd: "we have forgotten to masturbate, to get abortion, to allow priests to get married (referring to gay marriage in the context of the scene)..." all these values that contradicts the beliefs of the church and that are contradictory to any line of thought that a pope should think of or address the crowd by.

The main purpose of these contradiction would be to shock the audience. According to Shklovky (1998), de-familiarization is the technique of forcing the audience to see common

things in an unfamiliar way, in order to enhance insight of the well-known perceptions. Thus, de-familiarization is taking aspects that have become familiar or taken for granted, and presenting them in a strange way in order to force individuals to recognize artistic language (Valvi, 2013). Given the definition of the term, it is obvious that the filmmaker in this series is trying to de-familiarize the audience about the notion of the papacy by showing the pope in unfamiliar frames such as the numerous contradictions and some actions such as smoking in the church... which would result in a new critical perception of priesthood.

*The Young Pope* can be considered as a unique example of using cinematic style in TV series. In this example, it can be said that style dominates the story and has a strong presence in communicating ideas rather than merely serving the story. But it would not be necessary for a quality TV series to have such over powering style over the sake of telling a more understandable dramatic story in order to be cinematic. All of the series that were used as examples in this study can be arguably labeled as cinematic and at the same time they do not have such dominant style. Consider *Game Of Thrones* as an example, the series emphasizes on the story in a big deal, and style is used to serve the comprehension of the story or to acquire certain emotions from the spectator. It might not be a coincidence that *The Young Pope* is written and directed by an established film director, but this style of intellectual cinematic film making in a medium such as the television would become contagious for other TV shows, and such modernist filmmaking would become (and probably is becoming) more popular among quality TV series by familiarizing the audience with such film language.

## 8 Conclusion

### 8.1 Cinematic TV Series

“At its best, post-modernism alerts us that new times demand new strategies (Stam, 2000, p.307).” Taking lead from this thought, the current study expanded from an observation



that “cinema may have reached its natural plateau in terms of popularity as an art form” (Witt, 1999, p.337), at the time that television (the proposed new strategy of film in the post-modern era) gained a status as the dominant medium for entertainment (Leitch, 2002). The rise of the television’s status came with an upgrade in the quality of its products. This study proposed a reading of this improvement of quality in TV that relates to the extension of the art in film into narrative TV series. This product of television that has the qualifications to be comparable to film has been studied by critics as contemporary quality TV series, and such series may be thought of as having cinematic qualities. Such cinematic qualities are categorized into three main elements of film: the content, the form, and the style.

As for their content, contemporary quality TV series can be categorized in genres the same way films are (e.g. Western, Gangster, Fantasy...etc.) since they acquire similar generic formula but in an episodic format. These TV genres would hold functions similar to film genres, mainly by echoing dominant ideologies of the time (or the myth); For example a Western TV series such as *Westworld* is found to be commenting on the artificiality of the society, impact of technology, and the violent and sexual fantasies of people. Not only the genre, but the narrative of the studied TV series can be comparable to cinema. It is clear that such TV narratives may alternate between the classical film narrative (causal narrative), and the modern and post-modern narrative (non-linear narrative). In this sense, the narrative complexity in the contemporary TV series is identified by having multiple and intertwining story lines that progress in innovative ways using narrative special effects (plot twists and climactic moments) which draws attention to the process of the operational aesthetic (how the narrative was created) (Mittell, 2006).

As much as the content or the story of the TV series is important in assessing its quality value, the style and form play a major role in adding an artistic facet to the series. Building on theories of modernism and art film, it is proposed that in cinematic TV series the form and style

is dominant over the content rather than being embedded in the story and serving it. By that, an artistic value in TV series can be detected when style and form become a vehicle for signification. Expanding on this notion, contemporary TV series would tell the story using complex narration where the events tend to be out of chronological order, creating temporal and spatial narrative gaps. Such complex narration have a post-modern tendency to shift between multiple subjectivities within the series where the events can be presented from different character perspectives (e.g., *The Affair*), and the subjective thoughts of the characters can be represented visually (e.g., *The Young Pope*). This is executed technically using filming techniques such as *mise-en-scène*, cinematography, and editing (referred to in this study as style).

These cinematic visual elements contribute to the artistic value of the film or TV series by either intellectually communicating with the audience, or by being justified dramatically or psychologically. A unique style in a TV series accompanied by the consistent use of the cinematic elements that convey similar messages (such as the cinematography of *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Mr. Robot*) would shed light on the concept of auteur series that is comparable to auteur film. In some examples, it is observed that the use of sophisticated visual cinematic elements (e.g. long take) is primary to draw attention to the mode of production rather than communicating a dramatic or intellectual concept. Such post-modernistic use of cinematic elements adds to the reflexivity of the work, and may contribute to a cinematic look but it can be argued that it does not upgrade the artistic value of the series for it lacks a justification in the context of the scene.

When a quality TV series is said to be altering the logic of the flow of events (complex narration) and communicating cinematically with the audience, it would be expected from the spectator to put watch cognitively in order to reconstruct the story and to create a meaning for the cinematic elements. This would indicate that the target audience of such series are educated

people who have a certain degree of knowledge about cinema and its techniques. Moreover, this audience has to watch television cognitively and with attention to detail. On a different note, the narrative gaps that are created through complex narration can be regarded riddles that make the audience curious to figure out the answers of, especially when the exposition of the narrative gaps are delayed to coming episodes. This encourages the audience to speculate and hypothesis about what will come next or about the meaning of an ambiguous event. These spectators have blogs where other fans can share their predictions about future events of their beloved show or analyses that help comprehend the series, in addition to teasers and sneak peeks for the upcoming episodes and seasons that give clues to possibly solve the riddle-like narrative. By that, it can be considered that the consumers of quality and cinematic TV series watch interactively where the watching is to validate their speculations rather than just watching the events unfolding.

## **8.2 Reality and Cinematic Representation**

A logical reading for the popularity of the television material in discussion, against a decrease in the dominance of cinema, is that this genre of TV shows (cinematic TV series) is answering a need among its target audience. This resonates with the idea that genres answer contemporary dominant concerns. Cinematic TV series may be thought of as genre that reverberates with the contemporary scio/economical status and changes where the modern life became more home anchored and routinely due to work obligations, financial constraints, and individualistic societies. That is, quality TV series may be regarded as an economically friendly and time flexible escape from every days' harsh reality.

The idea that contemporary quality TV series present a cinematic and fantasmatic expression of reality rather than a realistic and life-like representation of events (e.g. the classical unconstructed narrative) can be made evident in the series that were discussed earlier in the current study. For example, *Game of Thrones* transcends reality by creating an imaginary

realm that is highly differentiated from reality through the presence of magic and through taking place in a proposed fictional medieval time. *American Gods* presents a fantasy and magical world too, but it takes place in the current times (with some scenes that take place in pre-historic times and in fabricated settings) and in known American locations. This series situates it self far from reality by skewing the notions of death and life, by bringing religious figures to life as modern characters, by creating new “gods,” and by representing the after life as a setting of the narrative. The concept of fantasmatic representation of reality is not to be misunderstood with the fantasy genre. For instance, HBO’s *Westworld* relies on fictional technological developments that made robots seem human-like in a Sci/fi Western hybridized genre. *The Handmaid’s Tale* laid out a speculative reality where the laws and social conventions changed due to the rarity of fertile women, which distances the show from our perceived reality. In all these examples, the series can be clearly identified as out of this world, but the fantasmatic representation of reality is not exclusive to this type of shows. For example, *House of Cards* would seem to have a realistic tendency in the sense that the series does not technically contain elements that challenge our reality, but by creating an alternate fictional modern political history of America with fictional presidents, the series could be distancing itself from the spectator’s reality. The style of *House of Cards* plays a role in its assumed fantasmatic representation through frequently breaking the forth wall by having the protagonist look at the camera and talk directly to the audience. In this example, reflexivity draws attention to the medium and reminds the audience that they are watching fictional events on the screen, which in its turn situates the events of the series far from every-day reality. Reflexivity can be considered a major element in the fantasmatic representation because it “subverts the assumption that art can be transparent medium of communication, (and) a window into the world (Stam, 2000, p.151)”. In other words, reflexivity plays a role in reminding the spectator of the film’s (and the series, in the case of the current study) constructed reality. Another show

that integrated its fictional events into real incidents is *The Young Pope*. In addition to portraying a fictional first American pope, the series' fantasmatic representation is evident in its narration that oscillates between subjective and objective representations of the narrative events, and dream sequences, often without a clear distinction between them, what adds to the ambiguity of the show and gives the audience access to the character's inner subjective thoughts. The representation of the subjective thoughts of the character is a technique used in *Mr. Robot* where the protagonist's mental illness is embodied in a character (referred to in the series as Mr. Robot) that can be seen interacting with the surrounding while he is actually a manifestation of Elliot's mind. This is considered to distance the series from the perceived reality for the obvious reason that in real life only the mentally ill person would perceive his/her delusions as real, whereas in the series the spectators are able to share this mental illusion with the protagonist (by thinking the Mr. Robot is a real character in season one of the show). Moreover, the fragmented editing in such series (e.g. *The Young Pope* and *Mr. Robot*) and the distinct cinematographic techniques can be regarded as cinematic tools to intellectually communicate with the audience and motivate them to read the series and interpret the cinematic tools rather than just watching its events and perceiving it as reality. From all of the TV series that were used as examples in the current study, *Breaking Bad* may be the most problematic series to consider its fantasmatic representation because the show illustrates the journey of Walter White (the protagonist) from an ordinary person to a furious gangster and drug lord in a rather realistic manner that can be comparable to real-life events. However, a deeper consideration of the series would reveal that it is a psychological journey of a character that begins weak and starts to transform into a different character (Heisenberg). In the first episode of the show, it was revealed that Walter White is having sexual difficulties with his wife, and after he found his criminal path and his strength as a myth manufacturer, it is then shown (at the beginning of the second episode of the first season) that he sexually performed as never

before. This instance in the series signifies that Walter White found his lost manhood through engaging in the criminal world. In later seasons it is shown that the protagonist is refusing to quit his meth business although he achieved his initial goal (providing financial security to his family), that is because he wants to sustain a greater image of himself (Heisenberg). These examples from *Breaking Bad* hint about a psychoanalytical aspect of the show that is treated in a fictional dimension. Concerning narration, the show habitually presents a foreshadowing scene at the beginning of most episodes that hints to events that will happen in later episodes. This narrational strategy draws attention to the medium by playing a guessing game with the fans of the show and inviting them to think about the meaning of these short scenes and to speculate about its operational aesthetics (how will the writers manage to get the character to this point). Concerning the style, *Breaking Bad* frequently uses unconventional and reflexive shots that are made more obvious by having a few of them in a single episode among mostly normal eye level medium shots and close ups, and wide shots. For example the uses of time lapses, or point of view shots of objects where shots seem to be from the “point of view” of the barrel that Walter is looking in, shot where the camera is apparently attached to the brush that Jesse Pinkman is using to clean a barrel, or the POV of a fly etc. Another of the many examples of such reflexive shots is a shot at the end of the seventh episode of the third season that brought attention to the presence of the camera. When Hank (Walters brother in law) is attacked, he shoots the villain while he was laying on the ground, in this shot the camera is situated behind the villain and when Hank shoots him, blood splatters on the camera view. All these examples contribute to the idea that although *Breaking Bad* is predominantly a realistic series, but its psychoanalytic representation, its reflexiveness, and narrational techniques indicate that this series represents reality in a fantasmatic sense.

An important clarification still needs to be made about the fantasia of TV series where the fantasmatic representation of reality does not, in any sense, contradict with the realism of the series in presenting its narrative.

Realism of the narrative promotes identification with its fictional character (Carroll, 1990) by having them behave in ways similar to real life behavior considering the events of the show (Cohen, 2001). Here *mise-en-scène* seem to play an important role where the actor's performance in mimicking the reactions and portraying the feelings of real people, in addition to realistic costumes and settings. But the extent of realism in presenting the narrative is to be judged according to the rules and regulations of the world of the story (the alternative reality that the film presents) rather than to the world of the spectator (Klift, 2014). For instance, a highly unrealistic incident in real life would rather be realistic for the world of *Game of Thrones* such as the ability of the character of Daenerys to be un-burnt from fire because it is established and justified within the narrative.

To summarize the observations from the above examples, the fantasmatic representation of reality in TV series can be detected through the dominant theme (e.g. series revolving around themes of supernatural events and magic), by the use modern and post-modern cinematic techniques (e.g. multiple subjectivities, unstable narration, reflexivity... etc.), and by the expressive uses of cinematic elements to communicate with the audience. Against this background, one can legitimately claim that contemporary TV series are transcending realism in order to integrate fiction and its fantasmatic reverberation in their representation of reality. This idea is an addition to the argument of the filmicness of contemporary quality TV series, where in its core, cinema encompasses "a certain impression of reality" rather than an "illusion of reality" (Metz, 1982, p.101). Therefore, by being cinematic, contemporary quality TV series are providing their spectators with an escape from a presumably harsh, boring, and routine reality. This relief from reality comes in the form of

the discussed TV series that is more accessible, more flexible, and economically friendlier than movies where the audience escape from home at home.

On an ending note, as cinema has a dignity of art, it would be legitimate to think about the possibility of reaching the idea of art TV when contemporary quality TV series can be comparable to cinema. Then, questions are to be made about the evolution and creation of a new film/series movement or tradition that is being developed in this era, and about a new conceptualization of TV series. More research needs to be done on cinematic TV series as an extension to the cinematic traditions (e.g. classical, modern, and post-modern traditions) in order to identify the distinctive feature of the evolving televisual/cinematic contemporary products.



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