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**REDEFINING THE ANTHOLOGY:
FORMS AND AFFORDANCES IN DIGITAL CULTURE**

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Abstract

[*English*] As the longtime dominant U.S. television business model has been challenged in various ways by industrial and technological changes in recent years, more heterogeneous narrative forms have emerged in addition to original serial structures. The diversity of televisual forms became particularly evident since national, local television landscapes started opening up to foreign markets outside of the U.S., finally embracing a transnational, global perspective and tracing alternative value-chains. The transition to internet-distributed television played a pivotal role in this formal fragmentation and new dynamics of online streaming opened up another path for understanding the flow of television content, which today reflects a highly interconnected, networked media and digital environment. Indeed, the proliferation of video-on-demand services is forcing seriality to adapt to the contemporary mediascape, giving rise to audiovisual products that can be transferred online and present specificities in production, distribution and reception. One of the outcomes of such changes in U.S. television series at the dawn of the twenty-first century is the anthology series divided in different seasons with separate stories, yet linked by tone and style. My research positions itself in such a technological, industrial and cultural context, where television content is increasingly fragmented. Given such a fragmentation, this thesis considers the ways contemporary television content is distributed in the interaction between algorithmic-driven recommendation processes and more traditional editorial practices. The aim of the project is to investigate the way certain narrative structures typical of the anthology form emerge in the context of U.S. television seriality, starting from specific conditions of production, distribution and consumption in the media industry. By focusing on the evolution (temporal, historical dimension) and on the digital circulation (spatial, geographic dimension) of U.S. anthology series, and observing the peculiarities in their production and style, as well as their distributional networks and the consumption patterns they foster, this thesis ultimately insert itself into a larger conversation on digital-cultural studies. The final purpose is to examine the relation between anthological *forms*, distribution *platforms* and consumption *models*, by proposing a comparative approach to the anthology that is at the same time *cross-cultural*, *cross-historical*, *cross-genre* and accounting for both pre- and post-digital practices for cultural content organization.

Keywords: anthology, digital culture, media studies, internet studies, platform ecology.

[*Italian*] Mentre assistiamo al progressivo sfaldarsi del modello di business televisivo statunitense da lungo tempo dominante, messo alla prova dai cambiamenti industriali e tecnologici negli ultimi anni, sono emerse forme narrative più eterogenee, in aggiunta a strutture seriali tradizionali. La diversità delle forme televisive è diventata particolarmente evidente da quando gli scenari televisivi locali e nazionali hanno iniziato ad aprirsi a mercati esteri al di fuori degli Stati Uniti, abbracciando finalmente una prospettiva transnazionale e globale. La transizione verso la televisione distribuita via Internet ha svolto un ruolo fondamentale in questa frammentazione formale e le nuove dinamiche dello streaming online hanno aperto la strada ad un percorso alternativo per comprendere il flusso globale di contenuti televisivi, che oggi riflette un ambiente multimediale e digitale altamente interconnesso, in una complessa rete istituzionale. La proliferazione di servizi di video on demand sta costringendo la serialità ad adattarsi al panorama mediatico contemporaneo, dando vita a prodotti audiovisivi che possono essere trasferiti online e presentano specificità di produzione, distribuzione e ricezione. Uno dei risultati di tali cambiamenti nelle serie televisive statunitensi agli inizi del ventunesimo secolo è la serie antologica divisa in diverse stagioni con storie separate, ma collegate da un tono e stile condivisi. La mia ricerca si posiziona in un tale contesto tecnologico, industriale e culturale, in cui i contenuti televisivi sono sempre più frammentati. Data tale frammentazione di contenuti, questa tesi considera il modo in cui i contenuti televisivi contemporanei sono distribuiti nell'interazione tra processi di raccomandazione basati su algoritmi e pratiche editoriali più tradizionali. Lo scopo di questo progetto è dunque quello di studiare il modo in cui certe strutture narrative tipiche della forma antologica emergono nel contesto della serialità televisiva americana, a partire da specifiche condizioni di produzione, distribuzione e consumo nel settore dei media. Concentrandosi sull'evoluzione (dimensione temporale, storica) e sulla circolazione digitale (dimensione spaziale, geografica) delle serie di antologie statunitensi e osservando le peculiarità nella loro produzione e stile, nonché le loro reti distributive e i modelli di consumo che promuovono, questa tesi si inserisce in ultimo in una più ampia conversazione sulla cultura digitale. Lo scopo finale è di indagare la relazione tra *forme* antologiche, *piattaforme* di distribuzione e *modelli* di consumo, proponendo un approccio comparativo all'antologia che sia allo stesso tempo *cross-culturale*, "*cross-storico*", "*cross-genere*" e che tenga conto delle pratiche pre- e post-digitali di organizzazione di contenuti culturali.

Parole chiave: antologia, cultura digitale, media, internet, ecologia delle piattaforme.

[*French*] Alors que le modèle économique de la télévision américaine, longtemps dominant, a été mis au défi de diverses manières par les changements industriels et technologiques de ces dernières années, des formes narratives de plus en plus hétérogènes sont apparues, qui se sont ajoutées aux structures sérielles originaires. La diversité des formes télévisuelles est devenue particulièrement évidente depuis que les paysages télévisuels nationaux et locaux ont commencé à s'ouvrir aux marchés étrangers situés en dehors des États-Unis, pour finalement adopter une perspective transnationale et globale. La transition vers la télévision distribuée sur Internet a joué un rôle central dans cette fragmentation formelle et la nouvelle dynamique de la diffusion en ligne a ouvert une différente perspective pour comprendre le flux mondial de contenus télévisuels, qui reflète aujourd'hui un environnement multimédia et numérique hautement interconnecté et mis en réseau. En effet, la multiplication des services de vidéo à la demande oblige la sérialité à s'adapter au paysage médiatique contemporain, donnant naissance à des produits audiovisuels pouvant être transférés en ligne et présentant des spécificités de production, de distribution et de réception. L'un des résultats de tels changements dans les séries télévisées américaines à l'aube du XXI^e siècle est la série anthologique divisée en différentes saisons avec des histoires distinctes, et pourtant liées par le ton et le style. Ma recherche se situe dans un tel contexte technologique, industriel et culturel, où le contenu télévisuel est de plus en plus fragmenté. Compte tenu de cette fragmentation des contenus, cette thèse examine la manière dont les contenus télévisuels contemporains sont distribués, dans l'interaction entre les processus de recommandation basés sur des algorithmes et les pratiques éditoriales plus traditionnelles. L'objectif de ce projet est donc d'étudier la manière dont certaines structures narratives typiques de la forme de l'anthologie apparaissent dans le contexte de la sérialité de la télévision nord-américaine, à partir de conditions spécifiques de production, de distribution et de consommation dans l'industrie des médias. En se concentrant sur l'évolution (dimension temporelle et historique) et sur la circulation numérique (dimension spatiale, géographique) des séries d'anthologies américaines, et en observant les particularités de leur production et de leur style, ainsi que leurs réseaux de distribution et les modes de consommation qu'elles favorisent, cette thèse s'inscrit finalement dans une conversation plus vaste sur les études culturelles et numériques. L'objectif final est d'étudier la relation entre les *formes* anthologiques, les *plateformes* de distribution et les *modèles* de consommation, en proposant une approche comparative de l'anthologie qui soit à la fois *cross-culturelle*, *cross-historique*, *cross-genre* et qui prenne en considération les pratiques pre- et post-numériques pour l'organisation de contenus culturels.

Mots clés: anthologie, culture numérique, médias, internet, écologie des plateformes.

Overview and Acknowledgments

The following research originated from my master's thesis, where I analyzed the return of the anthology form in contemporary U.S. television seriality, by looking at its evolution overtime. The main subject revolved around two questions, which asked why this form has returned in television and how it has changed since its original configuration, shifting from an episodic to a seasonal arc. To understand the reasons that brought the television anthology form to transform its original narrative structure instead of maintaining the traditional episodic arc that have been distinguishing it for years, I adopted a historical perspective on the U.S. television industry, by reasoning on the notion of form and genre as the variable elements subjected to technological and cultural mutations. The historical perspective allowed me to look at the current television industry scenario by comparing differences and similarities in the development of serialized narratives, from their early appearance to nowadays.

Since I wrote my master's thesis in 2015, after a two-month period at the *UCLA Film & Television Archive*, which still benefits my research project as of today, the trend of producing both episodic and seasonal anthology series in television has increased and it is now perhaps one of the most evident symptoms of the complex dynamics behind contemporary digital media and cultural industries. The debate on anthology series needs to be expanded, not only because they are at the very origin of seriality in one of the most influential television markets, that of the United States, but also because they can tell us more about new tendencies in the way we produce and organize narrative content.

For my Ph.D. project, I therefore decided to retain the anthology, both as a concept and as a practice, as the main object of interest, by also broadening the subject to embrace an interdisciplinary thinking and account for epistemological questions in media studies. On the one hand, to pursue my study further, over the course of my doctorate I tackled the subject of the anthology form in television seriality from a production studies perspective, by analyzing its properties in terms of distribution and cultural outcomes. On the other hand, I asked not only how the structure of the anthology form has changed, but also what is its impact from a reception standpoint (in actual circulation and social practices of viewing). By building on previous archival research carried out during my master's degree, my Ph.D. research therefore started with the need of broadening the analysis in order to account for the uses and affordances of the anthology form, along with its role in the context of contemporary television, where production, distribution and reception practices are constantly being redefined by the introduction of new communication technologies.

A question that came up while observing the current non-linear television dynamics, where streaming platforms play a central part in the collection and use of data, is what I was missing from a solely qualitative study that often operates at its best in a close reading, textual environment. As I was approaching large corpora, from both a historical and geographical perspective, but also as I was entering the realm of internet-distributed television, with its seemingly endless source of information, I became interested in testing a different approach, which was, for the most part, lacking in my previous research. For this reason, my doctoral thesis benefits from the theoretical and methodological contribution of digital humanities, an interdisciplinary area of research that stands at the intersection of computational sciences and the humanities (Burdick *et*

al. 2012), resulting in the merging between the two in favor of the implementation of digital tools in humanistic research.

Dealing with a relatively high number of series (a sub-corpus of almost two hundred cases just from the United States, not counting their division into several seasons and episodes) and looking at long-term evolutionary processes, I opted for a macroscopic perspective and became acquainted with Franco Moretti's work on distant reading in literary studies. I will provide an in-depth overview of his approach when discussing the theoretical background and methodology. On this path towards a distant reading in television studies, I was influenced by two research groups, which I have been collaborating with since the beginning of my doctorate. First, as part of my alma mater, I was partially affected by the researches carried out at the University of Bologna - Department of the Arts, whose studies focus on the "narrative ecosystem" theory, first outlined by Professor Guglielmo Pescatore and Professor Veronica Innocenti (2012) as a system-oriented framework for analyzing television series. Second, interested in the work of Professor Marta Boni, I joined the group Labo Télé at the University of Montréal, as part of a double-degree and agreement between the two universities.

The research carried out with Labo Télé profoundly shaped my views on the use of cartography and mapping for localizing serialized narratives, along with other tools found in digital humanities. Network analysis in particular turned out to be a fruitful practice for inserting television studies into the larger realm of cultural studies, while also providing a useful tool for the study of transnational dynamics in media ecology. Starting from these premises, this dissertation goes into further details about the subject and the object of my study, as well as the main issue (or *problématique*, to use the French terminology), corpus, theoretical framework, methodology and

the limits that I encountered in facing all these steps. For the support offered all along my research and writing process, I want to thank my supervisors, Professor Veronica Innocenti (University of Bologna) and Professor Marta Boni (University of Montreal), who spent hours reviewing and proofreading my thesis, and encouraged me to find appropriate theoretical frameworks and methodologies to organize my research findings. Not only they provided me with excellent suggestions, which consistently helped improving each draft of my dissertation until this final version, but they also offered a precious guidance throughout the entire course of my doctoral degree. They truly became my mentors and allowed me to find my way as a researcher, by offering both support and discipline.

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This thesis additionally accounts for the direct influence of the work of several digital humanities communities. Such communities of remarkable individuals who crossed my path were essential for developing my own perspective in the field and elaborating my own visualization projects. First of all, at the University of Montreal I interacted directly with the lab of Professor Marta Boni, who serves as supervisor for this thesis and built a groundbreaking research project in television studies based on previous research by Franco Moretti (2005). I also had the opportunity to meet Professor Marcello Vitali-Rosati, from whom I borrow the concept of editorialization (Vitali-Rosati 2018) as one of the core topics for my study on the anthology. A second digital humanities community that deeply shaped my vision is located at Brown University, where I have the privilege to pursue a Visiting Research Fellowship at the Virtual Humanities Lab (October 2019—March 2020), in collaboration with the Center for Digital Scholarships, advised by Professor Massimo Riva. This fellowship has provided me with a solid theoretical and methodological knowledge in computational applications for humanistic research, which is essential to perfect the interdisciplinary work found in this dissertation. A third community I am currently engaged with is that of Professor Jeffrey Schnapp's MetaLAB at Harvard University, which offers unique, thought-provoking perspectives, with its large, composite pool of humanities scholars, visual designers, creative technologists and engineers.

For the time spent inside and outside of campus, my gratitude goes to each of my colleagues and friends, who shared with me this Ph.D. life, enriching the solitary commitment to research with a constant presence throughout my many peregrinations. Thanks to Sara Casoli, for always finding excitement in discussing with me theoretical frameworks and approaches, and for teaching me everything I needed to know about the academia the very first day I walked in the

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“Consider a future device for individual use, which is a sort of mechanized private file and library. It needs a name, and, to coin one at random, ‘memex’ will do. A memex is a device in which an individual stores all his books, records, and communications, and which is mechanized so that it may be consulted with exceeding speed and flexibility.

It is an enlarged intimate supplement to his memory.

[...]

Wholly new forms of encyclopedias will appear, ready made with a mesh of associative trails running through them, ready to be dropped into the memex and there amplified.”

Vannevar Bush, “As We May Think.” *The Atlantic*, July 1945.¹

¹ Bush, Vannevar. “As We May Think.” *The Atlantic*, Last modified September 10, 1945. Retrieved September 28, 2019. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1945/07/as-we-may-think/303881>.

INTRODUCTION

In the past few years, the field of television studies intersected with a range of interdisciplinary topics as a consequence of the implementation of digital technologies, which are affecting more and more the production and circulation of content. In addition to favoring the emergence of a new network of platforms and infrastructures in the television industry, the digital has come to stimulate new debates, theories and methodologies among television and media scholars. This context seems to provide a fertile ground for introducing in media scholarships computational approaches that are most often found in digital humanities, a discipline that introduced in humanistic research a variety of innovative methods for analyzing cultural *corpora* - e.g. digitization, data visualization, data analysis, topic modeling, machine learning and so forth. A common conversation, which engaged both academic communities from media studies and digital humanities, regards, for instance, the way digital technologies operate as drivers for cultural and social changes. This perspective collides with a tendency to observe technologies through the lenses of either a hard or soft determinism (Marx and Smith 1994), a theoretical framework that, although considered controversial by many scholars, advances a necessary debate on the causes and effects of past, present and emerging technologies, and the way they interact with previous socio-cultural, institutional ecosystems.

Reasoning on the complexities and entanglements that digital technologies and the Internet brought to the realm of media, this dissertation does not limit itself to tackle simple cause-effect mechanisms involved in the spreading of internet-distributed television. It rather aims to examine a complex and dynamic genealogy of the anthology form in television, with its set of practices inherited from previous processes of analog anthologization that eventually led to the current digital scape, throughout evolutionary processes and technological disruptions. In this sense, I insist on the coexistence in media systems of both processes of evolution and disruption, which are equally important to understand cultures and societies across different time spans and geographical areas. The study of evolutionary dynamics in cultural systems represents a large part of historical research in many fields. Similarly, the analysis of social, cultural, economical, or even technological disruptions attracted a wide interest and raised questions concerning the predictability of such events, and the way they deeply influence the course of evolution perhaps more than fluid, foreseeable processes. As the case of streaming platforms demonstrates, technological innovations occurred in the history of television did not operate as unique, isolated driving forces acting in the lack of pre-existent media practices. And yet, we can certainly detect the presence of a moment of disruption, to borrow a metaphor used by the television scholar Amanda D. Lotz (2018), a disruption that notably affected broadcasting both as a process of transmission/communication and as a whole industry.

If, on the one hand, the seemingly revolutionary nature of internet-distributed television has already proven itself still much influenced by oligopolistic tendencies and other hierarchical industrial macro-dynamics, which were present in traditional television, the introduction of streaming platforms did bring a new conversation to the field of media studies, by leveraging on

previously undefined - or at least only partially defined - concepts like platformization (Helmond 2015; Nieborg and Poell 2018), digitization/digitalization (Tilson *et al.* 2010), algorithimics (Miyazaki 2016) and other terms that became part of a renewed vocabulary for humanities scholars. Furthermore, the emergence of telecommunication and information technologies in the post-industrial society moved the focus from tangible to intangible goods, where content produced for either knowledge or entertainment entered local economies at all scales, thus showing an unexpected potential for financial investments and growth. Digital culture is therefore not only to be intended in its interaction with previous socio-cultural systems, but also in the collision with digital, weightless economies that rely on intangible goods, and generate a series of practices and uses, which overlap with older forms and norms - as in the case of the anthology form, which had already consolidated itself over time, throughout different media.

Even more than previous disruptions, digital cultures and economies had indeed a pervasive impact on a range of media practices, business models and modes of representation, superposing themselves to pre-existing social and industrial habits. As Lev Manovich argues, while other technological revolutions affected only specific stages and types of cultural communication, “the computer media revolution affects all stages of communication, including acquisition, manipulation, storage, and distribution; it also affects all types of media—texts, still images, moving images, sound, and spatial constructions.” (Manovich 2001: 19) In television as much as in other media, the term “digital” notably came to address a rather complex intertwining of technological, economic and social dynamics, which eventually affected the production and distribution, as well as the very access to, information, narratives and cultural forms at large. Such a digital turn (Svensson and Goldberg 2015) not only landed in media studies, by carrying an implicit call for

the redefinition of traditional theories and methodologies, in order to account for the most recent technological evolutions, but it also affected the television industry as a body of infrastructures, by initiating a broad reassessment of the very *network* of institutional entities and individual players concurring in both the production and circulation of content.

The idea of network represents a key component for understanding digital media and the way they function. By explicitly referring to processes of digitization/digitalization, the sociologist Manuel Castells notably discussed the social entity arose with the introduction of digital technologies using the term “networked society” and describing how the Internet has impacted human communication and activities at all levels of making and spreading culture. “At the heart of these communication networks the Internet ensures the production, distribution, and use of digitized information in all formats. According to the study published by Martin Hilbert in *Science* (Hilbert and López 2011), 95 percent of all information existing in the planet is digitized and most of it is accessible on the Internet and other computer networks.” (Castells 2014, online) Manuel Castells (1996) addresses topics as varied as technological revolution, dynamics of globalization, new economy, informational flows and virtual culture, to account for a radical shift in the level of interconnectedness between contemporary human communities and systems. Without going this far, this dissertation accounts for such a scenario and updates some of the concepts recurring in the field of media studies, in order to adapt them to recent changes emerged with the migration of television content on streaming platforms and online distribution.

As Lisa Parks suggests in an essay on cable infrastructures, “if television technology is a historically shifting form and set of practices, then it is necessary to consider more carefully how the medium’s content and form change with different distribution systems.” (Parks 2007: 114) To

further explore changes in television, I will consider a specific object, that of the television anthology, which requires a discussion on the anthology first and foremost as a cultural form presenting a certain set of affordances, but also as a practice, a model, a process. As I will show, finding themselves at the crossroads between television histories and the digital, contemporary anthology series serve as linkages to previous media traditions (i.e. literature and radio), as much as they act as medium-specific entities in the definition of classificatory systems on online platforms. When addressing narrative forms and structures, I will therefore consider contextual media, economic and social environments, as well as historical evolutions. Drawing upon a post-modern and post-structuralist perspective, this research accounts for the complex relation between the anthology form and narratives, industrial and social spheres, temporal continuities/discontinuities, techno-cultural transitions, which help framing and understanding the coexistence of linear and non-linear media environments in contemporary mediascapes.

More specifically, as the longtime dominant U.S. television business model has been challenged in various ways by industrial and technological changes in recent years, more heterogeneous narrative forms have emerged in addition to original serial structures. The diversity of televisual forms became particularly evident since national and local television landscapes started opening up to foreign markets outside of the U.S., finally embracing a transnational, global perspective. The transition to internet-distributed television played a pivotal role in this formal fragmentation and new dynamics of online streaming opened up another path for understanding the global flow of television content, which today reflects a highly interconnected, networked media and digital environment. Indeed, the proliferation of video-on-demand services is forcing seriality to adapt to the contemporary mediascape, giving rise to audiovisual products that can be trans-

ferred online and present specificities in production, distribution and reception. One of the outcomes of such changes in U.S. television series at the dawn of the twenty-first century is the anthology series divided in different seasons with separate stories, yet linked by tone and style.

Other attempts to reformulate serial structures are part of an evident trend in contemporary U.S. television seriality, characterized by the contraction of the season's duration in favor of the expansion of the narrative arc outside its typical episodic limit. My research positions itself in such a technological, industrial and cultural context, where television content is increasingly fragmented and virtually travels across borders (Esser *et al.* 2016) and platforms, creating a *trans*-medial and *trans*-national experience. Given such a fragmentation, this thesis considers the ways contemporary television content is distributed in the interaction between algorithmic-driven recommendation processes and more traditional editorial practices. The aim of this project is to investigate the way certain narrative structures typical of the anthology form emerge in the context of U.S. television seriality, starting from specific conditions of production, distribution and consumption in the media industry. The subject of television anthologies as serial products, with their singular properties of production, distribution and consumption that guarantee a unique adaptability, seems particularly relevant. However, it rarely appeared in the discussion on U.S. seriality and almost exclusively in relation to the notion of quality television (Feuer *et al.* 1984; Brunson 1990; Thompson 1997), or to the early history of U.S. television (Hilmes 2003; 2013). Most Western studies on serial storytelling focus on “vast narratives” (Harrigan and Wardrip-Fruin 2009) and long-running shows, often neglecting “short” television narrative forms with a pre-defined length.

Due to its cross-historical, cross-medial relevance, the television anthology, a serial *form* that can be reproduced at the same time as a *format*, is my case study to address *formal* issues - to further insist on the value of this etymological root -, without necessarily falling into radical formalist or structuralist approaches. Rather, I am interested in observing the connection, in constant redefinition, between form *and* content in anthology series, where the modular content is accentuated by a formal division into discrete narrative modules, subjected to mechanisms of scalability and reproducibility which make that of the anthology a highly resilient form. The present research project intends to answer more precisely the following questions: can concepts like format, form, and formula be usefully integrated in digital media studies, to account for the current formal, both local and global, fragmentation of television narratives? If so, what is their intersection with processes of anthologization in television? And, finally, what is the place of the anthology form in television seriality in the digital age and how can we detect its specificities in modes of production, distribution and consumption, in relation to cultural industries and streaming platforms? By observing the context of television, I will consider some of the properties that anthological narratives acquired in their material dependency on a single medium. However, I will also acknowledge that the process of shaping raw narrative content does not entirely rely on constraints and allowances that are solely medium-specific.

In particular, the first chapter builds on the concepts of format, form and formula in serial narratives, from their initial definitions in relation to early television, along with the radiophonic and literary origins of such terms, up until their place within the current academic debate on non-linear media environments. The chapter was notably developed starting from a review of formalist and neo-formalist approaches, by introducing the discussion on a morphology of narratives

(Propp [1928] 2010) and anticipating a morphology of media (Kitsopanidou and Soulez 2015) in application to television studies. Formats, forms and formulas are discussed as diverging, multi-layered notions, bridging between juridical, economical, cultural, narratological dimensions and constantly mutating throughout historical shifts and contextual conditions. This chapter is meant to provide a theoretical background in support of the use of “anthology form” as the preferential terminology to address the diversity of implications, topics and issues raised by the anthology (in terms of narratives, but also affordances, uses, practices).

As I previously mentioned, as much as the anthology form has developed in relation to television, a solely medium-specific approach does not justify the complexity of anthological formations on streaming platforms. It is therefore important to acknowledge that the practice, observed in television, of giving an anthological shape to otherwise form-less narrative content is the result of older cultural traditions inherited from other media, in a mutual exchange. To this aim, a study of the emergence, definition and evolution of the anthology form across several media is carried out in chapter 2. The chapter initially focuses on a definition of anthology and its etymological roots, to then consider the cultural implications of its uses and affordances in literature, radio and television. When discussing a definition of television anthology, I will outline a preliminary taxonomy - i.e. *ex ante/ex post* anthologies, micro-/semi-/macro-anthologies, episodic/seasonal anthologies -, which is useful to orientate the reader throughout different anthological prototypes. This abstract classification also points at the necessity of outlining specificities and differentiations between anthological forms and their affordances, as they are influenced by other examples of short narratives and micro-programming. Additional concepts will be discussed to establish the basis for an observation of world-building and world-narrowing practices in relation

to the anthology form, as well as processes of scalability and connectivity that suggest a similarity between the anthology and a “database model” (Manovich 1999).

Taking into account the core research questions of this dissertation, chapter 3 examines the theoretical frameworks behind the selection of the methodology that supports my thesis and sets the premises for future research at the intersection between television studies, digital humanities and distant reading (Moretti 2005). The first part of the chapter is dedicated to ecosystemic, ecological (Kelleter 2017) perspectives in cultural (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), media (Nystrom 1975; Strate 2006; Scolari 2012) and platform (Bogost and Montfort 2009; Gillespie 2010; Steinberg 2019) studies. The second part is intended to be a proposal for an interdisciplinary approach (Klein 1990) to the study of media and television. It notably appeals to the generation of scholars who opened up humanistic research to computational methods, inaugurating the field of digital humanities. The list of scholars engaged with the vast realm of digital humanities scholarships is long and varied. While considering as much as possible all types of experimental research conducted in application to a digital methodology and inquiry, here I will focus on the fundamentals laid out in 2012 by a group of scholars engaged in this field, namely Anne Burdick, Johanna Drucker, Peter Lunenfeld, Todd Presner and Jeffrey Schnapp, who reported a state of the art of digital humanities research. Starting from such a background, this chapter provides a framework for understanding the process of data collection, discovery, cleaning I underwent to define my *corpus*, which brought to a consistent work on data visualizations and information design, currently in phase of further development.

Even at a preliminary stage, this research on data visualization serves as a useful basis to understand visual models in application to media studies focusing on the production and distribu-

tion of television content. While I was not able to perform a distant reading of world television to the same extent to which Franco Moretti performed a distant reading of world literature, due to the many constraints found in accessing and manipulating data collections on television series worldwide, I still decided to proceed with a distant reading of a sub-corpus (i.e. anthology series produced or distributed in the United States, being the U.S. one of the largest television markets). Such a distant reading was then integrated with other approaches oriented towards cultural and media studies - namely, comparative historical analysis and media industries analysis -, thanks to a qualitative survey of the data and information available online (i.e. archives, interviews, newspapers articles), together with a review of literature. Close reading was also taken into account to examine single anthological content in the larger context of contemporary non-linear television. Ultimately, chapter 3 intends to prepare the ground for chapter 4 and 5, as well as for future research oriented to the use of digital humanities and distant reading in media studies starting from a larger database. Acknowledging both limitations and advantages of working with a restricted sample of data, I integrated the visual models presented in chapter 3 with the analysis offered in chapter 4 and 5, which helped frame the data visualizations I created and put them into context.

For instance, the visualizations outlined in chapter 3 are adopted as references for defining the comparative historical analysis found in chapter 4, which presents an overview on the evolution of the anthology form in U.S. television. By looking at the transition from traditional linear television to non-linear television and the consequent proliferation of serial content, the fourth chapter notably approaches the issue of formal fragmentation in television, by orienting the attention towards the anthological form, in its various declinations as it thrived to survive from analog to digital culture. For this approach, which is primarily cultural-historical, I followed the peri-

odization proposed by Amanda Lotz (2007), who theorized, among others, a “post-network era” in the United States, or as she reframed it later on considering the most recent adjustments in the industry, a “post-channel era” (Lotz 2016). To cover other international scenarios concerned with this “post-” phase, I additionally considered studies proposed by other scholars, who offer a transnational perspective on the transformations in television as a medium of communication: *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition* (Spigel and Olsson 2004) and *Television Studies After TV: Understanding Television in the Post-Broadcast Era* (Turner and Tay 2009). Furthermore, with the aim of exploring the corpus through both distant reading (Moretti 2005) and close reading, I discuss the relation established over time between television genres and the anthology form, a necessary *ex-cursus* if we want to observe the return of this form in contemporary media productions. The chapter ends with a look at internet-distributed television and digital platforms, which introduces in the conversation on the anthology form a substantial connection with digital culture and economy.

This peculiar connection is further explored in chapter 5, with a series of case studies which outline the mutual interaction between forms and platforms. An example of a case study is, for instance, one that accounts for Netflix’ business models for the production and distribution of original anthologies. Overall, the chapter discusses the strategies outlined by the main U.S. television platforms in relation to the anthology form. The case studies are divided into the following categories: original content on streaming natives (i.e. anthology series on Vimeo on Demand, Youtube Premium, Sony Crackles, Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Video, Apple TV+, Quibi), acquisitions on streaming natives (i.e. anthology series acquired by the main U.S. over-the-top players Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Video), skinny bundles’ originals (i.e. anthology series produced for CBS

All Access, HBO Now, FX+, Shudder, AMC Premium). Before analyzing each case study, this section of the thesis tackles a series of key topics for understanding internet-distributed television, its industrial context (Lotz 2017a), geography (Lobato 2016; 2019) and modes of non-linear time organization, often leading to forms of over-consumption (Trouleau *et al.* 2016). The intent is, on the one hand, to create a bridge with the previous chapter, by analyzing historical continuities in the industrial scape, and, on the other hand, to insist on the disruptions - technological, infrastructural, cultural - that marked the shift to non-linear television.

The conclusion finally brings together the main themes that emerge and recur over the course of each chapter, in order to verify the current placement and role of the anthology form in internet-distributed television, by addressing once again issues related to algorithmic culture and classificatory processes in the contemporary digital mediascape. The conclusion also serves as a broader reflection on the necessity to rethink the qualitative methodology traditionally used in television studies, to integrate it with a data-driven methodology, able to grasp the cultural impact of anthology series in the contemporary media environment, considering the amount of content produced. The limits and opportunities of the methodological approaches adopted here will be addressed in the final part of the dissertation, in order to propose further evolutions of this research at the intersection between digital media and cultural studies. By focusing on the evolution (temporal, historical dimension) and on the digital circulation (spatial, geographic dimension) of U.S. anthology series, and observing the peculiarities in their production and style, as well as their distributional networks and the consumption patterns they foster, this thesis ultimately insert itself into a larger conversation on digital-cultural studies. The final purpose is to investigate the relation between anthological *forms*, distribution *platforms* and consumption *models*, by propos-

ing a comparative approach to the anthology that is at the same time *cross-cultural*, *cross-historical*, *cross-genre* and accounting for both pre- and post-digital practices for cultural content organization.

1.1. On Narratives

First appeared in literary contexts, from its very origin the anthology form presented itself as a collection of separate, standalone stories. Narratives are therefore the *nuclei* of the anthology, which is primarily a form built on the assemblage of multiple forms. Since this thesis starts by mobilizing both concepts of narratives and forms, as they emerge in relation to several media, including television, it is necessary to consider some perspectives in narratology, as a discipline that helps framing the core components of anthological content in mediated environments. For this reason, in the present chapter, I will discuss notions borrowed from narrative theory and cultural studies, with the aim to both clarify what I refer to when I discuss the anthology as a narrative and cultural form, as well as to offer a contextual framework for my methodological approach (see chapter 3). This first chapter is therefore not intended to propose specifically a narratological approach, but it rather aims to address narratives and place them in a broader cultural, social, economical, political complexity, as they demonstrated to be pervasive entities in both individual and collective human life.

Even though narratives have spread in all domains, the study of narratives is still most commonly associated with narratology. Building on previous normative (Lukács [1916] 1974) and formal paradigms (Spielhagen 1883), this discipline was indeed the first to propose a programmatic theory, a method (Kindt and Müller 2003) for understanding storytelling and its occurrences in human societies, under certain structural conditions and logical constructs. However, since the initial attempts to define a “science of narrative” (Todorov 1969), the very notion of narrative itself emerged as problematic. In his seminal work on *Narrative Discourse*, the French scholar Gérard Genette ([1972] 1983) addressed the issues of defining this term, considering not only its ambiguous and multifaceted meaning, but also its multiple functions and properties. He notably distinguished three possible definitions of the word “narrative”. The first definition indicates the actual textual or verbal statement, the expression and *mise en discours* of the narrated events. The second meaning refers to the subjects of the discourse and their relations. Finally, a third meaning can be used to define the moment of narration, that is to say the very act of telling, narrating a story. Narrative is to be intended in this third aspect as a performative action, which implies several entities outside of the text (narrator, projected reader).

Genette, along with many other scholars, focused in particular on the first case, where a narrative text can be read as a set of temporal, spatial, functional (logic, causal) links, similarly to Tzvetan Todorov’s classification into different categories of correlation - tense, aspect, mood. Such relationships can exist between narrative discourse and story, between narrative discourse and narrating act, or between narrating act and story. The second meaning, which I will consider here along with the first meaning, in relation to more recent theories on narratives, appears as the most abstract and perhaps challenging one. We can picture narratives as *formless* content, the

fluid material that will eventually assume a shape by means of a certain narrative structure. “‘Analysis of narrative’ in this sense means the study of a totality of actions and situations taken in themselves, without regard to the medium, linguistic or other, through which knowledge of that totality comes to us.” (Genette ([1972] 1983: 25) The intersection between the first and second definition given by Genette opens up several possibilities to reflect upon text and context, but also on the meaning of narratives at large, outside their occurrences in literary studies. Before investigating the idea of narrative content and form, I will spend some time discussing the main concepts originally emerged in narrative theory, which contributed to set interesting directions in my research.

Narratology moved its early steps from the idea of a form (Propp [1928] 2010) or structure (Lévi-Strauss 1955; Barthes [1966] 1975) on which stories are built. These notions respectively evolved into the currents of Russian formalism and French structuralism. When Vladimir Propp published his *Morphology of the Folktale* in 1928, he was notably proposing a grammar of narrative, by borrowing a botanical term used for addressing the *structure* of a plant. As he states in the foreword of his book, “the word ‘morphology’ means the study of forms. In botany, the term ‘morphology’ means the study of the component parts of a plant, of their relationship to each other and to the whole — in other words, the study of a plant’s structure.” (Propp [1928] 2010: xxv) Despite the embryonic stage of his work on narrative forms, Propp was inaugurating a ground-breaking approach to story grammars, which would be later on adopted in quantitative narrative analysis, with the idea of coding narrative sequences, functions, categories and other data from textual sources (Franzosi 2010). Such an approach was criticized by Claude Lévi-Strauss, who supported a structuralist perspective in favor of less abstract models and formulas,

as part of his broader theorization of a “structural anthropology” (Lévi-Strauss 1963). As he writes, “*Form* is defined by opposition to content, an entity in its own right, but *structure* has no distinct content: it is content itself, and the logical organization in which it is arrested is conceived as property of the real.” (*ivi*: 168) The relation between these three key concepts - form, content, structure - lies at the foundation of several debates in narrative theory and helps in clarifying anthological entities as *forms* that give *structure* to *content*.

To sum up, on the one hand, Propp classifies two entities in narratives: the form, which leads to a morphological study, and the content, which remains inconsistent and unintelligible without the former. On the other hand, Lévi-Strauss stresses on the difference between formalism and structuralism by pointing precisely at the fact that “this opposition does not exist; structuralism does not treat one as abstract and the other as concrete. Form and content are of the same nature, amenable to the same type of analysis. Content receives its reality from its structure, and what is called form is a way of organizing the local structures that make up this content.” (*ivi*: 179) Following this structuralist current, in 1969, Todorov initiated what he called “Structural Analysis of Narrative”, which was outlined in one of his essays as a theoretical framework having a “logical rather than spatial significance.” (Todorov 1969: 70) His aim was “to propose a theory of the structure and operation of the literary discourse, to present a spectrum of literary possibilities, in such a manner that the existing works of literature appear as particular instances that have been realized.” (*ivi*: 71) Such a structuralist approach encountered over the years several challenges and controversies, which ended up in the reformulation of scholarly research in the field of narratology in favor of post-structuralist theories. Post-structuralism recognizes the narrative text as inserted into a process of signification placed within a social and cultural space, ack-

knowledging a relationships between text and meaning. This additionally poses the premises for postclassical narratology, by welcoming methodological approaches that examine textual narratives as “context-sensitive” (Alber and Fludernik 2010: 22).

Similarly, formalism encountered a new wave of renovation in the current of neo-formalism. An interesting reformulation of the idea of form is notably proposed by Caroline Levine, who re-elaborated this notion by suggesting a broader definition, to include cultural and social practices surrounding the narrative text. Overall, it seems that, at the turn of the twenty-first century, the debate on the triad form, content, structure opens up to another component, that of contextual forces and entities. In this sense, the anthology can be read as a *form* that gives a *structure* to narrative *content* in relation to a cultural, social, economic *context*, among others. What most narratologists are now concerned with is the relationship between these three concepts internal to the text - form, structure, content -, and the context external to the text. In the following paragraphs, I will describe Levine’s notion of form, which serves as the main theoretical perspective to approach my object of study - i.e. the anthology -, a form that embraces a certain set of affordances and relates the narratives it contains to a widespread exchange with other cultural forms. If anthologies can be indeed defined as ways to *structure* narratives and deliver knowledge, in this knowledge-transfer process that they activate, they also produce meanings, stem conversations and offer conceptual frameworks to interpret human societies, cultures, institutions or even single individual actors, sometimes generating narrative canons.

Much like anthologies are vaster than each narrative they contain, narratives themselves are vaster than the text. They are found beyond the realm of literary studies, in fields as varied as anthropology, politics or history. Even economics, a discipline traditionally unwilling to reason in

terms of storytelling dynamics, is now opening up to embrace narrative theory and follow this narrative turn. Considering the power of narratives in influencing economic behaviors, the economist Robert J. Shiller recently proposed the notion of “narrative economics” (Shiller 2017), insisting on the fact that “narratives drive the world that we live in.”² This post-modern, post-structuralist vision was previously summed up in the theories of Jean-Francois Lyotard, which Martin McQuillan reframed by asserting that “narrative is a mode of knowledge [...]. Knowledge is articulated and communicated in society in the form of narratives.” (McQuillan 2000: 323)

This epistemological dimension of narratives, as reflective mechanisms triggered by experiences and triggering interpretations, is additionally explored in the field of cognitive narratology, which I will not rely on here, except for outlining some marginal aspects relevant to this dissertation. Emerged as a subfield of postclassical narratology investigating the nexus between narratives, knowledge representation and human mind, cognitive narratology gains an interesting relevance in application to Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its ability to reproduce semiotic structures typical of human knowledge. A cognitive study of how human minds and computer machines process stories into scripts and parse them into units or sequences can indeed shed a light onto an epistemology of algorithmic recommendation systems, in their overlapping with analog practices of editorial content organization. Bearing in mind cognitivist approaches, I will discuss anthologies as “types of mental structure, including categorical, matrix, serial, schematic, and story structure” (Mandler 1984), which, in the context of digital platforms, are likely to superpose onto AI-generated structures.

² Smith, Jake J. “Robert Shiller on ‘Narrative Economics.’” *The Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society*. Last modified February 17, 2017. retrieved July 26, 2019. https://neubauercollegium.uchicago.edu/news/detail/robert_shiller_on_narrative_economics.

Overall, understanding narratives and anthologies as “modes of knowledge” and, finally, as cultural *forms*, allows me to observe them not as mere self-existent structures, recalling an archaic narratological vision, but as entangled human constructs, conceived within cultural systems and often carrying a number of formal rules. Anthropological research thus enters the debate on narratives, which are not only studied through a narratological perspective, but also through a historical and sociological one, as they colonize all human spheres. Taking this stance, I will observe anthologies as both narrative forms and forms of knowledge. Such a post-structuralist, neo-formalist perspective notably anticipates a study of anthology series as products inevitably nested into popular culture, obeying to the logics of entertainment and generating a shared, organized cultural memory. In this respect, anthologies acquire even more value in a context where digital technologies “have altered the practices and possibilities of collective remembering.” (Linke 2015: 181) While rethinking Todorov’s intuition of a morphology of narratives and admitting the original lexicon of narratology, television anthologies will be therefore studied here as culturally and socially embedded narrative forms, or else structured manifestations of a “collective memory” (Halbwachs [1950] 1992) and shared human knowledge, thus reconnecting to a set of practices for the editorialization, organization, storage of narrative content and functioning as a fundamental means for the circulation of culture in the broader sense of the term.

1.2. Of Formats, Forms, Formulas. Towards a Re-formulation

Before going in-depth into a detailed definition and classification of the anthology form, it is necessary to discuss three key terms, which will recur often while outlining the pivotal con-

cepts that guided my research into the field of media studies - that is to say: format, form and formula. To advance my thesis and hypothesis, I built upon these notions, which provided part of the theoretical and methodological imprinting that eventually informed an interdisciplinary approach. First, I looked at the definitions of format, as one of the structural components affecting the distribution of television content. Yet, in the absence of a precise and stable definition of television format, which often appears as an arbitrary concept that emerges from changing industrial practices, rather than from theories of academic origins, I have oriented myself taking into consideration other formulations proposed in the field of television studies, as well as in other disciplines. In particular, issues related not only to formats, but also to narrative forms and formulas, have been examined by several scholars in recent years (Chalaby 2016; Ellis *et al.* 2016; Aveyard *et al.* 2016), involving various subject areas: from cultural studies (Cawelti 1969) and sociology (Gitlin 1979), to narratology, with the concept of “form” proposed by Caroline Levine (2015), to media studies (Moran 1998; Moran and Malbon 2006) and transnational studies observing global paths of television content (Oren and Shahaf 2012).

In the following paragraphs, I will look at each term more closely, with the purpose of clarifying the terminology generally adopted to address television anthologies and explain how forms articulate into formats or formulas, in a morphology of narratives that is inscribed within the larger context of a “morphology of media” (Kitsopanidou and Soulez 2015: 7). While scholarly traditions do not always agree on a shared definition and use of the words form, format and formula, since these terms change their meaning not only across disciplines but also across different countries and linguistic areas, what I will try to do here is to define a common vocabulary that can be used as a reference point for further discussion. Very much like in linguistics and se-

mantics, the idea is not to localize all definitions, which would risk to generate a scattered conversation on different meanings of the same word, but rather to agree on a global terminology that can lead us to an effective communication exchange around labels assigned to certain concepts, while also admitting the presence of specificities in single markets leading to variations and exceptions.

For instance, within a certain level of generalization, we can state quite fairly that traditionally, in broadcast television, the format acts with a double value: on the one hand, as a production and commercial unit to be sold and reproduced in the television schedule, and on the other hand as a model on which the narration is developed. In shaping television formats, economical norms merge with the languages and codes of storytelling, creating semiotic universes that interact with surrounding cultural systems and social contexts. In this sense, the anthological structure is often considered as a format, as seen in the widespread terminology of “anthology format”. Albert Moran, one of the first academics who considered the format as a subject of study, defined this unit of production as “a set of invariable elements in a serial program out of which the variable elements of individual episodes are produced.” (Moran 1998: 13) More recently, together with Justin Malbon, he proposed another definition, where format, rather than referring only to the fixed, recurrent, reproducible elements within a serial product, is seen more broadly as “the total body of knowledge systematically and consciously assembled to facilitate the future adaptation under license of the program.” (Moran and Malbon 2006: 7) This pragmatic dimension of the adaptation and reuse of televisual material is particularly relevant in the seemingly saturated market of contemporary television.

Here, I will use the word format in the updated definition of Jean K. Chalaby (2016), who emphasizes the presence of four dimensions implied in this notion: (i) a legal dimension; (ii) a cultural dimension; (iii) an economic and financial dimension; (iv) a productive dimension. To return to the cultural aspect, which will be central to my research, examples of formats in anthology series will be considered as places of cultural negotiation, or, to use Heidi Keinonen's words, as circuits of "economic and cultural exchange" (Keinonen 2017: 996), in a perspective that aims to reconnect the notion of format with cultural studies. However, using the concept of format for describing the nature of all anthology series might be misleading, and more appropriate terms should be considered. For instance, beyond a legal, economic, productive dimension, which come together in the process of negotiation between two commercial entities (production-distribution companies and those who buy the serial product), I intend to also point at a narratological dimension, returning to some of the narrative concepts outlined in the previous paragraph. Intertwined with the others, the actual narrative is nevertheless detached from rigid dynamics of institutional bargaining typical of the format. Instead, it rather takes shape in the non-institutionalized act of "textual co-operation" between empirical author(s) and empirical reader(s) (Eco 1984).

To account for this cultural-narratological aspect, I will adopt the notion of "form" as theorized by Caroline Levine in her book *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*. Together with Levine, I use the term form to define "an arrangement of elements—an ordering, patterning, or shaping." (Levine 2015: 3) Such polyhedric notion doesn't simply refer to processes of *formation*, but it embraces within itself four distinct elements, that can overlap. The first three are addressed using the following terms: (i) "whole", as the totality of a form; (ii) "rhythm", as its temporality; (iii) "hierarchy", as an ordering, a gradation between forms. The fourth term introduced

by Levine to discuss the notion of form is “network” (Levine 2015). As she notes, “Sprawling and spreading, networks might seem precisely formless. But studies of networks in mathematics, physics, and sociology have shown how networks follow knowable patterns, surprisingly systematic ordering principles.” (Levine 2016: 78) The concept of network will return in the following paragraphs as one of the main notions discussed in this dissertation, which addresses both Levine’s conceptual theorization of forms and Johanna Drucker’s discussion on “visual forms of knowledge production” (Drucker 2014).

Other definitions that I will consider in my thesis are that of “formula” (Cawelti 1969), which refers to a process of absorption of cultural practices or norms, and “genre”, which has a long history in literary studies taking a structuralist perspective in search for narrative patterns and cues. Overall, the definitions of format, form and formula of a television program - i.e. anthology series - need to be taken into account if we intend to proceed to a cultural study of television seriality and the social discourses related to it. Since they interact with industrial dynamics of production, distribution and reception, these three notions allow the examination of television series both in commercial terms, as reproducible models in the television marketplace on a local or global scale, and in terms of an economy of narrative, by imposing normative, temporal or stylistic, limits to the development of storytelling. According to the market’s demand, which must be considered to motivate choices of production, cultural norms influence the creation of a first *schema* to build the narration - the scheme being a format, a form or a formula. These terms are useful to understand the importance of repetitions, regularities, returns in television seriality, as well as for describing processes of absorption of cultural practices and norms. The concepts of format, form and formula are therefore equally indispensable for establishing the path of analysis,

since they contribute to define anthology series in their conceptual, industrial and cultural complexity.

1.2.1. Formats

Using a particularly effective metaphor borrowed from a television producer, the scholar Albert Moran describes the television format as a pie-and-crust model, in which the outer crust always remains the same, while the filling changes and regenerates from week to week (Moran 1998: 13). In this sense, the anthology is often described by mass media using the term format, with reference to the way it acts as a “crust”, or as a container, by influencing the production of narrative content. Just like anthology series, television formats date as far back as the birth of television as a medium. However, while some anthological occurrences in television can be said to respond to format logics, not all anthology series are formats. It is therefore necessary to clarify this distinction, by outlining a brief history of format research and giving a more precise outline of what formatted anthology series look like. As mentioned before, format is in fact a construct of the media industry itself, and only later became a concept used in academic research for the analysis of audiovisual content and its production or distribution strategies. Two histories of format thus exist, one that deals with the actual practice of television formatting and the other that considers the theoretical evolutions of format studies.

While tracing his history of television formats, Jean K. Chalaby suggested that the format business, meaning the production, trade and adaptation of reproducible television programs, came to life as an Anglo-American invention (Chalaby 2012). As one of his articles points out, the format trade in the broadcasting industry started even before television, during the early days of ra-

dio, when cross-border adaptations were produced under licensing agreements between several anglophone countries - United States, United Kingdom, Australia, but also Canada (*ivi*: 37-38). In television, the first television programs exported as formats were comedy panel shows, quiz shows, game shows traveling along the U.S.-U.K. axis, coming from American channels like CBS or NBC and mostly being acquired by the British channel BBC (*ibidem*). These shows and their scripts were sold abroad through commercial agreements. As it emerges from Chalaby's research (2012; 2016) on the historical and legal foundations of the concept, since the very beginning, the word "format" meant at least three things: border-crossing, licensing agreement, monetary exchange. To these, it should be added the presence of a script, or else, as it appears later on in the history of television, a package, which contains the core idea for the program, along with directions for the production process and other contextual requirements, according to copyright standards and intellectual property.

Elsewhere, licensed content was much more rare, resulting in a diffused practice of pirating or simply non-trackable borrowing and an overall lack of copyright protection (Chalaby 2016). With new players entering the market thanks to the arrival of cable television in the 1980s, formats began assuming a strategic value in both local industries and the global value chain, related to the possibility to create content that fits the programming schedule, while also minimizing the financial risks and serving as a "proof of concept" (Chalaby 2011: 305). "The entire premise of the TV format trade hinges on two benefits: cost effectiveness and risk management." (Chalaby 2016: 170) This premise stands at the origins of the contemporary format industry system, where formats in both factual and fictional entertainment secure the programming schedule of most television linear channels worldwide. Throughout its evolutions in

different times, territories and markets, the term format in television industry ultimately came to refer to “a show that can generate a distinctive narrative and is licensed outside its country of origin in order to be adapted to local audiences.” (Chalaby 2011: 296)

While exporting a format clearly builds on a legal agreement and on some type of contract, it also means adapting the content to a different cultural environment. Even though the concept of format recalls several practices of localization and it can assume different disguises depending on the countries involved, it is clear that some elements remain stable in the definition of what a format is. As Chalaby underlines (2016: 8-13), the term format returns to four dimensions: (i) a legal dimension, which includes matters of copyright; (ii) a cultural dimension, built in the adaptive interaction between the local and the global; (iii) an economic and financial dimension, as to the capital budgeting, investment appraisal and related risks; (iv) a productive dimension, concerned with industrial norms and challenges. These four elements are decisive to determine the impossibility to fit all television anthologies under the umbrella term of anthology format. While formats acquire their status in the process of replication beyond national or local boundaries, under certain legal, economical, productive circumstances, an anthology is an anthology even when there is no transnational movement involved. Hence, we should specifically ask which anthologies can be defined as formats. It seems to me that using the extensive study of Chalaby and its large contribution to the field clarifies much of the aspects necessary to assign the label of format. However, other scholars have addressed this subject before and it is worth considering their theories before proceeding to a categorization of the anthology formats.

One of the first scholars to engage in this discussion and certainly one of the most renowned authors in format studies is Albert Moran. In 1998, Moran was asking “what exactly is a program

format?” (Moran 1998: x), initiating a longtime discussion in television scholarships. He notably traces the origin of the terms back to the printing industry and identifies dictionary synonyms like pattern, model, shape. As he underlines, while, in the domain of publishing, format is mostly associated to an aesthetic dimension, in television studies this term “carries a particular industrial set of implications” (*ivi*: 13); formats can be “generative” or “organisational” (*ibidem*). In his primary attempt to summarize a comprehensive formulation of format, he introduces the idea of variable versus invariable elements in a program (*ibidem*). In this broader sense, if we dismiss for a moment the legal dimension that Moran acknowledges, the anthology can be considered as a format, since it does follow patterns of divergence and convergence in its main structure. And yet, while all anthology series might fit a meaning of the term inherited from the printing industry or a very vague formulation of television format, they certainly will not fit Moran’s final definition.

Almost a decade after his book *Copycat Television: Globalisation, Program Formats and Cultural Identity*, together with Justin Malbon he wrote *Understanding the Global TV Format* (Moran and Malbon 2006). In this publication, he updates some concepts previously outlined in an introductory glossary, where Moran adds some of the elements a format package should contain or provide - such as a Bible and a consultancy service. Only by looking at the glossary (*ivi*: 5-7), the term format turns out to be much more complex than a simple mix of crust and fillings. Over the past few years, as television super-formats colonized the television market, this notion was further developed considering a transnational perspective and going beyond an anglophone-centric vision. If Moran and Malbon (*ivi*: 11) acknowledged the processes of adaptation, transfer and recycling as the most important dynamics of television formatting, Chalaby also stressed this point by discussing “how the TV format trade became a global industry.” (Chalaby 2011: 293)

Agreeing with these statements and recognizing the strict connection found between format and dynamics of globalization, Tasha Oren and Sharon Shahaf (2012) edited a volume on “global television formats”, widening the study on television across borders. Other renown television scholars, namely John Ellis, Andrea Esser and Juan Francisco Gutiérrez Lozano (2016), contributed to the developments in the field, by making a state of the art of format research and its theoretical, methodological, historical developments.

In this consolidated and spread fashion of television formatting, global anthology formats came into existence only recently as a marginal tendency within the larger trend to reproduce scripted television series outside national borders. As Chalaby (2016: 168) explains, scripted TV formats had a late rise in the global market. The format revolution of the 1990s did not really take into account scripted fictional entertainment (*ibidem*). Nevertheless, from the 2000s on, some scripted anthologies began joining the global format trade. Despite the presence of a strong anglophone tradition behind this typology of serial content, anthology formats are now acquired from both anglophone and non-anglophone markets. One example is the Argentinian procedural series *Mujeres Asesinas* (Canal 13, 2005-2008), which was exported to the U.S. market with the title of *Killer Women* (ABC, 2014). The series can be described as an episodic anthology, or semi-anthology, as each episode contains a different story on a different character. While it was canceled in the U.S. after only one season, the series had a higher success in Mexico, where the format was acquired by Canal 5 and aired for four seasons as of 2019. Police procedurals are interesting examples of an anthology structure. Serial objects where the long-running plot is not so present and the focus of the storytelling is given to the anthology plot, like in the case of *Mujeres Asesi-*

nas, can be addressed as anthology series or semi-anthologies, both from a production and distribution standpoint, but also for what concerns the reception side.

Another procedural format that was exported with relative success is the Danish series *Forbrydelsen* (DR1, 2007-2012), which was sold to Fox Television Studios and Fuse Entertainment in 2011. The U.S. version was distributed with the title *The Killing* on AMC (2011-2013) and it was then acquired by Netflix in 2014 for a final season consisting of six episodes. By moving the setting from Copenhagen to Seattle, this restyling for the U.S. audience brought the European genre of nordic noir to North-American television, a legacy that continued with the acquisition of the Danish-Swedish coproduction *Bron/Broen* (SVT1/DR1, 2011-2018) by Shine America and FX, resulting in the show *The Bridge* (FX, 2013-). Thanks to the setting, which places the series at the border between two countries (Denmark and Sweden in the original series, U.S. and Mexico in the North-American adaptation), *Bron/Broen* turned out to be an interesting experiment for the cross-cultural adaptation of a scripted format. It was remade in the UK and France, taking the name of *The Tunnel* (Sky Atlantic/Canal Plus, 2013), in Estonia and Russia (*Most/Sild*, NTV, 2018-), in Malaysia and Singapore (HBO Asia/NTV7/viu, 2018-), and in Germany and Austria (*Der Pass*, Sky Deutschland, 2019-).

Calling the *Forbrydelsen* or *Bron/Broen* a true anthology is a bit risky. Yet, we can still consider them as semi-anthological formats, given that each season (more or less, depending on the adaptation) deals with a separate case. In that sense, a product like the crime series *Law & Order* also generated a practice of formatting of an anthology-like product, with adaptations in Russia (NTV, 2007), France (TF1, 2007-08), UK (ITV, 2009-) and South Africa in (2012). The fact that we need to include these ambivalent examples (that is to say, series having a long-run-

ning narrative arc with a strong anthology component stressing on a single episode or season) is representative of the certain scarcity in the amount of anthology series that actually went to formatting. Two scripted television formats that can be labeled more properly as anthology series, both having a seasonal narrative arc, are *The Syndicate* (BBC 1, 2012-), which was turned into the U.S. remake *Lucky 7* (ABC, 2013), and the Australian series *Secrets and Lies* (Network Ten, 2014-) adapted for ABC (2015-2016). Some other anthology products are set for future adaptations, such as the British series *Accused* (BBC1, 2010-2012), which might be remade for ABC by Sony Picture Television under the direction of David Shore³.

Another British anthology series licensed outside its country of origin is *Black Mirror* (Channel 4, 2011–2014; Netflix, 2016–). Whether *Black Mirror* was sold as a format or not, and if it can even be considered as such is not clear. *Black Mirror* had a singular history and destiny. The series was produced in the U.K. television market by Endemol Shine for Channel 4. As reported by *The Guardian*⁴, some dispute during the negotiations between the series' creators, Charlie Brooker and Annabel Jones, and Channel 4 for commissioning the third season lead Channel 4 to lose the right to screen the sci-fi series, which officially entered the Netflix's library as Netflix Original content in 2016. Even though it is clearly a case of screening rights' acquisition, a common circumstance in the television industry, this transatlantic displacement implies some features typical of the format trade: border-crossing, licensing agreement, monetary exchange. It also implicitly means adaptation for another market. In a moment when a certain Net-

³ Holloway, Daniel. "David Shore Extends Sony Overall Deal." *Variety*. Last modified June 12, 2018. Retrieved July 26, 2019. <https://variety.com/2018/tv/news/david-shore-sony-overall-deal-1202843625>.

⁴ Plunkett, John. "Netflix Deals Channel 4 Knockout Blow over Charlie Brooker's Black Mirror." *The Guardian*, Last modified March 29, 2016. Retrieved July 26, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/mar/29/netflix-channel-4-charlie-brooker-black-mirror>.

flix aesthetics starts to consolidate, even within its localized productions and despite the creative freedom Netflix grants to content creators, in this “transtelevisual move” (Hills *et al.* 2019: 235) *Black Mirror* is inevitably forced to reposition itself. Indeed, the series underwent a format-like process in both financial terms (higher budget) and cultural terms (transcultural audience).

To conclude, what emerges from all these examples is that anthology series are rarely adhering to formatting practices from an industrial perspective. Given different risk management outcomes, scripted television formats are less diffused than unscripted formats (Chalaby 2016: 170). Even when we might be able to use the definition of anthology format, as in the TV series mentioned above, there is often some peculiarity involved, which makes most cases an exception. A discussion on the nature of these anthology formats, which usually depends on specific commercial agreements and did not generate any visible trend so far, would not be relevant in this research. Even the word format as concept borrowed from literary studies, with its materialistic connotation, does not apply to the idea of a television anthology format. In order to avoid confusion, but also to make the analysis of television anthology series meaningful for the scope of this dissertation, I will consider other, more appropriate terms. For instance, rather than recurring to a technical term such as format is, I propose to adopt the concept of form. Returning to narrative theory, but also incorporating cultural studies and media theory, this versatile notion will be considered here throughout its multiple uses in the humanities and will return frequently in the chapters ahead.

1.2.2. Forms

“There are countless forms of narrative in the world.” (Barthes [1966] 1975: 237) With this phrase the French semiotician Roland Barthes was introducing a structural analysis of narrative, proving that even though structuralism detaches itself from formalism, it still conveniently employs the term “form” interchangeably with the term “structure”. Found in both formalist and structuralist theories, the concept of narrative form tackles several aspects related to narratives as texts - where texts is to be intended in its broad sense. Starting with an extremely simple definition, a narrative form can be intended as the shape and length of a narrative text. In her theoretical overview on narrative forms, Suzanne Keen enriches this definition, by arguing that “the historical, material, and cultural conditions surrounding the production of a narrative often have a profound effect on its presentation: the form in which it comes to a reader.” (Keen 2015: 21) Similarly, “this form in turn may have an impact on its immediate success in the marketplace, on its chances for surviving its immediate moment or short-term ‘shelflife,’ and the statistically unlikely event that it will be studied [...]” (*ibidem*) As simple as it seems, the idea of form as shape or length has an important place in anthropological research. Short and long forms convey different narratives in different cultures. Short stories like ballads or brief tales often carry different function than novels or epic works. I will return on this differentiation in chapter 2. From classical epic to contemporary television series, each narrative may contain shorter “formal arrangements” (Keen 2015: 22), being chapters, episodes, sequences, verses. These sections give rhythm, create a pause or an interval, guide the readers/viewers and their interpretation.

A similar account of narrative form as something that is dependent from - and at the same time actively influences - historical, material, cultural conditions can be found in several theories

loosely based on early formalism. Among the offsprings of early formalism, New Historicism, originated from the works of Michel Foucault, Clifford Geertz, Raymond Williams and theorized by the scholars Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher, among others, offered an interesting take on the notion of form. A reflection on the nexus between history, literary forms and social formations was already initiated by Marxists like Georg Lukács, Pierre Macherey and Fredric Jameson, who in the words of Levine, “have been inclined to understand literary forms as expressions of social and economic realities.” (Levine 2006: 625) More specifically, “literary forms, read in their rich complexity as struggles among conflicting sign systems, [...] bear witness to a dialectical social agon, offering us our best access to both existent and emergent systems of social relations. Foucauldian and New Historicist critics, too, have argued that literary forms do not merely reflect social relationships but may help bring them into being.” (*ibidem*)

Drawing upon Marxist and New Historicist theories, along with a formalist vision, Levine thus introduces a new framework for the study of narrative forms, that of “strategic formalism”, or “post-post-structuralist formalism”, as she defines it⁵. As Levine explains, on the one hand, this paradigm “relies on historicist work in the field to understand the ways that literary forms have force in the social world and are capable of shaping political arrangements. On the other hand, it extends formalist insights to make the case that social hierarchies and institutions can themselves be understood as forms.” (*ivi*: 626) This is a fundamental premise for understanding Levine’s later work, which inserts itself within a neo-formalist movement, to ultimately propose a new approach for analyzing not only the cultural value of narrative forms, but also their interplay

⁵ “Deliberately echoing Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, here, I am proposing something of a post-post-structuralist formalism. It is deconstructive in that it acknowledges the political perils of abstractions, of binaries, of apparently transhistorical forms, while also presuming that we cannot do without them. [...] The point is not to do away with simplifying, iterable forms, then, but to follow them as they cross paths with other forms.” (Levine 2006: 632-633)

with social formations. By doing so, Levine moves very close to the domain of cultural studies. In her vision, forms can be literary, cultural, social, political, transhistorical, even economic. By adopting a similar approach, I acknowledge that forms are always social and that such an overlapping of forms generates an intricate structure, where complex systemic processes of ordering and patterning are not so easy to discern.

At this level of abstraction, a formalist vocabulary, she argues, is needed to investigate temporal and spatial, but also relational mechanisms, in human cultures and societies. “If cultural studies has taught us to see power relations as systemic and patterned— as formalized—then it is time to think about culture in terms of its forms.” (*ivi*: 631) And if forms are “ways of imposing order, of shaping and structuring experience” (*ivi*: 635), then cultures should be read “as dense networks of different kinds of interacting forms.” (*ibidem*) Perhaps one of the most important points in Levine’s strategic formalism is her attention not only for what forms are, but also for what forms *do*. A practical evaluation of the notion of forms leads us to observe their functions, utterances, or, how she refers to them, *affordances*. Drawing interesting analogies with the affordances of specific materials - diamond, wood, glass -, Levine borrows “the term ‘affordance’ from design studies. The affordances of materials are the kinds of uses or actions that are latent in them—their capabilities. [...] Specific designs, which organize these materials and others, then lay claim to their own range of affordances.” (Levine 2016: 76) Much like “a wooden chair affords sitting, as well as sociability when placed around a dinner table” (*ibidem*), the anthology form *affords* specific uses, or else offers the possibility to actualize certain *affordances*.

To this matter, Jonathan Kramnick and Anahid Nersessian also ask what do forms *explain*, arguing that one of the weaknesses of this concept might be precisely that it explains everything

through a series of instances. Seemingly ubiquitous, the concept of form has indeed been “applied to circumstances widely disparate in scale, character, and significance.” (Kramnick and Nersessian 2017: 650) This might recall David Bordwell and Noël Carroll’s definition of a post-theory (1996), through which they were challenging film scholars to embrace a cognitive stance, instead of adopting a universal, unified theory, and to consider the factitive action of audiovisual media on audiences, which ultimately leads to a variety of alternative practices and theories. The same issues were raised by Marjorie Levinson (2007), who expressed her skepticism for the lack of a shared commitment and agreement on what form actually is. However, Kramnick and Nersessian interestingly conclude that the fact “that form appears sometimes as shape, sometimes as pattern, sometimes as habit, line, structure, model, design, trope, and so on suggests not that formalism is incoherent but that form [...] is not a word without content but a notion bound pragmatically to its instances.” (Kramnick and Nersessian 2017: 661) By instances they mean versions of forms.

This is also how Levine came to a categorization of the concept in her book on forms (Levine 2015). Not only Levine tells us what forms are, but she also tells us what they are *not*: ruptures, gaps, interruptions, subversions, collapsing binaries, impulses of force, affect and desire (Levine 2016: 77). By clarifying what they are and what they are not, but also what they do, she finally recognizes four typologies of forms that emerge across several disciplines: whole, rhythm, hierarchy, network. When Caroline Levine outlined four major forms - that is to say, whole, rhythm, hierarchy, network -, she was not thinking specifically about the anthology form. And yet, these four elements proved to be particularly pertinent for the analysis of anthology series. The first concept she describes is that of whole. Whole refers to a containing, totalizing, organic

form (Levine 2015: 24), a model traditionally used in literary studies for defining narrative closure and formal unity. However, when she talks about “whole” as a unifying force focusing on its role of container, she does not imply an overall, absolute homogeneity. She does not advocate for a narrative closure either, as even enclosed forms can be portals to other forms, thus never really bringing to a full closure. What she focuses her attention on is rather the problem of wholeness as bounded, restricted space, meaning a space with boundaries and enclosures, being them spatial, temporal, narrative or of other nature. Wholes, she explains, affords both inclusiveness and exclusion. In this dialectic closure/enclosure lies the meaning of whole and its inner relevance.

As Levine puts it, “This analysis will push us beyond the model of literary form as containment, and invite us to reconsider the relation between literary forms and social containers as something other than reflective homologies.” (*ivi*: 40) Taking as a case to the anthology form, the anthology principle functions indeed as a whole. The very act of anthologization creates a formal unity, through both constraining and enabling processes. On the one hand, it constrains in the sense that it imposes boundaries and a containing mechanism, since the anthology always implies a principle of organization that tells us what can go inside and what cannot (inclusion/exclusion). On the other hand, the anthology form enables variations, being them aesthetic, stylistic, thematic, narrative (e.g. different characters or plot) variations. The power of variations is such that it entails a friction between unities and disunities, and ultimately, between different, interacting forms. This opposition between unity and multiplicity is intrinsic to the idea of a whole, which exists in the binomial relation homogeneity/dishomogeneity. Or as the philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987: 103) put it, “You will never find a homogeneous system that is not still or already affected by a regulated, continuous, immanent process of variation.” (Deleuze

and Guattari 1987: 103) Agreeing with them, Levine adds that “Homogeneity always depends on variation; but there is no variation without the shaping power of homogeneity.” (Levine 2006: 653) In the analysis of the anthology form and its clash with other forms, I will therefore account for the interactions that it creates as a structuring and ordering whole.

Another scholar who approached these formal entities defined as “wholes” is Franco Moretti. In his theoretical approach to the term, he does not go as far as Levine; and yet, he suggests a very similar perspective to the one just outlined. In his book *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* published in 2005, before Levine advanced her call for a new formalism, he was reporting the necessity to approach literature as a whole, instead of a fragmented ensemble of single, discrete texts. He notably commented that “a field this large cannot be understood by stitching together separate bits of knowledge about individual cases, because it isn’t a sum of individual cases: it’s a collective system, that should be grasped as such, as a whole.” (Moretti 2005: 4) The connection between forms and systems will be discussed more in details in chapter 3 on the methodology, accounting for a complexity framework (Morin 2008). Nevertheless, starting from this introductory chapter, it is important to insist on the connection between theory, methodology and objects of study.

As a second example of form, Caroline Levine introduces “rhythm”, stressing out its temporal dimension. It would be perhaps more appropriate to define this form as temporal rhythm, since it implies repetitions and enduring patterns over time (Levine 2015: 21). While some cultures perceive rhythm as a recurrent, symmetrical motion, recalling the etymological root of the term (Liddell and Scott 1996), scholarly studies based on the observation of musical meters see rhythm as a flow, instead of a series of discrete units, unfolding over time, very much based on

perception (Cooper and Meyer 1963: 2). In short, the core meaning of the term rhythm, encompassing different definitions and embracing the constants commonly found across them, can be summed up in two main components: a time component (a durational aspect, a frequency, a tempo or others) and a geometrical component (a pattern, alternations, repetitions). In Levine's perspective temporal rhythms "must be seen to function together and differently, overlapping and colliding, to produce a diachronic complexity [...]." (Levine 2015: 67)

The diachronic periodicity of rhythm, its ability to generate cycles, is what ultimately makes it a form. "While its meanings and values may change, the pattern or shape itself can remain surprisingly stable across contexts. [...] No matter how different their historical and cultural circumstances, that is, bounded enclosures will always exclude, and rhyme will always repeat." (*ivi*: 7) Regular or irregular, contrastive or uniform, repetitions over time define rhythm as a form. By mentioning several examples, Levine additionally suggests that "A rhythm can impose its powerful order on laboring bodies as well as odes. Binary oppositions can structure gendered workspaces as well as creation myths." (*ibidem*) Much like wholes, socio-political rhythms are therefore considered, within this perspective, in their implication with narrative or aesthetic rhythms. Without looking at these implications as merely causal, Levine invites us once again to look at the complex ways these forms "meet, reroute, and disrupt one another." (*ivi*: 23)

In anthology series, if the whole sets a closure through exclusion and inclusion, rhythms sets the actual patterning of the narrative structure. This can be found on a small and large scale, by simply observing how a single anthology is constructed in terms of narrative form, or by reasoning on a larger corpus, in terms of a cultural form. As I will demonstrate while discussing the methodology, finding rhythms and patterns is fundamental for a research that aims to adopt a

“distant reading” (Moretti 2013) on serialized cultural objects with the intent of finding regularities and disruptions across them, as they are themselves prone to follow a rhythmic movement of repetitions and variations. Considering a distant reading as a framework, other interesting questions might arise from this brief reflection on formal rhythms: if rhythm is a time-related concept, how can we measure it? Disciplines like “quantitative formalism” (Allison *et al.* 2011; Moretti *et al.* 2017) reason precisely in terms of counting recurring patterns across texts, thus isolating clusters or aggregating texts. A rhythm-sensitive research can be therefore considered in digital humanities to understand movement over time, but also to account for computational, digital or algorithmic turns in media.

To this regard, in Jentery Sayers’ (2018) *The Routledge Companion to Media Studies and Digital Humanities*, Shintaro Miyazaki further explores the concept of “algorhythmics” (Miyazaki 2016), which turns out to be particularly useful to understand non-linear television and digital culture at large. As he explains, “rhythm [...] is an effect of ordering and measurement. ‘Algorhythmics,’ then is a research field, that inquires time-based, technological processes, which occur when matter is modulated by symbolic and logical structures, such as instructions written as code.” (Miyazaki 2016: online) Finally, “understanding the efficiency and performance of algorithms is crucial to also understanding the sociopolitical and economic aspects of digital cultures, because algorithms are now common components of most infrastructures.” (Miyazaki, in Sayers 2018: 244) Algorithmic-driven infrastructures are included in over-the-top television platforms. Being algorithmic-driven or simply based on cultural or narrative shaping forces, rhythms will be therefore considered here as pivotal forms that interact with wholes, but also with hierarchies and

networks, thus justifying the purpose of a neo-formalist study, as applied to audiovisual serialized narratives with a tendency to show rhythmic temporalities (i.e. seasonal, episodic).

With his analysis of cultural patterns and processes of codifications or parsing in world literature, Franco Moretti introduced his own personal vision on a “sociology of symbolic forms,” by stating that “it is impossible to deny that human society is a multifarious, complex, overdetermined whole; but the theoretical difficulty obviously lies in trying to establish the hierarchy of different historical factors” (2005 [1983]: 19) Caroline Levine (2015: 87), in dialogue with Moretti’s theories, adopts this concept of hierarchy to discuss hegemonic systems, political spaces and even relational binaries (in identity, gender, race, class and so forth). Hierarchies are present almost everywhere in the social sphere. While I will use the formal concepts of whole and rhythm mostly as narrative forms, recurring within a single text or across multiple texts, the notion of hierarchy will be observed here in its political dimension and interaction with societies and cultures. Levine identifies hierarchies as organizational dynamics in literary texts, which concern “investments in certain values and characters over others” (*ivi*: 21), very much opting for a close reading approach. However, she does so including this perspective into a socially and “politically aware historicism” (*ibidem*), reminding us that her theory does not only cover the domain of narrative forms and the way they “have force in the social world and are capable of shaping political arrangements.” (Levine 2006: 626) On the contrary, it also “extends formalist insights to make the case that social hierarchies and institutions can themselves be understood as *forms*.” (*ibidem*, *her emphasis*)

Without focusing too much on procedural hierarchies in serial narratives, I will apply this category to the overall institutional and industrial network that the production and distribution of

serial narratives in television always imply. Similarly, far from tracing a simplistic, rigid separation between whole and rhythm, on the one side, and hierarchies and networks, on the other side, as they all overlap to some extent, I will nevertheless consider the privileged way in which networks and hierarchies tend, within certain conditions, to influence each other. Instead of assessing a hierarchy of values, the intent is therefore to discuss hierarchies emerging from historical and industrial factors, in their interplay with networked mechanisms. Finally, taking a more critical perspective, I will try to evaluate whether networks of production and distribution of television content maintained the same degree of hierarchy over time or are perhaps shifting towards a non-hierarchical clustering model of television content's circulation. In oligopolistic markets, the presence of inequalities due to hierarchical conformations are quite obvious. When forces from multiple sources come at play on both linear and non-linear television environments, is the topology of the institutional network still responding to a hierarchical geometry? I will tackle this issue over the course of this dissertation, and more precisely in chapter 5, while addressing more specific case studies. For the moment, I will limit myself to state that, before determining the hierarchical form of a network, we need to define the concept of network itself.

Forms and the links between them, which altogether contribute to the creation of networks - which are forms themselves -, seem to be the key for observing the return of anthology series. The concept of network opens up to a far wider discussion compared to other formal categories, and introduces the topic of interdisciplinarity. In this vast panorama, both Caroline Levine and Franco Moretti, which I have largely quoted in my overview on contemporary uses of the notion of form, have the merit of having imported this conversation in the humanities, by proposing the concept of network as essential part of larger theoretical frameworks in narrative theory and cul-

tural studies. In particular, Levine can be considered one of the first scholars to have fully theorized the presence of a close relationship between narrative forms and networks, as I am also suggesting here. Let us look closer into her neo-formalist definition of network.⁶

Before publishing her extensive neo-formalist work *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* in 2016, Caroline Levine proposed a definition of form as part of a broader reflection on what she addresses as “strategic formalism”. The definition is the following:

Form [...] refers to shaping patterns, to identifiable interlacing of repetitions and differences, to dense *networks* of structuring principles and categories. It is conceptual and abstract, generalizing and transhistorical. [...] It does involve a kind of close reading, a careful attention to the ways that historical texts, bodies, and institutions are organized-what shapes they take, what models they follow and rework. But it is all about the social: it involves reading particular, historically specific collisions among generalizing political, cultural, and social forms.

(Levine, 2006: 632, *my emphasis*)

In this citation, extrapolated from the essay “Strategic Formalism: Toward a New Method in Cultural Studies”, the term network is associated to the meaning of form as one of its possible occurrences. In 2009, she initiates her discussion on networks drawing upon research carried out in social sciences and citing the work of the physicists Mark Newman, Albert-László Barabási, Duncan J. Watts (2006). Finally, in her latest monograph, Levine (2015) spends an entire chapter discussing this peculiar association between networks and forms, by considering the network as a form itself.

As she points out, in a certain academic tradition networks are usually described as being formless, ever-spreading or generically containing some degree of connectivity. However, a more attentive observation of networks carried out across a wide range of fields, from mathematics and

⁶ Moretti’s view will be marginally considered in this section of the thesis, only to be further elaborated when approaching the methodology, with the intent of both exploring and problematizing a distant reading approach.

physics to sociology, showed that they have a tendency to generate recurring patterns and shapes. Levine also notes that “while it is certainly true that networks do not fit formal models of unified shape or wholeness, even apparently chaotic networks depend on surprisingly systematic ordering principles.” (*ivi*: 112) As such, they can be imported in formal analysis to observe larger configurations that result from the linkage between other forms discussed by Levine - namely wholes, rhythms, hierarchies. Not only do networks have forms and forms can generate networks, as Levine suggests, but the multiplicity, the nature and the level of their interconnection can be also analyzed. In her more practical examples, she considered specifically narrative networks, by outlining an example of web-like interconnections in the television series *Bleak House* (BBC, 2005) and *The Wire* (HBO, 2002-2008). Base on her applications of these theoretical concept, her case for networks thus results to be very much oriented towards narrative agency, meaning network is seen as descriptive of a set of characters (nodes) sustaining the fictional structure and entailing interrelations (links), through actions and social relationships.

Years before Levine’s comprehensive theorization, Franco Moretti (2005) was proposing to use abstract models and artificial constructs, such as graphs, maps and trees, for literary studies. In a first formulation of his theory, he begins from an examination of graphs, a tool imported from quantitative analysis, among other data visualization. When talking about a study of over twenty thousand novels, he argues precisely that “a field this large cannot be understood by stitching together separate bits of knowledge about individual cases, because it isn’t a sum of individual cases: it’s a collective system, that should be grasped as such, as a whole - and the graphs [...] are one way to begin doing this.” (*ivi*: 4) More recently, Moretti (2011) considered more complex types of graphs in the form of networks. In his essay “Network Theory, Plot

Analysis”, he analyses networks found within narrative forms (e.g. a network of characters). If a network is made of nodes and links, vertices and edges, then “characters will be the vertices of the network, interactions the edges [...] Two characters are linked if some words have passed between them: an interaction, is a speech act.” (*ivi*: online)

This model for quantifying the plot by observing it as a network can be used in television studies for analyzing complex narrative ecosystems. Patrick Jagoda (2016), for example, made the case of the HBO’s series *The Wire*, promptly cited as a valid object of study also by Levine. However, contemporary television anthologies do not always fit an ecosystemic perspective as intended by Veronica Innocenti and Guglielmo Pescatore (2012). Plot networks might perhaps be seen in macro-anthologies that underwent a process of revival or trans-medial reformulation (*The Twilight Zone*) or in anthologies with a connecting-the-dot structure (*Black Mirror*), but not in every single anthology. Following Levine’s theorization and drawing upon Moretti’s modeling applications, network analysis can be used for understanding contemporary anthology series in the television industry, even when we are not opting exclusively for a plot analysis. As demonstrated by many research groups - Stanford University’s *Literary Lab*, University of Montreal’s Labo Télé, McGill University’s *TXTLAB*, just to name a few -, by using notions and tools traditionally adopted in network science, scholars in the humanities can pursue a large-scale analysis of cultural phenomena, by systematically observing causalities and relations between nodes. Notions borrowed from network theory like path length, network centrality, hubs, hinges can be therefore effectively integrated in an interdisciplinary vocabulary for conducting small scale and large scale analysis in television studies. In my own application of Levine’s and Moretti’s perspecti-

ves, I notably developed a network visualization of anthology series' production and distribution. A diversity of options will also be considered as possible future trajectories of my research.

1.2.3. Formulas

Form is a compelling concept. It appeals to an interdisciplinary perspective and allows us to consider an object like the anthology series as a formal entity, with literary, cultural, social, transhistorical, economic implications. However, its level of abstraction forces us to integrate in the discussion on the anthology form other terms, like formula and genre - but also canon or model -, in order to outline more specifically the characteristics of the objects of this study - namely, television series. I will start with a brief presentation of the notion of formula in studies on popular culture, focusing on the U.S. market, where the anthology form had a large resonance all along the history of television. The notion of formula was notably introduced in the study of popular literature by John G. Cawelti (1969). In defining this terminology, Cawelti explains that word formula refers to

[...] a conventional system for structuring cultural products. It can be distinguished from form which is an invented system of organization. Like the distinction between convention and invention, the distinction between formula and form can be best envisaged as a continuum between two poles; one pole is that of a completely conventional structure of conventions – an episode of the Lone Ranger or one of the Tarzan books comes close to this pole; the other end of the continuum is a completely original structure which orders inventions.

(Cawelti, in Hinds *et al.* 2006: 187)

This idea of a concrete “conventional structure”, as opposed to the abstract ordering instance of a form, recalls the notion of genre. Cawelti clarifies the relation between the two, by specifying that these two terms, rather than denoting two completely different things, reflect in-

stead “two phases or aspects of a complex process of literary analysis. This way of looking at the relation between formula and genre reflects the way in which popular genres develop. In most cases, a formulaic pattern will be in existence for a considerable period of time before it is conceived of by its creators and audience as a genre.” (Cawelti [1976] 2014: 24) This archetypal function of literary formulas with regard to genres leads us to think to the concept of formula as representative of a standardization process, rather than a purely formal patterning process. Taking the example of anthology series, anthology is a form. Adhering to this form, a series like *True Detective* (HBO, 2013-) originated its own seasonal formula, through a set of “normative” rules and repetitions. It created a convention. In this creative process, once a formula is born as a cultural product, it might as well evolve into a genre - e.g. true crime.

Crime stories are traditionally very formulaic. It is perhaps not a casualty that the anthology form developed in close connection with this and other highly formulaic genres (like horror), which can be easily reproduced in a homogeneous collection of episodes or seasons. As Cawelti remarks, “the formula of the classical detective story can be described as a conventional way of defining and developing a particular kind of situation or situations, a pattern of action or development of this situation, a certain group of characters and the relations between them, and a setting or type of setting appropriate to the characters and action.” (Cawelti [1976] 2014: 80) Cawelti’s formula therefore turns out to be a very helpful parameter for assessing the extent to which a product is anthological in the intent, or else which anthology series are actually formulaic, which not and why. It is the case of semi-anthological products like police procedurals. As the scholar Todd Gitlin also noticed when observing one of the most famous legal dramas of the of the late 1950s and 1960s, “Perry Mason was Perry Mason once and for all; watching the reruns

only devotees could know from character or set whether they were watching the first or the last in the series. For commercial and production reasons which are in practice inseparable [...] the regular schedule prefers the repeatable formula. [...]" (Gitlin 1982: 245)

Gitlin (1982) associates the word formula with a tendency to standardization of television programs which was dominating the mediascape until the 1980s, and which was not necessarily strictly connected to the concept of format - although he uses these terms sometimes almost interchangeably in the same context. Some studies addressing media policy and literacy did in fact approach the term "format" under a less pragmatic perspective, although still acknowledging a "grey area" of copyrights issues (Moran and Malbon 2006: 113). Lyndsay Gough, for example, defines format as "a collection of (or the sum of) the key elements and characteristics that make up the concept of a programme, giving it a unique look and feel and its broadcasting identity. It is the style, plan or arrangement of a particular show." (Gough 2002: 26) Another blurred definition of formula, defined as "genre formula" and relatively close to the concept of format, is additionally found in Peter Bennett, Jerry Slater and Peter Wall, who explain: "Genre formulas provide a recipe for proven success which producers hope will guarantee future popularity in the market place." (Bennett *et al.* 2005: 44-45)

To avoid any confusion and to conclude this theoretical introduction about formats, forms and formulas, I will clarify these concepts in their theoretical and methodological interrelation. If, on the one hand, format can be summed up in the primarily practical act of licensing and regulating the trade of a televisual content, the notion of form, on the other hand, can be placed on the opposite side, since form is first and foremost an abstract model of systemic self-organization and patterning. More precisely, while the concept of format most often leads to a television market

analysis, the concept of form embraces a cultural analytical perspective to media industries, which I largely adopt here. Half-way it stands the useful definition of narrative formula, a term that accounts for a middle ground where both industrial and cultural dynamics intervene. In this sense, perhaps the definition proposed by the French scholar Jean-Pierre Esquenazi seems more accurate to describe this entanglement, and to bridge the gap between different sets of close and distant reading methodologies found in this research. Esquenazi notably uses the term formula as a meta-description, designating “not the script, but the machine that generates scripts, not the group of characters but the stock of models of characters, not the *mise-en-scène* but the definition of a framework for the *mise-en-scène*.” (Esquenazi 2014: 91, *my translation*)

Another concept, originated from the term formula, suitable to study the process of anthologization is that of “deformulation” (Lifschutz 2015: 36) or reformulation, meaning the ability of a series to detach from the initial formula only to recompose its formula anew. The notion of formula differs both theoretically and methodologically not only from that of format and from Levine’s view of form, but also from Northrop Frye’s ([1957] 2002) theorizations of genre and myth. As Cawelti outlines, if on the one hand formula refers to problems of cultural specificity, genre is perceived as being more of a universal pattern emerging across cultures (Cawelti, [1969] 2006: 188). The notion of genre, appeared in literature and successfully adopted to understand audiovisual production, along with other categories, will be explored further to account for the connection that have been established over the years between the anthology form and certain genres in U.S. television. Going beyond the conceptual triad of format, form, formula, the notion of genre will be observed as a form of categorization and as a social construct itself, thus providing a context for tracing a socio-cultural history of U.S. television anthologies.

1.3. Genres

In an article published in 1976, Todorov was expressing doubts about the use of an anachronistic term like genre for discussing contemporary literature. Only a few years after Todorov's article, the British philosopher Steve Neale tried to redefine this concept by applying it to the cinematographic industry. In his book *Genre*, he writes:

Genres institutionalise, guarantee coherence by institutionalising conventions, i.e. Sets of expectations with respect to narrative process and narrative closure which may be subject of variation, but which are never exceeded or broken. The existence of genres means that the spectator, precisely, will always know that everything will be 'made right in the end', that everything will cohere, that any threat or any danger in the narrative process itself will always be contained.

(Neale 1980: 28)

This definition is correct if we think of a certain kind of cinema, inscribed within a highly hierarchical industrial structure like Hollywood once was. It might be also applied to early U.S. television, when the television industry was mostly oligopolistic, but it certainly will not fit the current scenario. Nevertheless, Neale underlines a valid concept that can be retained in a study of how genres influenced some evolutionary aspects of narrative forms until the present days. He notably proposes to observe genres not as systems *per se*, but rather as "processes of systematization." (Neale 1980: 51)

Reasoning on this idea of genre as a process, David Buckingham additionally noted, with reference to television programs, that genre is not simply "given by the culture: rather, it is in a constant process of negotiation and change." (Buckingham 1993: 137) In this constant process of systematization, negotiation and change that makes genres transhistorical, genres in U.S. televi-

sion mutated with a diversity of outcomes. To give an example, early U.S. television produced very formulaic programs, subjected to rigid production norms and fitting into precise genres under the influence of the Hollywood studio system. These programs were adhering to conventions and were aiming to meet the expectations of the audience. However, already in the first few decades of television history in the United States, some television series distinguished themselves for their lack of coherence with previous narrative schemes and formal models. In the Fifties and Sixties, television series like *The Twilight Zone* (CBS, 1959-1964) and *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (CBS/NBC, 1955-1965) were already trying to reformulate genre's constraints. Over the years, narrative contaminations that challenged the expectations of the audience became more and more common in television series, making the boundaries between genres more and more permeable (Abercrombie 1996: 45), in favor of a fluid transition between different modes of storytelling and narrative categories.

This position was notably taken by Nicholas Abercrombie, who suggested that the fact that "television comes at the audience as a flow of programmes, all with different generic conventions, means that it is more difficult to sustain the purity of the genre in the *viewing* experience." (*ibidem*, his emphasis) Nowadays, in the context of an increasing genres' hybridization, where the separation between different television genres is not so rigid anymore, this concern seems to find a solid ground. In fact, contemporary television challenged the concept of genre in many ways, by opening to cross-genre but also cross-cultural contaminations. And yet, the specificities of a television show might emerge in some cases precisely from the way it adopts or disregards the norms of a given genre. In 2001, Jason Mittell notably proposed to study television genres as both structured and fluid cultural schemata, standing between textual specificities

and mechanisms of hybridization. In his theoretical perspective, television genres emerge as cultural categories in their full complexity, thus requiring an observation based on “interrelated sites of audience, industrial and cultural practices.” (Mittell 2001: 18) This also suggests that genres are ultimately part of larger cultural systems, where hierarchies of power and networks of relations interfere with the affordances of the medium.

While not trying to define a systematic television-specific genre theory, I argue that it is still possible to use an observation of television genres as a method for tracking resemblances between televisual products, as they adhere to a recurring set of cultural practices. The need for a cultural approach to television genres (Mittell 2001) also supports a genre classification where additional taxonomies can be traced at the intersection of genres, forms and cultural practices (i.e. horror anthologies). Over the years and throughout several transformations, genres endured and proved to be still relevant in the study of both early and contemporary television. For instance, a genre-oriented indexing, along with other categorizations, is what turned the Netflix’ platform into a recommendation system⁷. Over thirty-thousand sub-genres can be unlocked on Netflix by simply typing the relative number or code assigned⁸.

Furthermore, other than being a formal and formulaic frame for grouping narratives into categories based on semantic and syntactic elements, as the scholar Rick Altman (1999: 162) put it, genres should therefore be considered as labels that influence not only the production of television content, but also its reception. Perhaps “genres do not exist until they become necessary to a

⁷ “How Netflix’s Recommendations System Works.” *Netflix Help Center*. Retrieved July 29, 2019. <https://help.netflix.com/en/node/100639>.

⁸ “List of Netflix Categories.” *What’s on Netflix*. Last modified January 24, 2018. Retrieved July 29, 2019. <https://www.whats-on-netflix.com/library/categories>.

lateral communication process, that is until they serve a constellated community.” (*ibidem*)

Modes of consumption, along with modes of production and distribution, are indeed fundamental in the genesis of television seriality and its typologies, being them genres, formats or forms. In this mutual exchange between production and reception, genres and formats or genres and forms might overlap. As Moran and Malbon point out, “the distinction between a genre (which cannot gain copyright) and an original work (which has copyright) is fairly obvious at the extreme ends of the scale, but becomes increasingly uncertain and blurred as we move towards the centre point of these extremes.” (Moran and Malbon 2006: 113) And when it comes to a differentiation between format and genre, they simply conclude, “Somewhere between writing what might generically be called a boy meets girl [a girl meets girl] comedy and the script for Punch-Drunk Love lays the grey area of copyright.” (*ibidem*)

Not only television formats, but also television forms tend to intersect with genres. Over the course of my research, some genres notably emerged as recurring elements of the anthology form. For the reasons outlined, I will therefore use this term as an organizational macro-frame for anthology series and as an illustrative notion within the complex landscape of contemporary seriality. More specifically, even though some rare examples the anthological form can be found in the comedy, I will focus on a corpus of U.S. drama anthology series covering the period between the Fifties and the present days. In this corpus I identified in particular three great original strands in the evolution of the anthology form: crime, science fiction and horror genres. These genres will be analyzed not only in early anthology series, as the trademark of anthological production, but in contemporary examples of seasonal anthologies, which appear both in linear and non linear television.

CHAPTER 2. DEFINING THE ANTHOLOGY FORM

2.1. Etymological and Cultural Roots

Starting from the hypothesis that the anthology form is in fact a transhistorical and transmedial phenomenon, in this chapter I will consider the interplay between the anthology form and media, where media are to be intended as complex systems of infrastructures and technologies in a media ecological perspective. Traditionally, the Greek word *ἀνθολογία* - *ἄνθος* (*ánthos*, “flower”) + *λέγω* (*legō*, “I collect”) - is used to describe a collection of short texts, in prose or verses. As stated in the Oxford English Dictionary, this term refers to a collection of “flowers of verse, i.e. small choice of poems, esp. epigrams, by various authors” (from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Simpson 1989: 510), reunited in a single volume. Such a definition addresses issues of quality, size, multiplicity/plurality, uniformity, also mobilizing the idea of selecting a set of relevant texts within a corpus, and paving the way to practices of re-configuration and re-contextualization. The process of constitution of an anthology can indeed appear similar to the process of constitution of a corpus, as both anthologies and corpora are concerned with defining a selection principle, a set or subset and a system of relationships (Lorusso 2015). And yet, whereas it can be

defined as a collection or as a series of texts, an anthology is not really a corpus in the strict sense of the term.

In the end, the etymological root of the term “anthology”, often associated with the Latin word “collection”, does not give an exhaustive definition of its use in contemporary forms of storytelling. Alternative definitions are thus necessary, especially when we approach a specific field, such as television studies, with the ultimate aim of understanding how the anthology form operates. It is with this scope in mind that I started reasoning on a more appropriate definition and taxonomy. In 2013, Lieven D’hulst clarified some of the issues in the definition of anthology, by pointing at the difference between anthology, collection and series. According to D’hulst, “criteria for defining the ‘anthological object’ are needed: linguistic, geocultural, generic, historical, thematic. Given the difficulty in drawing borderlines, it might prove useful to offer a prototypical definition of the conceptual core of anthology and neighboring notions (such as collection, or album) as an ‘anthological class’, a dynamic generic construct [...]” (Seruya *et al.* 2013: 3) However, talking about an anthological class at large risks to be too broad for being useful when it comes to actual analysis and practical applications. A differentiation between anthology and collection or series can help to avoid the chance of a tautological impasse where these terms are adopted interchangeably.

As stated by Essmann and Frank, the difference between a series or collection and an anthology “is, quite pragmatically, a matter of magnitude: an anthology is what you can carry home in one hand” (Essmann and Frank 1991: 67). A prototypical definition of anthology would require the further consideration of physical, institutional, formal, semantic and functional features, among others.

(*ibidem*)

The scholars Teresa Seruya, Lieven D'hulst, Alexandra Assis Rosa and Maria Lin Moniz outlined these characteristics of the anthology form based on occurrences found in literature and print. As I will show in the following paragraphs, linguistic, geo-cultural, generic, historical, thematic criteria are indeed common parameters in the formation of anthologies at large. Similarly, physical, institutional, formal, semantic and functional features emerge as relevant in assessing the multifaceted nature of anthology forms. While such a definition is particularly relevant in the case of publishing practices, it might need to be expanded when the anthology form encounters other techno-cultural apparatuses, such as radio or television. Here, I am using the term techno-cultural apparatus, instead of simply referring to medium, in order to stress on the “cultural complexity” (Hannerz 1992) that media objects imply. I am notably concerned with what Charles Wright Mills describes as “all the organizations and *milieux* in which artistic, intellectual, and scientific work goes on, and by which entertainment and information are produced and distributed.” (quoted in Summers 2008: 204, *his emphasis*) More specifically, I engage with a discussion on the technological component of such a cultural apparatus, as one of the main driving forces that shape specificities in cultural practices and uses. This perspective on media as techno-cultural apparatuses motivates a study of the anthology form as the coexistence of technological specificities and cultural commonalities, thus going beyond a medium-specific perspective and considering broader complexities.

For instance, if we analyze television as a techno-cultural apparatus, is a definition of anthology form based on “magnitude”, as Helga Essmann and Armin Paul Frank (1991: 67) suggest for printed translation anthologies, effective for all media? Is a television anthology series something that we can, metaphorically speaking, “carry home in one hand” (*ibidem*)? Compared to

long-running programs, the anthology series in television turned out to be, as I will demonstrate, a type of content that is more manageable in terms of consumption, thus reinforcing a dynamic that Raymond Williams described as “mobile privatization” (Williams 1974). In the contemporary cultural, social and technological context of internet-distributed television, as viewers are granted complete autonomy in organizing their own viewing habits, a shorter narrative, already cut into small bites, is undoubtedly easier to fit into individual, daily time schedules than longer ones. Early anthology series in television were somehow passively repurposing older literary, theatrical and radiophonic traditions. Today, they actively create content that offer the possibility to distribute the viewing based on self-sufficient narrative modules as part of the same anthology, ultimately standing out as practices strictly related to internet culture. A look at the evolutionary stages in media ecology will tell us that anthologies externalize their affordances, purposes and functions depending on the industrial system in which they are inscribed. In other words, building on previous citations of Caroline Levine as quoted in chapter 1, beyond a definition of what anthologies are, we need to understand what anthologies do.

A definition of anthology can notably be found in pre-internet culture, such as in printed press, and it is even possible to hypothesize the existence of pre-media anthologies in oral literature. In contemporary digital media, the anthology form assumes again a pivotal role. The philosopher Milad Doueihi brought the discussion on the anthology one step further, not only to include different media, but also to create a debate on the evolution of the anthology form in digital culture. Recalling previous definitions, he notably designates anthology any “surreptitious selection and dissemination of apparently unrelated snippets or fragments as meaningful collections, where meaning is largely derived from an apparently arbitrary association of content

[...].” (Doueihi 2009: 11) In the context of digital publishing, he argues, such a process of collection, whether it is defined as a company’s strategy or as user-generated, becomes increasingly present, to the point where we can discuss an anthological property as much as an ontological one, as the core components of the Semantic Web and the linked content - or better data - that exist within it (*ivi*: 9).

This point will be fundamental as I enter a discussion on the organization of data in the current digital landscape of media ecology. For now, it is sufficient to say that by initiating a conversation on the “anthological turn” in digital culture, Doueihi addresses the anthology as both a concept and a practice, a model and a methodology. To insist on the extent of the anthological turn, he states that “digital norms [...] are shaping both the technological development as well as the economic models underlying the deployment of the latest generation of large scale web hubs.” (*ivi*: 11) He notably refers here to users’ practices in the form of tagging, but the anthological model can be found also in production and distribution models on most online platforms. This idea of linking data, metadata and ultimately content into anthological streams thanks to algorithms is at the basis of online recommendation systems used by over-the-top providers like Netflix. “The anthological model makes it possible to transform collected items into a dynamic and open publication of potentially new knowledge and to present them in their extensibility.” (*ibidem*) This feature, I argue, is one of the reasons why television anthology series seem to be proliferating in the global television scape and were able to successfully integrate on online platforms, creating what appears to be a solid trend.

By accounting for its affordances in digital culture, Doueihi (2011) offers an outstanding vision of the anthological fragmentation on the web as something that feeds into the way narrati-

ve forms inscribe themselves into online platforms. Furthermore, the anthological fragmentation also tells us something about the intertwining between digital technologies, culture and collective memory: while human memory is often fragile and brief, digital culture stands out with new forms for managing cultural memory (*ivi*: 151), by allowing for extensive track-recording and new content archival practices. One of the ways in which content is organized is the anthology. Doueishi's study will serve as a starting point to understand the importance of observing the anthology form in the continuity between analog and digital culture, which eventually lead to its re-appearance in non-linear television. In order to examine the anthology through its affordances, it might be helpful to start with an overview on the way anthology series generated and operated beyond television, originating in literature and evolving through radio in new forms of storytelling. After all, "forms are not so historically specific that their operation change radically from place to place" (Levine 2015: 39), meaning that while their actual uses and functions might change, each form is still likely to present the same set of potential affordances throughout its evolution over time.

2.1.1. In Literature

Television did not invent short stories. It did not invent anthologies either. Both are found in human societies since the early days of writing and in oral storytelling. While going through the entire history of world literature would be an unnecessary digression, considering the anthology form in its original appearances in the history of writing and publishing might contribute to highlight some of its intrinsic affordances. Literary anthologies are usually built onto several short stories grouped into uniform collections. Standard definitions, however, differentiate bet-

ween the two, by pointing at the fact that whereas a literary collection is more suitable of a term for a group of works by a single author, anthologies are composed by stories written by different authors and gathered together under a single seal based on homogeneity of themes, style or other indicators of coherence. A preliminary introduction to the anthology form should therefore start from an overview on short narratives, as the microscopic components of editorial processes of anthologization.

Edgar Allan Poe, who inaugurated several Western scholarly theorizations on short narratives, defined them as “Brief tales, or narratives that can be read in a single sitting. [...] Singleness of effect that can be achieved when a story is read straight through, unity of a pre-established design, in which the end controls the beginning and the middle.” (Keen 2015: 21) The history of literature contains many examples, from the famous Italian *novella* or *racconto*, a whole genre by itself, which had several mimic descendant in Europe, such as the Spanish *novela corta*, to nordic folklore and other tell-a-tale short stories coming from strong oral traditions in countries as varied as India or Libya. Short fiction was also found to have a solid presence across postcolonial literatures in Canada, West Indies, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, among others, where short narrative forms became ways to negotiate a cultural identity and reconfigure a place, such as in the case of Caribbean orature (Bardolph *et al.* 2001).

Indeed the power of short stories, sometimes forgotten in the study of Western literature, which often privileged long narratives while diminishing the value of brief forms of storytelling, lies in the way they are able to permeate interstitial spaces in popular cultures, thus allowing for the emergence of discourses that would otherwise remain untold or at the margins, trapped in peripheral circulation and orality. Short stories provide a variety of alternative voices to dominant

epic narratives and myths, and by doing so, they create windows onto vaster narratives and more variegated perspectives. Because of their brevity and the unique way they approach larger debates in human societies and cultures, they are often organized into groups, thus forming collections or anthologies. It is the case of notable examples like *Arabian Nights*, the *Canterbury Tales* or the *Decameron*, where a multiplicity of single short stories is contained into a larger narrative arc that operates as a frame story. The flexibility and resilience of the anthology form allows short narratives to expand or contract, depending on the cultural and media ecosystem in which they are inserted.

More specifically, literary anthologies adhere to a principle of uniformity, which can vary depending on each specific case, and they are found all over the world. One example is the Chinese poetry anthological collection *Shijing*, also known as *Classic of Poetry*, which is among the oldest anthologies found in literature, dating from the 11th to 7th century BC (Dobson 1964). Much like in more recent literary anthologies, as well as in radio and television anthologies, *Classic of Poetry* tends to alternate between “elements of repetition and variation” (Frankel 1978: 216), resulting in the presence of “similarities and differences in the formal structure” (*ivi*: 51). This Chinese collection represents a particularly relevant case because it shows that the actual connotations of the anthology as we know it nowadays - meaning, alternation of repetition/variation, organizing and archiving principle, selection process with a canonical scope - were born way before the official Greek terminology came to existence thanks to Meleager of Gadara’s *Anthology*, which appeared only in the first century B.C. These circumstances suggest that the origins of the anthology form might need to be traced before its actual definition, as far back as the very appearance of the first analog media for writing.

What makes literary anthologies worth exploring in relation to similar televisual forms is not just the coexistence of processes of repetition and variation, which is found across media as one of the main characteristics of anthologies, but more importantly the emergence of a core affordance of this form that I will explore further in relation to contemporary digital media and that can be described as an “organizing principle”. To this point, while discussing the formation of this early Chinese anthology, the scholar Martin Kern notices that *Classic of Poetry* as “a body of text came into being [...] as a repository of expressions inherited from the past” or else “[...] an artifact of the past remembered—a canonical curriculum [...]” (Kern 2018: 43-44) The anthological form as a way to archive texts into a repository or canonical curriculum suggests that, with their inner property of “cataloguing” documents from various sources, anthologies have the potential to elevate short stories to the status of foundational texts, by constituting literary canons. Such a peculiar affordance of the anthology form was noted by Alexander Beecroft, who, while carrying a comparative study of the Chinese and European traditions, pointed out that “anthologies and anthologizers have long played a major role in the establishment of literary canons.” (Beecroft 2018: 341)

Before more recent technological evolutions inherited this form, one invention that boosted the production of anthologies was that of the printing press (Doueihi 2011: 162). In her overview on the ways anthologies shape literary canons and connect to the publishing industry, the scholar Lynda Prescott identifies most anthologies as “commercially-oriented” (Prescott 2016: 564) products, generated by editorial practices for the organization of short stories into publications, magazines, reprinted volumes and so on. Indeed, the introduction of print enabled a true revolution for the publishing industry and prepared the ground for new practices and busi-

ness models in the distribution of literary texts and written documents at large, for retrieval, educational or commercial purposes. Processes of anthologization became increasingly common in the publishing industry, both in the serialized structure of newspapers or weekly magazines and in more specific strategies for organizing, translating or simply marketing literary content. While it would be impossible to retrace a total history of the anthology form in the publishing industry in just a few pages, here I rather want to point at the necessity to include in the discussion on the anthology a debate not only on poetic, literary and cultural practices, but more importantly on the technological, industrial and economic context that influenced the evolution of such a narrative form.

To this aim, Marcello Vitali-Rosati introduces an English neologism derived from a French term: editorialization (French: *éditorialisation*). He notably calls for a “resemantisation” of this concept in relation to digital culture (Vitali-Rosati 2016), where older editing practices are repurposed into processes of editorialization as means for “structuring space and authority in the digital age” (Vitali-Rosati 2018). Vitali-Rosati notably underlines three main definitions of editorialization: a restrictive one, a general one and a combination of the two (Vitali-Rosati 2016, online). While a restrictive definition looks at the way content is produced, organized, and distributed on the web, through a “set of technical devices (networks, servers, platforms, CMS, algorithms of search engines), structures (hypertext, multimedia, metadata), and practices (annotation, comments, recommendations via social networks)” (*ibidem*), a general definition observes the broader overlapping between non-mediated reality and virtually-mediated reality, thus seeing editorialization as a globally diffused digital practice that affects everyday life. Vitali-Rosati synthesizes these two definitions, by outlining a third, final definition that accounts for the technological,

cultural and practical aspects of such a practice. “Editorialization is the set of dynamics that produce and structure digital space. These dynamics can be understood as the interactions of individual and collective actions within a particular digital environment.” (*ibidem*)

The practice of anthologization, I argue, is in fact a derivative of editorialization, in the sense that, from analog to digital culture, it operates towards a collection, organization and diffusion of content in mediated environments. In their intent to display content, anthologies truly marked the shift from content curation and edition, to content editorialization, thanks to their transition from analog to digital environments. As I will show in this chapter, whereas at the very beginning analog anthologies resemble more to curated volumes, much influenced by the competence of experts, in digital culture the focus of anthologies returns in both a cultural and a technological component that entail hybrid (both human-driven and AI-driven) processes of editorialization on online platforms. Vitali-Rosati further explains that “editorialization shapes and structures content in a way that is not limited to a closed, well-defined context (such as a journal) or a group of predetermined individuals (editors and publishers). It involves an opening up of space (several platforms) and time (several different editors unbound by deadlines). This opening up is one of the key differences between curation and editorialization.” (*ibidem*)

Going back to analog culture, in their study on translation in printed anthologies and collection, Seruya *et al.* add that practices of anthologization and anthology-making are found to play a role “as tools of static and dynamic canonization” and therefore “may be considered tokens of culture planning, a notion put forth by both Gideon Toury (2002, 2003) and Itamar Even Zohar (2002) and defined as a ‘deliberate act of intervention, either by power holders or by ‘free agents’ into an extant or a crystallizing repertoire’ (Even-Zohar 2002: 45).” (Seruya *et al.* 2013: 5) Se-

ruya *et al.* (*ibidem*) also note that, as acts of culture planning and literacy, anthologies can be associated to a vast array of different purposes and functions, depending on both intra- and intercultural dynamics. As they outline, the anthology form, other than responding to pleasure, subjective, educational purposes, can be used as a means for preservation, innovation, protection, structuring, accessibility, dissemination, and even profit. For these reasons, “anthologies and collections become very important first order objects for the study of the underlying criteria for selection and restructuring, the underlying taste of individual agents or of the community they belong to, of publishing and book-market mechanisms, of fluctuations in cultural importance, as second order objects.” (*ibidem*) In the following paragraphs I will show how moments of technological disruption following the printing revolution tended to call for a redefinition of the anthology form, inducing a repurposing of its affordances and constant updates in its uses.

2.1.2. *In Radio*

After the print, radio marked one of the major updates in the history of media. Often forgotten in media studies, the aural phase of radio is particularly useful to understand the consequent evolution of the broadcasting industry, which came to include both the radiophonic and television medium. Even though the two media eventually found their specific positioning in cultural and social landscapes worldwide, during the early days of assessment and experimentation with audiovisual technologies they showed some overlapping tendencies in the industrial structure as well as in the production of content. A historiographical perspective on radio thus contributes to our understanding of the transition that accompanied the anthology form from its traditional conformation in literature to more recent occurrences in television. In this context, I

will take the United States as a geographical framework of reference to understand one of the first national adoptions of broadcasting on a large scale, which eventually prompted a reconfiguration of the anthology form for radio and television. However, other examples of radio programs with an anthological structure found in other countries outside of the U.S. will be mentioned in favor of a comparative analysis.

Since its first introduction in the United States, the radiophonic medium was welcomed as a public utility, or else, as Michele Hilmes and Jason Loviglio phrased it, a consumer good and vehicle for the production of needs (2001: 23). This was a moment when Western societies were transitioning from a “politics of production” to a “politics of consumption”, by selling the concept of a capitalist society oriented towards leisure activities and an overall culture of prosperity (*ibidem*). As the United States were about to enter the Great Depression and many other countries were suffering the consequences of being at the edge of two world conflicts, the first three decades of radio - from the 1920s to the 1940s - were largely affected by two contrasting forces, one supporting the contemporary ideology of abundance and one thriving in conditions of scarcity. In this economic context, “advertising became not only a new economic force essential in the regulation of prices but also a vision of the way the culture worked: the products of the culture became advertisements of the culture itself.” (Susman 1984: xxiv)

In the first few decades of the twentieth century, advertising fostered in the United States not only the institutionalization of a radio industry but also the consolidation of radio programming itself, ultimately contributing to the rise of national broadcasting as the dominant cultural form (Hilmes and Loviglio 2001: 24). Three major factors helped framing such a radio landscape: the evolution of radio into a mass medium; the introduction of international corporations to regu-

late the extension of airwaves globally; large-scale investments in research and patent production (Iriye and Saunier 2009: 871). As a matter of fact, way before the internet, “radio inaugurated the age of globalization in telecommunications.” (*ivi*: 872) Since the very beginning, thanks to the introduction of a system of transnational infrastructures, along with the use of advertising as a way for financing radiophonic programs and stations, radio became at the same time a means for political propaganda, public education and information, intercultural communications, as well as popular entertainment. Early U.S. television will be to take a similar route.

Despite the illusion of radio - and later on, television - as a democratic, publicly financed and participative medium, the programming schedule of this period still appears to be much centralized and somehow normative, subjected to the influence of monopolistic giants like BBC in Great Britain or NBC in the U.S, something that we will notice also in the first phase of television. Such a technological, institutional, economical, political and cultural process of consolidation of radio led to the birth of “archetypal broadcast forms” (Hilmes and Loviglio 2001: 27), one of them being the anthology form. At the core of the first reconfiguration of the anthology form in broadcasting therefore lies a complex balance between several players, often described in historiographical accounts of U.S. broadcasting history as a mix of economic forces and cultural utopias, which ended up resulting in the birth of large national corporations supervising the content with the financial support of advertisers. Introduced by a recurring host who presented each episode and financed by sponsors through advertising, early radiophonic anthologies became the staple for many television anthologies ahead.

In addition to the presence of a host and a sponsor, which came to replace the framing principle of literary anthologies, early radio anthologies generated a series of distinct features.

One of the most evident is the strict connection with theater. When it comes to radiophonic anthologies with a theatrical production, the United States are perhaps the best known example, with popular programs like *The Mercury Theatre on the Air* (CBS, 1938), *The Screen Guild Theater* (CBS, 1939-48; NBC, 1948-50; ABC, 1950-51; CBS, 1951-52), and *Lux Radio Theatre* (WJZ, 1934-35; CBS WABC 1935-36; CBS, 1936-54; NBC, 1954-55). BBC follows as one the major producer of early radio anthologies in the U.K. and worldwide. However, other countries developed anthological structures similar to the anglophone radio dramas - also known as radio plays -, with full-length plays, operas and stage adaptations airing directly on radio.

In most cases, theatre was generally adopted as a framework to define radio anthologies as new narrative and cultural forms. In Argentina for instance, one of the first to adopt radio as a national medium, *radioteatro*, a narrative form with a strong anthological staple, came to existence as a powerful instrument for social education and cohesiveness. As a public service, Argentinian radio, much like in other countries, adopted a “patriotic posture” (Matallana 2006: 9, *my translation*) which made the *radioteatro* and other early anthological radio program part of a larger cultural experiment for a social integration (*ivi*: 21-22) and identitarian national quests. Diffused also in Spain, after a period of decline, *radioteatro* is now returning in the form of radio podcasts. Beyond the differences in the structure of early radio industries, which can be summed up in three models - public monopoly (e.g. U.K.), mixed public and private systems (e.g. Italy), or private-oriented with commercial intent (e.g. United States) -, the evolution of the anthology form thus initially resulted quite homogeneous in terms of its uses. Radio anthologies showed to be particularly effective in reframing not only theatrical, but also literary and then cinematographic narratives into broadcasting media. To give another example, in the Italian market, this variety of

pre-existing narrative forms adapted to television from another medium resulted in a polyhedral terminology: from the *sceneggiato televisivo*, with a theater oriented production, to the *telero-manzo*, originally based on literary classics and then left space to television originals, and the *te-lefilm*, leaning more on a cinematographic aim.

Overall, even when observing autonomous attempts of domestication in local radio industries, the anthology form emerges as a common element for organizing into homogenous programs what would otherwise be a messy collection of sparse radio content. The very act of tuning-in daily or weekly required a framing principle for keeping the conversation between the broadcasters and its public open, for creating communities and a social dialogue. It is the case not only of anthologies based on fictional narratives, but also of anthological collections of separate intervention on a number of non-fictional topics, “from lectures on economics (e.g., Leipzig’s 1930 series *Tagesfragen der Wirtschaft* [Economic issues of the day]) to interviews with workers (e.g. Frankfurt’s 1929 program *Wo uns der Schuh drückt* [Where our shoes are pressing])” (Hilmes and Loviglio 2001: 32). While long-running serials became the main narrative innovation brought by broadcasting (e.g. soap operas and telenovelas), anthologizing practices still represented an important way to respond to the possibilities offered by the radiophonic medium in terms of an interplay of affordances (those of the medium and those of the anthology form). These acts of collection of more unique and self-standing short stories into a single anthological flow were able to create a “feeling of membership” (Cantril and Allport 1971: 260), a community. This particular affordance of radio anthologies is one of the main elements that will be inherited by television programs.

2.1.3. In Television

Much like in the case of radio, starting from the very beginning of the history of television in several countries, we can observe the presence of archetypal serial forms, which have evolved in the more or less extended narratives that we see today. Notably, the first thirty years of television in the United States, but also in other countries, are at the origin of two heterogeneous trends, which created two fundamental evolutionary circuits: that of the anthology series, with the episodic structure that we are going to analyze here, and that of the serial, meaning a long-running show with narrative continuity between episodes and seasons. Among different degrees of serialization and examples of polarization of narrative forms in contemporary television, we can list the following: made-for-TV-movies, miniseries, micro-series, limited series, event series, episodic anthologies, seasonal anthologies or anthology miniseries, long-running series and serials, telenovelas. Such a varied, mutating morphology of television series always reconnects to a pair of opposite values, one represented by effects of “hypo-serialization”, and the other by effects of “hyper-serialization”.

The most recent examples of serial forms seem to be the result of these two opposite forces, one that pushes towards “vast narratives” (Harrigan and Wardrip-Fruin 2009) - long-running series, prolonged in time and space -, and the other that pushes towards narrations with a limited and pre-established duration. The question of the anthology form and its definition thus represents an important topic in the discussion on television seriality, both if we look at its historical evolution and at its local or global geographical movements. Guillaume Soulez articulated such a polarization in television seriality by stressing that anthologies are designed to “explicitly combine objects given as distinct around a common point, which does not determine, however,

the serial matrix: the seriality is external, as in the collection *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, which serves to gather around a single host-director different films that belong to the same horrifying kind.” (Soulez 2011: online, *my translation*)

To give a more detailed and practical definition of television anthologies, I reconstructed a historiographical account of the U.S. television industry based on the work of several television historians and scholars. This facilitated a comparative historical analysis of the anthology form in television, which represents the initial methodological framework of my research. As previously mentioned, from a diachronic perspective, the form of the television anthology in the United States, one of the major producers of anthologies, finds its roots in radio programs of the 1930s and 1940s, in which a host introduces and concludes each episode of a single series. Anthology series both in radio and television notably follow a serialized structure built on narratively independent stories, and yet connected by genre, register - or tone -, style, or, in some cases, by similar themes. As such, television anthologies are constructed on a fundamental duality, since two entities coexist within their nature: the totality of the series and its fragmented narrative units. The combination of these two elements - the whole and its parts - makes the anthology a versatile, dynamic and resilient form, capable of being constantly reformulated in a continuous process of re-contextualization and re-configuration.

A binary system, based on the opposition “discrete/vs/continuous” (Lotman [1990] 2001), should be considered to show the complexity of this narrative form, which even more than other serial forms oscillates between two poles, “the one operates as a discrete system of coding and forms texts which together like linear chains of linked segments. [...] In the second system the text is primary, being the bearer of the basic meaning. This text is not discrete but

continuous.” (ivi: 36) In Jurij Lotman this duality refers to the interplay found in rhetoric between sign (as single segment) and text (chains of linked segments). However, reasoning in terms of a dual system of meaning offers interesting options for the study of the anthology form. By focusing on revived anthologies such as *The Twilight Zone*, for example, we can identify both the adherence to a longer narrative and an update of themes designed to fill a generational gap. In addition to the analysis of narratives and their interaction the cultural environment, one could also use such a duality to reason in terms of the evolution of the anthological form in the context of a new media landscape. In chapter 4 and 5, I will account for both perspectives. The aim is to present the distinct traits and uses acquired by the anthological form in television, as a consequence of its specific positioning in certain broadcasting environments and in the broader context of contemporary digital cultures which facilitated the emergence of innate affordances.

Before getting into the details of such evolution, which I will discuss in chapter 4, a preliminary distinction is needed to differentiate typologies of anthological formations in television, as I will outline in paragraph 2.2. First, anthologies created *ex-ante* should be distinguished from anthologies created *ex post*. The studies that I have cited in relation to the definition of anthology in literature rather refer to anthologies created *ex-post*, either through the act of collection, or through the act of translation and contextualization. On the contrary, radio and television anthologies are most often produced *ex-ante*, in the very process of writing and creating the narration - e.g. *Kraft Television Theatre* (NBC, 1947-1958), *The United States Steel Hour* (ABC, 1953-1955; CBS, 1955-1963); *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (CBS/NBC, 1955-1965). In addition to a taxonomy based on modes of content production and distribution, we should then consider a taxonomy based on the narrative structure itself, which, I argue, defines three main categories

based on possibilities for narrative expansion: micro-anthologies, semi-anthologies, macro-anthologies. I will finally give a list of similar short serial products which interacted with the anthology form, creating cases of overlapping that ended up in recent formal evolution of the anthology form, such as in the case of the anthology miniseries, which shifts from an episodic to a seasonal narrative arc.

By taking a pragmatic standpoint for understanding audiovisual production, I will discuss such a taxonomy of the anthology form as part of a “morphology of media” (Kitsopanidou and Soulez 2015: 7), which focuses on contextual practices that add onto more structural conditions of the text. In this sense, the anthology in television emerges not only from a purely theoretical definition given so far, but also and more importantly from the pragmatic motion of its affordances, as suggested by Levine. What emerges in this chapter’s overview on anthologies in literature, radio and television is that, from the very beginning, this narrative and cultural form sets itself first and foremost as a common practice in search for definition. In this sense, from both a conceptual and pragmatic perspective, it stands between a definition based on theory and a definition based on practice. Analyzing what the anthology form does and how it’s done is therefore central for continuing this discussion. While not necessarily adhering to the concept of matrices, I will adopt Soulez’ approach at large, in the sense that media should be understood as “social organizations for cultural diffusion” (Soulez 2011: online, *my translation*), or else devices that provide forms and can give rise to formats, by imposing norms and standards in the media landscape.

2.2. Typologies

2.2.1. *Ex-ante and Ex-post Anthologies*

In a marginal note in his article “La double répétition. Structure et matrice des séries télévisées”, Soulez discusses a pivotal difference between collections made *a priori* and *a posteriori*. He notably states that: “Inside the collection, we can distinguish the anthology, which is a collection *a posteriori* of disparate pre-existing objects (as we define an anthology of poetry), the collection itself, which corresponds to an editorial offer *a priori* addressed to future authors as well as to future readers-viewers.” (*ibidem*) I argue here that both types can be considered anthologies in the proper sense of the term. I will however borrow Soulez’ distinction between a form constructed *a priori* and a form generated *a posteriori*, which I define respectively as *ex-ante* and *ex-post* anthologies. Both found in television, *ex-ante* anthologies evolved to be one of the main formal vehicles for producing contemporary television programs as opposed to *ex-post* anthologies, which are rather bound to an editorial construct and subjected to distribution dynamics.

This first classification of the anthology form therefore turns out to be a pivotal one, since it leverages on the different practices for document-collection and storage that can be found across several media histories. On the one hand, television programs conceived as *ex-ante* anthologies, meaning in the process of production itself with the active involvement of one or more screenwriters in the design of the content, affect the development of the narratives themselves, along with their contextual features - i.e. running time, actors’ rotation, financial commitment or budget constraints. It is the case of early U.S. anthology dramas such as *Studio One* (CBS, 1948–

1958), *Philco Playhouse* (NBC, 1948-1955), *Kraft Theater* (NBC, 1947-1958), with live half-hour or more episodes containing different stories each week, but also of more recent television series like *Black Mirror*. Through a constant regeneration, *ex-ante* anthologies are able to escape the normative and repetitive effect of longer serials, as they minimize the outcomes of external perturbations, such as possible defections of actors or unforeseen events like a writers' strike, while still creating a longer discourse around certain themes.

On the other hand, I define *ex-post* anthologies all collections generated after the process of actual creation of content, where the anthology-making happens in the distribution and consumption phase. Hence, *ex-post* anthologies do not necessarily have the same features as *ex-ante* anthologies, since their potential affordances in the production phase are much more limited in favor of attempts of anthologization that rather cross into processes of archiving, packaging, marketing and circulation of content. Examples of anthologies created *ex-post* are most commonly television reruns like the 1980s collection originally curated for PBS, *The Golden Age of Television*, which later on turned into a DVD box sets by the same name curated by the Criterion Collection - which by itself represents a case of *ex-post* anthology. One interesting case of anthology often edited/distributed *ex post* is the made-for-TV movie collection, which represents a peculiar object in television, as it blends a filmic visual aesthetic and style with the formal norms more typical of television. What makes them relevant in this discussion is the fact that they are most commonly considered as anthological collections and presented under the "movie of the week" formula (Rapping 1992). Other cases of this typology of anthology form are unrelated groups of television episodes transformed into anthologies in foreign television markets, where anthological collections are created starting from previously unrelated snippets of television content.

Overall we can state that while in *ex-ante* anthologies the anthological principle is involved in the very creation of narratives, in *ex-post* anthologies the affordances of the form rather emerge in mechanisms of adaptation, whether historical or geographical, cultural or industrial. *Ex post* anthologies imply a discourse on how culture is received rather than how it is produced, and the epistemological impacts of exporting television content into a separate context, through re-organization, re-ordering, re-aligning or even hierarchizing, including/excluding, centering/decentering of material for transnational (or transhistorical) audiences. In internet-distributed television, given the absence of reruns as traditionally conceived within a fixed programming schedule, such a process of anthology-making *a posteriori* lies behind the principles of categorization and clustering of content, usually driven by algorithmic recommendation systems. If in traditional linear television these two anthological forms remain associated to different uses and belong to separate actions either in the programming schedule or in operations of marketing, non-linear television allows not only a coexistence of both forms in the same media space, but also an interaction of both forms in relation to the same content. I will illustrate further this point in the following chapters, when going into details on the media environment of online platforms and its functioning.

2.2.2. *Micro-anthologies, Semi-anthologies, Macro-anthologies*

If on a pragmatic level anthologies differentiate between *ex-ante* and *ex-post*, on a more structural level they can be divided into micro-anthologies, semi-anthologies, macro-anthologies. Such a distinction might seem irrelevant at a first glance, as it would simply seem to state several degrees in the formation of anthologies. However, the matter of scale in narrative forms is a very

important factor for the definition of the anthology and its affordances, since it does influence more pragmatic dynamics related to production practices, modes of distribution and even dynamics of content promotion and reception. The way micro-anthologies, semi-anthologies, macro-anthologies function in the mediascape varies consistently. While they fit into the same definition, at the same time they present certain specificities, enough to say that a semi-anthology acts in different way than micro- or macro-anthologies, and that micro- and macro-anthologies implies separate dynamics as far as their potential for creating franchises, transmedia occurrences or a revival mechanism.

I notably define micro-anthologies as the most compact and rigid anthological form, where the length is usually predetermined and the collection does not expand outside of such a prefixed length. Micro-anthologies tend to limit the possibilities for narrative dilatation by favoring narrative closure and completeness. In these anthologies, the accent is on the end of the narratives, which contrast with any attempt of reopening. Factors that provide closure can be structural or contextual, meaning they can be related to the structure given to the raw narrative material itself or they can be linked to economic or cultural factors. In the former case, the narrative structure generated by a composition of stand-alone stories is so that both within them and in their entirety of body of works the dissemination of meaning is limited. That is to say, there is a containment principle - either topological, thematically or even simply a lack of strength in the anthological framing - that makes the list of episodes definite by its very nature. In the latter, the containment principle is contextual, meaning it is not necessarily related to narrative barriers contained in the text; on the contrary, it is an effect of budget constraints or cultural limitations, such as in the case of outdated or controversial narratives.

Of course, as we are approaching fluid objects as cultural production is, micro-anthologies can emancipate themselves and transition to larger corpora, namely to macro-anthologies. What I refer to as macro-anthologies are anthologies that are open to expansion and tend to generate one of the following processes: franchising, revival, transmedia, serialization, adaptation, canonization. “Along similar lines, Patricia Odber de Baubeta suggests the consideration of anthology (in one volume) and macro-anthology (in several volumes) (2007: 29).” (Seruya *et al.*: 3) She notably suggests the following definition for macro-anthologies as collections of content where “individual texts may be read on their own but are brought together to provide a far more inclusive vision of different periods, styles and authors.” (de Baubeta 2007: 76) This differentiation is useful to understand not only tendencies in narrative development, but also underlining dynamics in the imposition of a cultural canon and in the financial exploitation of content in the television market, or in reception practices, as seen in active engagement of the audience through cult, fandom and fan-fiction phenomena.

Still connected to a cultural, commercial and sometimes political phenomenon, a third typology of anthology is the semi-anthology, which is often excluded from a taxonomy of anthologies and traditionally enters the pool of long-running shows. However, here I advocate that products like police procedurals do present certain features that are anthological in their nature. Borrowing Mark Alvey’s (1995) definition of television programs like *Naked City* (ABC, 1958-1963) and *Route 66* (CBS, 1960-1964), I call these type of anthologies “semi-anthologies”, where a framing narrative device contains a series of stand-alone stories. According to Alvey, *Naked City* was originally conceived “not as a police procedural but rather as a dramatic anthology with a police backdrop...the series was never intended as a show about detectives or their activities, but

rather as a series about the city and the people of New York.” (Alvey as quoted in Sabin *et al.* 2015: 32) Semi-anthologies are therefore television series that adhere to a grand narrative and at the same time benefit from the alternating of closure/reiteration, which allows for a regeneration of the narrative within certain parameters of repetition and normativity. This makes a semi-anthology a product keen to constantly update itself, much like anthologies, to keep up with contemporary debates, and yet subjected to a moral or ethical intent, usually designed to address social and political issues or disseminate a set of values.

Due to their repetitive scheme, such types of anthologies often turn into reproducible formats, with a standard formula that can be exported abroad, such as the Danish-Swedish *Bron/Broen* which had offsprings in the UK, France, Estonia, Russia, Malaysia, Singapore, Germany and Austria (see chapter 1). Semi-anthologies also introduce the topic of fluidity between narratives forms and genres, as they demonstrate how anthological and serialization processes can merge, coexist and ultimately operate collectively. Such fluidity in the formation of narratives spotted in early television programs become even more evident with the multiplication of television networks, markets, technologies, devices and platforms, which lead the medium of television through a series of mutations as consequences of competitive, interactive, global media environment. In this scenario, the anthology form evolved into two major categories: the classic episodic anthology and the seasonal anthology.

2.2.4. *Episodic and Seasonal Anthologies*

The distinction between episodic and seasonal anthologies is quite intuitive: episodic anthologies are those where the narrative arc develops within the limits of an episode and seasonal

anthologies are those where the narrative arc evolves throughout the span of a season. This peculiar division into sections or fragments - being them episodes, seasons or chapters - lies at the basis of most televisual narrative structures, which are commonly framed in narrative sequences of various length with a beginning, a middle and an end or at least a shared setting or thematic background. The reasons for the adoption of such rhythmical patterns in television narratives across various cultures and markets are to be retraced not so much in their narrative architecture (meaning how information and storytelling are structured), but in the need for a time-management system that involves - although differently in linear and non-linear media - both industrial and technological mechanisms. The necessity of timing serial production and distribution in television responds in fact to commercial, financial, economic strategies, as well as to the affordances of the medium. Furthermore, the way episodes and seasons are arranged often mirrors the structure of the television industry in given local markets, which then lead to the emergence of specific narrative forms. Observing shifts in canonical episodic and seasonal structures can be helpful to gather more evidences about the evolutions of television in different historical moments or geographical locations.

Before discussing the seasonal shift in the U.S. television anthologies, the definition of episodic anthologies needs to be further explained in relation to the academic debate on media and television. For instance, even though television anthologies existed in the episodic structure since the very beginning, in 1970 the U.S. radio and television historian Erik Barnouw interestingly distinguished between a rigid formula-based episodic series and the anthological form, which he describes as a means for creative experimentation. He notably specifies that “whereas the episodic series had emerged from a radio tradition, the anthology series emerged from a the-

ater tradition. From the start, artists from the theater were active in the anthology series.” (Barnouw 1970: 26) Elsewhere, Michele Hilmes will state that early television carried over from radio “the medium’s basic and distinctive characteristic of seriality - a system of episodic programs recurring on a regular weekly or daily basis [...].” (Hilmes 2012: 218) While Barnouw uses the term episodic to refer to a rigid genre-formula, Hilmes simply associates it to the timeframe for regular programming in television. Taking this second definition of episodic narratives in television, I am interested in the way the anthology form interacted with the episodic structure.

The episodic frame, as intended by Hilmes, along with its frequency, is one debated notion if we look at the way it affects narrative development in television. Products like telenovelas in Brazil or soap operas in the U.S. became a serial form typically associated with daily programming, as opposed to anthological products commonly found in weekly schedules. The episodic shape of television anthologies can also be observed in relation to its location in different time-slots, which have outcomes in reception. Scheduling an episode daily or weekly, during day time or prime time, and releasing a season in different moments of the year have actual effects on the economic success and cultural impact of a serial product. The distinction between episodic and seasonal anthology is therefore to be intended here not as strictly narratological and formal, but as economical, cultural and historical instead. As I will show, along with other televisual products, anthology series themselves were influenced by such formal shaping and, over the course of their evolution, mutated into two different strands: episodic-based and season-based. I will discuss in details this turn in anthology-making processes in U.S. television in chapter 4,

where I analyze the transformation of the anthology form as a consequence of mutations in the media environment.

As I argue in this dissertation, U.S. seasonal anthologies, otherwise known as anthology miniseries, are the result of both a phase of reassessment in media ecology on a macroscopic scale, as well as multiple processes of hybridization on a microscopic scale. On a macroscopic level, the introduction of non-linear environments for streaming television content via over-the-top platforms fostered the creation of new business models for television. One of the major players that redefined the traditional U.S. episodic and seasonal release's strategies was Netflix, with its full-season release strategy which brings the attention on the full season, rather than on single episodes. Even when streaming platforms opt for an episodic release, they still rewrote the rules for seasonal, yearly releases together with the pilot logic. Skipping the pilot process in favor of a straight-to-series commitment and a seasonal release, which makes the content available permanently on a library, marks "a transition that could alter the overall television landscape, both from the commercial and aesthetic standpoints, and that is part of a larger process of change in the way content is produced, aggregated, and distributed in contemporary mediascape." (Brembilla 2013, online)

The importance of this shift towards a seasonal anthology form can be understood not only in terms of economic development in business models for contemporary television, notably affecting streaming platforms, but also in terms of creative potential and contamination between forms. In fact, alterations happened over time in the television industry resulted on a microscopic level, on a multiplication of narrative forms. If "Ryan Murphy invented the modern anthological series or limited series and initiated a new genre that has proved irresistible to other great artists

and networks”⁹, it is also true that other serial forms contributed to boost this shift towards a seasonal structure. FX’s *American Horror Story* was one of the first declared attempts to reformulate the anthology form in television and a great branding operation under the seal of an innovative anthological model, which sparked aliases in U.S. non-linear television, as well as a renewed interest for the anthology form as a viable business model.

However, seasonal anthologies emerged also as the result of microscopic influences between televisual narrative forms like seasonal police procedurals, miniseries, event series and other examples of short narratives in local television markets. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss short or micro-programming that influences a redefinition of the anthology form in television. On the one hand, narrative experimentation was granted by a moment of transition towards a new form of television, which calls for a media ecological framework for understanding serial narratives. On the other hand, we should look at forms of narrative hybridizations which led to the distinction between episodic and seasonal anthologies. The upcoming discussion on short narratives in television should be therefore taken as a preliminary study of the anthology form in television, which will be further explored in chapter 4 and 5 by adopting a comparative historical perspective and considering more closely the industrial context, notably building on the studies of Michele Hilmes, Amanda Lotz and Ramon Lobato.

⁹ Alston, Joshua. “The Age of Anthology: Why the Ryan Murphy Model Is Taking over Television.” *TV Club*. Last modified August 11, 2015. Retrieved August 16, 2019. <https://tv.avclub.com/the-age-of-anthology-why-the-ryan-murphy-model-is-taki-1798282858>.

2.3. Other Short Narratives in Television

2.3.1. Short Narratives

What does “short narrative” mean in television? And how is it defined in opposition to vast narratives? To answer these questions, I should first clarify what I mean by vast narratives in television. The concept of vast narratives in media studies was first problematized by the scholars Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan (2009) in *Third Person: Authoring and Exploring Vast Narratives*. This book does not explore so much a comprehensive definition of vast narratives, but rather reflects on their implications in the current media scenario. Pat Harrigan notably identifies five fundamental elements that constitute vast narratives. I will consider each one of these elements, by considering their counterpart in what I refer to as “short narratives”. “First, we’re interested in what we call ‘narrative extent,’ which we think of as works that exceed the normal narrative patterns for works of a particular sort.”¹⁰ To clarify, “for example, *The Wire* doesn’t have that many episodes as police procedurals go (*CSI* has many more), but it attains unusual narrative extent by making the season—or arguably the entire run of five seasons—rather than the episode, the meaningful boundary.”¹¹

The term “narrative extent” associated to vast narratives thus defines a narrative scheme that goes beyond the traditional episodic structure, stressing on the seasonal arc instead. This shows that, following Wardrip-Fruin and Harrigan, semi-anthological products like police procedurals can be evolving into either a collection of short narratives or into seemingly vast narratives

¹⁰ “Authoring and Exploring Vast Narratives: An Interview with Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin (Part One).” *Henry Jenkins (Blog)*. Last modified May 18, 2009. Retrieved August 16, 2019. http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2009/05/an_interview_with_pat_harrigan.html.

¹¹ *ibidem*.

going past the episodic or even seasonal scheme. It also demonstrates that defining short forms in television requires further observation of production dynamics, since simply stating the extent of a narrative is not sufficient in a mediascape where narrative forms are fluid, resilient, adaptable. I will therefore consider short narratives contained in anthologies as non-extended narrative, in the sense of narratives containing limiting mechanisms in the evolution of the storytelling and a tendency towards closure.

The second point that Harrigan makes in relation to vast narratives is that such a narrative extension implies complex dynamics in the construction of narrative worlds and in continuity of characters, setting, plot. This is due to a production process that is typical of traditional broadcasting in U.S. television, where multiple screenwriters work together in the writers' room on weekly episodes. Hence, most serial products created in the context of the multi-channel transition were subjected to external dynamics, ranging from audience's feedback, to industrial and technological shifts, to commercial and financial choices. In a business model where production and distribution of content is dilated through time, even individual decisions made by actors who want to abandon the series can affect the narrative architecture. By nature, short narratives limit such a dilation in the narrative ecosystem, thus constraining external forces that might affect the narrative. Furthermore, short narratives in television, such as miniseries, often contain a stronger authorial presence, being it a single screenwriter or a designated director. One example is *Masters of Horror* (Showtime, 2005-2007), a U.S. anthology series shattered into several short stories, where each director's personality emerge to replace collaborative authorship of more serialized content.

The straight-to-series model introduced by Netflix helped reframing the rules of television pro-

duction by preferring shorter circuits of production that are more suitable for short narratives rather than vast serial ecosystems. This new business model sparked the emerging trend of so-called “mini-rooms”, or else “three-week-long mini-writers’ room funded by a studio to ‘pressure test’ eight episodes’ worth of story ideas and ‘see how they hold water.’ [...] Mini-rooms (the “mini” can mean fewer writers, a shorter time frame, or both) offer the promise of flexibility and reduced costs for studios and networks, while increasing opportunities for less experienced writers to get their feet in the door.”¹² The mini-room is one of the outcome of a media economy that is changing as a result of technological advancements. In a working paper for the National Bureau of Economic Research, the economists Katharine G. Abraham, John C. Haltiwanger, Kristin Sandusky and James R. Spletzer notably explain that

both media sources and scholars have adopted the term “gig economy” to refer broadly to these less structured work arrangements as well as more narrowly to the subset of flexible jobs mediated through various online platforms. The latter have been viewed as yielding an increasingly “on demand” economy where goods and services can be acquired through apps on smartphones and other web based applications.

(Abraham *et al.* 2017: 1)

Fitting a gig economy, where firms increasingly adopt alternative work flows as a consequence of the introduction of new technologies, mini-rooms seem to be a promising option, at the frontier of future television productions. Patrick Somerville, writer for *The Leftovers* (HBO, 2014-2017) and creator of the Netflix’ miniseries *Maniac* (Netflix, 2018) explains: “[The mini-room] was a very unusual thing when I first got into television, which was only five years ago,

¹² Press, Joy. “Is This the End of the TV Writers’ Room as We Know It?” *Vanity Fair*. August 7, 2018. Retrieved August 16, 2019. <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2018/08/the-end-of-the-tv-writers-room-as-we-know-it-mini-rooms>.

and now they're everywhere."¹³ Mini-rooms don't necessarily mean short narratives; however, this trend does turn out to support particularly well short-term seasonal productions like anthology series. Gina Welch, writer for the anthology series *Feud* (FX, 2017-) who is currently working on another FX' anthology series based on Carmen Maria Machado's story collection, *Her Body and Other Parties*, adds that mini-rooms are rooms "where there's no expectation that a whole show is going to get written. They're just sort of either a cauldron of ideas or they're to get the creator going on writing a pilot."¹⁴

If vast narratives are extended and affected by complex ecosystemic dynamics, short narratives are limited and tend to maintain a certain creative control in the evolution of the story. This leads to a third point Harrigan brings up: vast narratives nowadays also mean cross-media narratives. The multiplication of virtual platforms and the unlimited potential of a story to evolve, as Harrigan argues, foster the birth of broader narrative universes where different stories can exist within them. To this regard, Henry Jenkins discussed a form of "transmedia storytelling" (Jenkins 2006), focusing on the process of narrative expansion at the convergence of different platforms and media, while Frank Rose coined the term "deep media" (Rose 2011), to stress on the immersive effect of such a participatory process on audiences. "This is 'deep media': stories that take you deeper than a hour-long TV drama or a two-hour movie or a 30-second spot will permit." (*ivi*: 3) As Rose suggests, deep media are strictly related to vast narratives, in the sense

¹³ Press, Joy. "Is This the End of the TV Writers' Room as We Know It?" *Vanity Fair*. August 7, 2018. Retrieved August 16, 2019. <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2018/08/the-end-of-the-tv-writers-room-as-we-know-it-mini-rooms>.

¹⁴ *ibidem*.

that they go beyond a single-hour experience. Transmedia storytelling and deep media is something visibly lacking in short narratives.

Harrigan then continues by outlining a fourth point in relation to different computational possibilities allowed by emerging media technologies in the use of a narrative and the interaction with it. The distinction between vast narratives and short narratives is rather complex when it comes to their interaction with digital technologies, which is still in a process of making and experimentation. On the contrary, it is more intuitive to define vast *versus* short narratives by adopting Harrigan's last point on the distinctive elements found in vast narratives, which is the higher possibility of interaction and dialogue with the audience as a "way of expanding narrative experiences to vast dimensions."¹⁵ Short narratives, as I have partially defined in opposition to vast narratives, leave less space for audience's intervention on the evolution of the story, since they are usually presented as a finished narrative with some sort of closure. Nevertheless, short narratives that evolved into television anthologies appear useful to understand cultural and technological influences of non-linear mediascapes on the creation of serial content. The seasonal anthology does not only inherit an anthological form, but it is also the outcome of parallel evolutions of other short-narrative forms in U.S. television, like miniseries.

2.3.2. *Miniseries and Micro-programming*

Miniseries represent some of the shortest narrative forms in television, so much so that they are sometimes considered "made for TV movies" broken down into several parts - such as in

¹⁵ "Authoring and Exploring Vast Narratives: An Interview with Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin (Part One)." *Henry Jenkins (Blog)*. Last modified May 18, 2009. Retrieved August 16, 2019. http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2009/05/an_interview_with_pat_harrigan.html.

the case of multiple-episode television films in Russia. Even though it is still not clear within which limit this terminology is valid, on average miniseries develop in a range between two to fifteen episodes, and their production usually involves narrative arcs with a predetermined limit. Quoting the *Encyclopedia of Television*, “a miniseries is a narrative drama designed to be broadcasted in a limited number of episodes. If the distinction is maintained between ‘series’ (describing a group of self-contained episodes) and ‘serial’ (a group of interconnected episodes), the term ‘miniseries’ is an acknowledged misnomer, for the majority of broadcast material presented in the genre is in fact produced in serial form.” (Newcomb 2014: 1499) Before the option of an anthology of miniseries became a trend following Ryan Murphy’s legacy on FX of a seasonal anthology form, miniseries were already problematizing the study of serial narrative, by proposing a narrative structure that is at the intersection between opposite forms.

This type of micro-programming became common in many television markets all over the world, assuming different shapes and lengths. Italian television, for example, represents an interesting case. With its low budget seriality when compared to U.S. TV productions, and rarely able to sustain long-running shows as the predominant offer of content, the Italian television market often opted for short serial formulas spanning between two to six canonical episodic installments (Buonanno 2012), thus inserting several television series in the miniseries category. Originated from *sceneggiato*, in some more recent cases Italian miniseries turned into longer sagas, such as *La Piovra* (Rai Uno, 1984-2001), which featured sequels and reboots, becoming *de facto* an anthology miniseries *ante litteram*. While discussing the miniseries tradition, the Italian television scholar Milly Buonanno notably refers to it as the “only authentic national formula” (Buonanno 2003: 403, *my translation*), “a true national hallmark” (Buonanno 2012: 38). Elsewhere, she de-

finer the miniseries as “the typical formula for domestic TV drama: it epitomises and conveys Italian TV drama’s tradition of ‘weak’ or ‘short’ seriality.” (*ivi*: 75)

The echoes of this form are found even in television markets with a preference for long-running shows, such as Brazil, where miniseries can consist of up to 60 chapters. In the 1980s, the Brazilian network Rede Globo, along with other television channels in Latin America, started inserting mini- and micro-series in its television offer along with *teleteatro* (Carter 2018). In Japan and South Korea, the *dorama* created a genre by itself, where the story can run throughout 25 or more episodes, and yet have a fixed length with a predefined ending (Clements and Tamamura 2003). In the United States, miniseries appeared in U.S. television during the 1970s, when multi-episode stories based on literary adaptations (Wheen and Fiddick 1985) started to be produced in the wake of British productions. Later on, cable technologies and new forms of television based on subscription adopted the miniseries form as a synonymous of high-budget productions, quality and channel branding. More recently, miniseries entered the umbrella term of “limited-run television series”, a television form that was officially listed in the rules and procedures for the Primetime Emmy Awards 2017/2018 with reference to programs “with two or more episodes with a total running time of at least 150 program minutes that tells a complete, non-recurring story, and does not have an on-going storyline and/or main characters in subsequent seasons.”¹⁶

Even though they are now evolving into a more varied array of narratives, in U.S. television, “the structural and stylistic roots of the mini-series are directly traceable to programming innovations explored a decade earlier by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in both its

¹⁶ Schneider, Michael. “Emmys: ‘American Horror Story,’ ‘The Sinner,’ ‘American Vandal’ Are Out of the Running for Limited Series.” *Variety*. Last modified April 9, 2019. Retrieved August 19, 2019. <https://variety.com/2019/tv/news/american-horror-story-the-sinner-american-vandal-emmys-limited-series-1203184952>.

originally scripted productions and its novel-to-television program.” (Edgerton 2009: 295) U.S. miniseries were therefore initially offering a type of content often related to literary classic, historical settings, bestseller novels, bringing the question of the authorship to television. The first U.S. miniseries were notably based on previous novels, such as in the case of ABC’s *QB VII* (ABC, 1974), based on the novel by Leon Uris. Furthermore, for their nature of short-narratives, miniseries distinguished themselves from long-running television seriality in terms of the initial financial commitment. The production costs for this type of micro-programming are in fact relatively high if compared to other serial products, which explains their original location in the television schedule at times without the constraints of the protected zone.

As Horace Newcomb notes:

It is significant that miniseries are generally part of late evening primetime viewing, the space made available for the privileged viewing of “irregular” material, whether it be contemporary feature films, miniseries, or other forms. This scheduling is important because the high production costs of miniseries can only be recovered through exposure to the largest, most lucrative, and attentive audiences and the material dealt with is often of either difficult and potentially upsetting, or of a sexually explicit nature not deemed suitable for children.

(Newcomb 2014: 1500)

Miniseries were presenting specific affordances in collision with certain media technologies. In linear television for instance, they acquired similar affordances to literary short stories, turning into places for alternative knowledge, where difficult, upsetting, even controversial narratives were presented to the public. In their evolution into anthology miniseries, given context of non-linear television, the location of such products in the programming schedule will not be as relevant to the study of short televisual forms. Some other affordances will, on the contrary, endure, such as the tendency to portray non-normative themes and characters, or the presence of an editorial figure dictating some stylistic and aesthetic choices. This apparent contraction between diver-

sity of narratives comprised in the anthology and the establishment of an editorial canon or brand, such as in the case of Ryan Murphy's authorial imprinting to *American Horror Story* (FX, 2011-), echoes literary anthologies. And yet, more than the search for a single authorial figure, this operation of both miniseries and anthologies can be better described as the establishment of a curator or editor, who supervises the process of edition, in complement with technological and cultural processes of "editorialization" (Vitali-Rosati 2018).

2.3.3. *Anthology Miniseries*

In 2013, the television writer and reviewer Alan Sepinwall was announcing "the rise of this era's other big new scripted format: the anthology miniseries" (Sepinwall 2013: 437), stressing the appeal for many creators to opt for a thirteen-episode series for cable or streaming instead of going for twenty-two episodes in commercial television (*ivi*: 438). The success of anthology miniseries in U.S. television was boosted by Ryan Murphy's *American Horror Story*, which in 2011 brought to television a hybrid form, both rooting in early television programming and embracing the season-long narrative arc which was typical of longer narrative forms. This idea of a collection of stand-alone seasons with different stories caught the attention of the television industry, in a moment when television was transitioning towards the coexistence of linear and non-linear media apparatuses, with Netflix introducing a streaming service for the first time in 2010. *American Horror Story* appeared in the three-year time frame between Netflix' initial race into streaming and the first Netflix original appeared - *House of Cards* (Netflix, 2013-2018). These two events are not directly related, since anthology miniseries were produced by cable channels before Netflix' straight-to-series business model became a trend in U.S. television industry. Ho-

wever, they are both symptoms of a moment of redefinition in the mediascape, where traditional linear television was thriving to reinvent itself to keep up with new creative and economic possibilities, while over-the-top platforms were initiating their ascent in the media landscape, with new plans of vertical integration, alternative strategies for television production, and innovative subscription-based models for non-linear distribution (Lotz 2017a).

Discussing anthology miniseries in such a media environment calls for closer observations of media and economic dynamics, other than narratological or cultural. If the seasonal anthology form emerged in televisual cultures as the mixing of a variety of narrative forms and genres - an interbreeding between anthology form, miniseries, and, in certain cases, police procedurals -, it also stands out as the result of a media, technological and economic context that favored its return. The intuition of anthology miniseries lies precisely in the fact that they were able to anticipate the mutations of digital culture and economy. With their shorter, compressed form, despite their high up-front costs, straight-to-season anthology miniseries reduce the financial risks of producing less controllable long-running shows, while still offering more programming time for an effective evolution of the narrative arc throughout the season. With a multiple episode commitment, the overall initial costs are likely to be higher than the costs of a single pilot, no matter how high they are. For instance, it is reported that some of the most expensive TV pilot in U.S. television range between \$10 million and \$30 million¹⁷, and yet up-front costs of major anthology miniseries still fluctuate between \$4 million and \$6 million per episode, making it a total of over \$40 million per season of about ten episodes - such as in the case of *True Detective*, with

¹⁷ Kurland, Daniel. "The 30 Most Expensive TV Shows Ever Made (And How Much They Cost)." *ScreenRant*. Last modified March 24, 2019. Retrieved August 19, 2019. <https://screenrant.com/tv-shows-most-expensive-cost>.

a budget of \$4 to \$4.5 million per episode¹⁸, and Ryan Murphy's *American Crime Story*, which gets closer to \$6 million per episode.

In the straight-to-series model the season tend to replace the pilot as a test for assessing the potential value in revenues of the series, as Netflix's Chief Content Officer, Ted Sarandos, suggests in an article on *Vox*¹⁹. This implies new creative processes, new consumption models, and a completely different risk/reward management, which relies on a variety of storytelling forms - old and new - that are asked to renovate their roles and functions in the television industry. In fact, the resilience of the seasonal form is such that it allows to define its status of anthology based on the success of the first season, without necessarily claiming the anthology form from the very beginning of the show. In other words, anthology miniseries in internet-distributed television do not need to be declared as such *a priori*, making the distinction between *ex ante* and *ex post* anthologies almost interchangeable. Some seasonal anthologies, for example, were originally designed with a narrative arc covering two seasons and then switch to a separate story: it is the case of *Scream* (MTV, 2015-2016; VH1, 2019-), which after two seasons opted for a third season with a different plot and cast, announcing it as a reboot going by the title *Scream: Resurrection*. Similarly, anthology series, whether seasonal or episodic, can be canceled any time at the end of the season, without having to drop an unresolved narrative, which would then remain on online platforms as an unfinished content.

¹⁸ See: <https://www.imdb.com/list/ls056710448>.

¹⁹ VanDerWerff, Emily Todd. "Netflix Is Accidentally Inventing a New Art Form — Not Quite TV and Not Quite Film." *Vox*. Last modified July 29, 2015. Retrieved August 19, 2019. <https://www.vox.com/2015/7/29/9061833/netflix-binge-new-artform>.

In conclusion, anthological content enables streams of “finished” content, with a narrative closure - I will return on this point in the following paragraphs -, thus helping the process of aggregation and archiving of the great abundance of content available on online platforms²⁰. Even outside of the anthology form, much shorter seasons are being produced for television, if compared to older series made of 20-episode seasons. In a platform economy (Kenney and Zysman 2016), more often referred to as part of a broader sharing economy (Codagnone *et al.* 2018), where there’s too much content to handle for both producers and consumers due to potentially unlimited opportunities for content aggregation and a vertically bundled experience²¹, shorter forms of programming proved to be able to catch the attention of producers and online distributors²². Anthology miniseries fit the idea of creating a collection of bite-size stories, easy to manage, a comeback in contemporary television that involved also the episodic anthology form. One can even presume that, as a result of a digital value and supply chain that makes available large amount of content leveraging on the anytime-anywhere logic, viewers simply tend to prefer shorter forms in the vast shelves of digital libraries. Before discussing a platform economy and ecology further, it is useful to pinpoint some of the main concept mobilized by the notion of anthology.

²⁰ Aggregation theory (Thompson 2015) notably explains the abundance generated by a multi-sided platform economy by pointing at three main causes: *i*) the absence of transaction costs, which facilitates the acquisition of users/subscribers; *ii*) the absence of distribution costs, directly linked to a proliferation of content; *iii*) the absence of marginal costs, which ensures scalability. “These three fundamentals explain how content changed from scarcity, only available through traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, books and TV, to abundance available on every person’s blog, social feed and YouTube channel.” Lifely, David. “Aggregation Theory: The Most Powerful Economics Theory You Didn’t Learn at University.” *Medium*. Last modified January 8, 2018. Retrieved August 20, 2019. <https://medium.com/@dlifely/aggregation-theory-the-most-powerful-economics-theory-you-didnt-learn-at-university-4dc854b8d0b>.

²¹ Cicero, Simone. “Market Networks, Innovation & Digital Value Chains.” *Medium*. Last modified September 29, 2018. Retrieved August 20, 2019. <https://stories.platformdesign toolkit.com/market-networks-innovation-digital-value-chains-60e676ca7d2>.

²² Patel, Sahil. “Why Netflix and Amazon Are Experimenting with Short-Form Programming.” *Digiday*. Last modified April 27, 2018. Retrieved August 20, 2019. <https://digiday.com/media/the-streaming-giants-are-experimenting-with-short-form-but-dont-call-it-a-gold-rush>.

2.4. Related Concepts

2.4.1. *World-building, World-narrowing*

Some theoretical problems emerge when looking for a definition of anthology series in television. For instance, a certain flexibility in processes of expansion and contraction of the narratives contained in the anthology form invites us to rethink the concept of world-building in media storytelling practices (Wolf 2012; Boni 2017), in order to acknowledge an opposite tendency towards “world-narrowing”. I use the term “world-narrowing” to account for cases of “limited world-building”²³, where the imaginary world is pitched using processes of demarcation and reboot of the story that prevent the potential for further “horizontal” developments of the narrative. To simplify, drawing upon Marie-Laure Ryan’s definition, I will say that world-building operates on three levels: it “brings a world to mind (setting) and populates it with intelligent agents (characters). These agents participate in actions and happenings (events, plot), which cause global changes to the narrative world.” (Ryan 2004: 337) World-narrowing in anthology series is based on a constant radical change of at least two of these three levels.

If the setting and characters change on the same core plot, we will have a different story - as in the case of some police procedurals. Similarly, if the setting and plot change, while still maintaining the same set of characters, we would then have something like *Easy* (Netflix, 2016-), an interesting case of anthology series, where few characters return in different situations/settings and interact with different plots. A similar anthological operation is expected with *Love Life*, which is announced as the first series to stream on WarnerMedia’s streaming platform

²³ “‘Black Mirror’ Continues to Excel at Limited World-Building.” *The Economist*. Last modified January 3, 2018. Retrieved August 20, 2019. <https://www.economist.com/prospero/2018/01/03/black-mirror-continues-to-excel-at-limited-world-building>.

(set to launch in 2020), hosting the same main character who will deal in each episode with different settings and plots. Finally, if plot and characters change by keeping the same setting, we would end up with an anthology like *Room 104* (HBO, 2017-), which readapted the format of the British anthology *Room 101* (BBC, 1994-2007), proving a continuity of setting between episodes while favoring a rotation of characters and situations on the background of the same hotel room. Of course, in more “radical” anthology forms, we could have a change on all three levels: setting, characters and plot are constantly regenerated and the organizing principle is provided by more abstract elements (main theme, tone, genre).

A change in the setting is one of the most evident strategies to mark a variation in the story, such as the shifts in fictional locations - Louisiana, California and Arkansas - that distinguish different seasons of *True Detective*, or the multiple settings in *American Horror Story* - the haunted house, the asylum or the hotel, just to name a few -, with their tendency to set borders to the narrative ecosystem, outside of which the plot tend to be less solid. Even in an anthology like *Fargo*, where the setting is recurrent, as suggested by the title itself, the configuration of the space varies depending on each season, in an effort to map different geographical and historical realities - namely Duluth 2006 in season one, Fargo, North Dakota, 1979 in season two, St. Cloud 2010 in season three and Kansas City in the 1950s in season four. *Narcos* (Netflix, 2015-) is following a similar path, as the setting was moved from Colombia to Mexico. Playing with the spatial and historical setting as a way to reboot the story is a common feature in contemporary U.S. television anthologies. However, as I showed, world-narrowing strategies based on the coexistence of innovation and repetition (Eco 1985) can also result in a spatial continuity that acts as a

stable background for other variations - e.g. characters, plot -, such as in the case of the already mentioned *Room 104*.

For instance, rotating characters is an interesting device adopted in horror stories to regenerate the plot over and over again. Horror stories usually provide closure by, quite abruptly, killing a set of characters. Reasoning on the liminal category of closure in narratives is fundamental to describe an inner, structural property of the stories that constitutes television anthologies, which always progress towards an ending. Contrary to what suggested by Mittell's view on contemporary television series as complex narratives that do not always conclude (Mittell 2015), ending in anthology series still exists and implies a sharp shift in the plot, and not just the "promise of an ending" (Favard 2019, my translation). Stressing on this point, Shannon Wells-Lassagne distinguishes between a soap-opera form of seriality, where the end is constantly postponed, and a short-form seriality built on a foreseeable, pre-planned, pre-determined ending (Wells-Lassagne 2017). In this regard, not only horror, but also crime genres in their more traditional formulas tend to converge towards a conclusion, by fostering at the same time regenerative processes, through the constant return of the serial killer, as in the *Scream* franchise (1996-), or in mechanisms of repetition inserted in the narrative structure typical of the crime series' tradition.

I use the term closure in a rather pragmatic way: closure is where the narrative strands converge into a resolution and stop. Instead of discussing a "phenomenological feeling of finality" (Carroll 2007: 1) found on a reception level in the audience, here I refer to practices of closure embedded in the narrative itself, as logical mechanisms of answering "all of the presiding

macro-questions and all the micro-questions that are relevant to settling the macro-questions.”²⁴

(*ivi*: 6) In certain genres, this quest of the narrative plot for a conclusion is more evident. At the beginning of a horror or crime series, the audience is presented with a problem (i.e. a presiding macro-question), which is then usually solved in the end, with different possible outcomes. The eschatological structure typical of such genres appears to be functional to the anthology form, resulting in many occurrences of horror or crime anthologies in the history of U.S. television. I will observe this predilection of the anthology form for certain genres when looking at the evolution of anthology series in television in chapter 4.

For now, I am more interested in showing that the process of narrowing, as opposed to expanding, other than being a formal and structural feature of serialized narratives, has effective outcomes on production. First, creating narrow worlds requires a lower commitment from the actors, which are not asked to sign a five-year contract or longer to return to the same series. Similarly, if narrowing happens in the setting, the financial investment on the location is likely to be lower. Finally, narrowing the plot allows for safer business models: since the initial financial risks of a straight-to-series commitment can be relatively high, as I previously outlined in the paragraph on miniseries and other short narratives, opting for an anthological reboot can be a valid alternative to long narratives that end up being not appealing for the public, or that simply incur in contextual impediments (actors leaving the production or lack of budget). In a platform economy, where there is an urge for always new content to feed the library, anthologies create quantity, in a moment when quality is not so clear of a term anymore, and perhaps even not that rele-

²⁴ Noel Carroll differentiates between ‘presiding macro questions’, ‘macro questions’, and ‘micro questions’ contained in narrative plots. As Carroll explains, “[s]ome questions orchestrate our attention to the emerging story from one end to the other [...]. Questions that structure an entire text or, at least most of it, we can call ‘*presiding* macro questions’.” More over, micro-questions are those “whose answers are required cognitively to render the answers to the macro-questions intelligible.” (Carroll 2007: 10)

vant. A massive audience's feedback, as seen in linear television via Nielsen-like rating systems, doesn't really affect the actual success of a television series on streaming platforms.

On the contrary, a long-tail economy (Anderson 2004; 2008) pushes internet-distributed television to invest on long-term success and niche audiences as much as - and sometimes even more than - on immediate sell-outs and mass audiences. Long-tail economy is a term commonly associated with digital platforms and it was first introduced in 2004 by Chris Anderson, who used this term in an article on *WIRED* magazine to describe Amazon's business model²⁵. The article states that in a traditional economy, with high marginal costs, mass markets are sustained by a logic that privileges blockbusters, a phenomenon that David Hesmondhalgh defined as "the blockbuster syndrome" (Hesmondhalgh 2012: 234). Referencing the Pareto principle, Anderson argues that in mass media only 20% of total content production is responsible for 80% of the revenues, meaning that the traditional television market, as well as other media and creative industries, were essentially based on mega-hit shows (*ibidem*). Internet aggregators like Amazon changed this logic by introducing a new model and significantly dropping marginal costs. In the context of online, what matters are not blockbusters that generate peaks in consumption, but niche products able to remain on the market in the long term, thus guaranteeing what Anderson calls a long tail effect in terms of revenues (Anderson 2008). With the arrival of online platforms, television underwent a similar transformation, by favoring entertainment practices mainly based on the production of a diversified plethora of niche content. A fundamental strategy in the long tail economy is therefore the expansion of the catalog and the overall offer, through the inclusion of niche products that used to be off-market due to distribution issues.

²⁵ Anderson, Chris. "The Long Tail." *Wired*. Last modified October 1, 2004. Retrieved August 20, 2019. <https://www.wired.com/2004/10/tail>.

While I do not advocate that television anthologies are the perfect fit in internet-distributed television, they do suggest an impressive resilience on both a formal and production level (they can be cancelled anytime, while preserving the possibility of a long-term benefit), which make them a good bet in a moment of uncertainty and reassessment in television industries and media economy, seemingly oriented towards the creation of niche markets. The anthology form, as a way to collect narrow narratives containing a sense of closure, or else, more pragmatically, an ending, seems to grant the modularity and openness needed in this phase of technological transition and fast-paced media mutations. Predictions on effectiveness of this anthological model in internet-distributed television can not be assessed clearly as of now; however, we can advance some hypothesis on its future evolution and evaluate the current state based on previous transformations. For instance, the possibility of reinventing the story, while still offering a familiar narrative, allows screenwriter(s) to gain a higher control on the creative process, which is in fact more fluid. Television content creators can opt for the anthological form anytime: they can create a one-season long narrative with closure and decide to revive the story for a second season, then again they can close the plot once and for all and restart with a completely different story. In other words, television anthologies today are both narrow and open, meaning they are dynamic in the way they can create infinite repetition and yet still guarantee variation where needed, by scaling narratives up and down base on an episodic, seasonal or multi-seasonal rhythm.

2.4.3. Scalability

The double possibility offered by the anthology form of narrowing and building appeals to another interesting concept: that of scalability. In order to discuss this complex, abstract concept

in the context of platform studies, I shall introduce a theoretical and methodological framework that I will develop further in the next chapter in application to the study of anthology series as databases. I start from the observation that, on digital platforms, anthology series generate lists, streams of content and ultimately organized databases, which operate as orienting maps for future recommendation and viewing. This anthological cycle activates starting from production and it is brought to the fore during the online distribution and consumption phase. In computer science, the notion of database has been discussed under several lenses, either considering archival and storage techniques, or the organizational structures (relational, networked) behind them. When translating this notion into Media Studies, Lev Manovich notes that “as a cultural form, database represents the world as a list of items and it refuses to order this list. In contrast, a narrative creates a cause-and-effect trajectory of seemingly unordered items (events). Therefore, database and narrative are natural enemies. Competing for the same territory of human culture, each claims an exclusive right to make meaning out of the world.” (Manovich 1999: 87) I argue that the anthology functions as a mechanism of abstraction of narratives, by treating them as blocks of data and transferring them into a database system, thus bypassing the incompatibility stressed by Manovich between database and narratives. This is due to the fact that the anthology typically provides first and foremost a scheme, an abstract model, a form for conveying, organizing and displaying content, as I suggested earlier in this chapter (see paragraph 2.1).

Beyond the systemic perspective layered out by the metaphor of database-anthologies, on which I will return later on in the present dissertation, this term serves as a means for understanding certain properties that the anthology form shares with databases, and notably scalability, availability and elasticity. Structural scalability refers to the capability of a network, system or

process “to expand in a chosen dimension without major modifications to its architecture” and the overall “ability not only to function well in the rescaled situation, but to actually take full advantage of it.” (Bondi 2000: 195) Given a growing amount of content, an anthology series can be defined scalable since it is able to handle and tolerate an increasing load of content thanks to its architectural characteristics. Structurally, anthologies can be subjected to vertical scaling and scaled up by adding resources - i.e. a new season can be added without changing the information architecture of the series. Scaling down would be equally possible - one could simply take away a season without affecting the remaining narrative content of the anthology -, but not desirable nor beneficial in terms of platform economy. Moreover, due to their fluid nature as previously discussed, contemporary anthology series, in contrast with early anthology series, allow for horizontal scaling via the addition of nodes (i.e. another episode or season based on the same story) to the existing narrative ecosystem. In other words, stand-alone stories in anthology series can be expanded as we can see in the series *Easy*, which I already mentioned as an example of open-end anthology that groups episodes by adding more to the same plot without a formal ordering in the seasonal division (the same plot can be found in episodes from different seasons). The idea of organizing narrative content as per main themes, or around characters and situations contributes to this particular use of the anthology as a scalable object. Indeed, scalability can also be found in longer forms of serial storytelling, such as sit-coms, and yet such content cannot be scaled down as effectively as short serial forms, for their innate tendency to always postpone the ending (see paragraph 2.4.1.).

Anthology series favor in a way space scalability as well: given their short form, they can easily be moved to a range of different devices and platform environments, adapting to transme-

dia movements and dynamics of media convergence if needed. Finally, time in anthology is another scalable element: the small-bite scheme, which can also be extended to a long marathon-viewing session, makes them so that they can easily adapt to personal viewing habits and time constraints on a reception level, given nowadays freedom in managing leisure time for watching specific television content at different hours and lengths. This implies a resilience and modularity of both form and content, as in the ability observed in the anthology form to face changes and upgrades in the media environment, without impacting users' access to the database/narrative content. Together with numerical representation, automation, variability and transcoding, modularity is one of the five "principles of new media" identified by Lev Manovich "not as absolute laws but rather as general tendencies of a culture undergoing computerization." (Manovich 2001: 27) In the context of a modular structure inherent to the World Wide Web, modularity is the key component of a digital, interactive environment. Anthology series implement the principles of modularity and variability by favoring their adaptation to a such a non-linear, fractal structure made of "collections of discrete samples." and "self-sufficient modules" (Manovich 2001: 51-52). Such modules can act independently or together, with disparate outcomes in the way they can make culture and meaning.

Of course, when talking about actual databases in the computing or mathematical sense of the term, such properties assume measurable values, which are not identifiable as easily when discussing database in a Cultural Studies-oriented perspective. However, even if we were to adopt the database framework as a simple metaphor, it would be a coherent attempt to test not only the anthological model, but also the anthological extensibility (Doueihi 2009: 11) of certain televisual forms available on online libraries, in dialogue with both platform economy (Kenney

and Zysman 2016) and an economics of nostalgia. In fact, such attributes of anthologies, that is the way they are scalable, modular and variable in that their distinct elements can be combined and assembled while retaining independence, turn out to be similar in nature to those of structural computer programming standards of the 1970s (Manovich 2001: 31). In line with technological advancements that eventually led to the Semantic Web, a web of data, principles of scalability, modularity, variability therefore show that the anthology form serves the purpose, on the one hand, of organizing content and information in digital platforms, but also, on the other hand, of making sense of such content by actively affecting cultural production, distribution and memory. If language and narratives already operate at scale, the anthology form in internet-distributed television thus helps boosting this scaling paradigm found on the internet at large and feed into broader mechanisms related to content indexing on online platforms.

2.4.4. Connectivity

The rebooting and scaling mechanism typical of the anthology form creates a syntagmatic structure of repetitions and connections, while still generating a set of paradigmatic variations. Returning to these semiotic concepts (syntagmatic versus paradigmatic relations), as originally seen in Ferdinand Saussure ([1916] 1974), might be useful to understand how the anthological model is bounded to the creation of a whole (the collection itself), of a rhythm (the episodic and seasonal division) and of a network of loose relationships between its parts (repetitions/variations). Reasoning in terms of syntagmatic (horizontal) and paradigmatic (vertical) processes in the use of world-narrowing strategies in anthology series also favor the observation of the social and cultural discourse that happens through these two coexisting processes in anthological narra-

tives: supporting a canon through a collective, shared vision across episodes and seasons, as opposed to rewriting a story episode by episode or season by season. That is to say, for example: what is the overall grand-narrative that *Black Mirror* convey - i.e. the dystopic effects of technologies on human relationships and social structures - as opposed to the themes explored in each episode - i.e. queerness, non-normativity and intersectionality in *San Junipero*? Having already insisted on paradigmatic movements (world-narrowing, closure, scalability, discretion), I will now briefly focus on syntagmatic tendencies found in anthologies.

Perhaps more than on discretion, streaming platforms rely on connection. I notably refer to the creation of a network of content on online catalogs, through algorithmic-driven recommendation systems. Connectivity doesn't only play a role on the large scale of a platform through a linkage of content, but it can also be found on the small scale of a serial narrative, as an interconnection of elements in the story-world. Within a narrative ecosystem framework, which I will discuss in the next chapter, vast serial narratives are indeed highly connected ecosystems. While it is evident that world-building involves a process of intra-textual connectivity and possibly even intertextual, transmedia citations, it is less evident to discuss practices of connection in world-narrowing such as in the case of anthology series. Yet, despite their discretionary nature and their predilection for narrow worlds, contemporary anthology series seem to aspire, even more than early television anthologies, to the creation of a networked whole able to connect stand-alone stories into a homogeneous collection.

Syntagmatic relationships between episodes or seasons in contemporary U.S. anthologies can be conventionally found in the repetition of a shared genre, register, tone or style, which respond to an anthologizing principle - i.e. how the anthology is selected through recurring themes.

Some anthology series, however, present unusual intertextual references between episodes or seasons. Examples may vary from simple citations to the recovery of characters or narrative elements transitioning between different episodes (*Black Mirror*²⁶) or between different seasons (*American Horror Story*²⁷). These connecting-the-dots mechanisms found in some television anthologies do not affect the anthological structure. They act as repertoires of inner *topoi* (Eco 1984: 119) and “links between texts, operating in the perception and experience of audiences” (Esser *et al.* 2016: 225), rather than operating on a more profound narrative level that has impact on the anthological form. When observed in terms of industrial production and distribution dynamics, intertextual citations, as in the case of this type of crossovers that are internal to the anthology structure itself, don’t emerge as relevant components. They are perhaps more important for building a fandom, rather than building a narrative complexity (Mittell 2015) typical of long-running serials.

On the contrary, other syntagmatic relationships are related to the very process of *formation* of the anthology, as in the definition of a structural recursivity which establishes the anthological form itself. Anthological ordering through reiteration and connection of genre, register, tone or style results in the creation of specific anthological categories and clusters. *The Twilight Zone* for example comes to define a specific, reproducible formula and not just a generic sci-fi type, meaning that, while the anthology is not a format by itself, it does show some formatting abilities to generate replicas. Instead of demanding connectivity on a narrative level, like serials do, antholo-

²⁶ A list of references, nods, cameos found in different episodes of *Black Mirror* are reported in an article appeared on *Screen Rant*, by the title “Black Mirror: 10 Connections Between Episodes You Probably Missed.” Fernandes, Mariana. “Black Mirror: 10 Connections Between Episodes You Probably Missed.” *ScreenRant*. Last modified June 3, 2019. Retrieved August 26, 2019. <https://screenrant.com/black-mirror-episode-connections-shared-universe>.

²⁷ The updated list of connections between different seasons of *American Horror Story* can be found at the following link: https://americanhorrorstory.fandom.com/wiki/American_Horror_Story/Connections.

gies thus show a connectivity on a production and distribution level. Connectivity in production can happen in the recurring figure of a screenwriter or a director, whereas on a distribution level, it results in the assemblage of snippets of unrelated content. In this sense, the anthological practice is naturally embedded in the digital landscape, since “it responds to the nature of its objects and supports, of their production, circulation and valorization.” (Doueïhi 2011: 170) Beyond the inner anthological properties just outlined - world-narrowing, scalability, modularity - and the related concepts discussed - intertextuality, connectivity -, I should therefore discuss more broadly the ecosystemic context in which the contemporary anthology form emerges and acts.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Ecosystemic Perspectives to the Study of Television Narratives

3.1.1. Cultural Ecosystems

In this chapter I will outline the theoretical foundations and the methodological framework I deploy both for the historical analysis of the anthology form in U.S. television, within a diachronic perspective, and for the synchronic analysis of contemporary anthological narrative models in their interaction with streaming platforms. I notably propose to adopt an ecosystemic perspective to the study of television narratives, and more specifically of the anthology, as a form inserted within a media and technological system, and deeply tied to cultural practices. I will therefore start with a “cultural-ecological (or systems-theoretical)” (Kelleter 2017: 3) approach, which draws upon a long theoretical tradition in the domain of anthropology and semiotics, to ultimately reconnect with media ecology and platform studies. As an interdisciplinary concept, developed by the American anthropologist Julian Steward (1993), cultural ecology asserts the presence of a correlation between cultures and their environment, thus focusing on processes of adaptation happening through cultural means. This super-organic, adaptive vision of culture was originally theorized in close relation with a biological and environmental framework. When the

television scholar Frank Kelleter refers to it in *Media of Serial Narratives*, he employs the concept of cultural ecology in application to popular narratives in order to stress their connection with “coevolving conditions of cultural environments” (Kelleter 2017: 3), which calls for a system inquiry to analyze the relationship between sets of elements existing in cultural habitats. In this sense, cultures should be observed as systems made of several interacting and overlapping components, which are organized into economic, political, social, technological forms.

Such an ecological and systemic thinking for understanding cultures finds several points of convergence with the neo-formalist theory outlined by Caroline Levine, where forms are observed as being context-sensitive and embedded into systems of various entities and natures. As she points out, these systems can themselves organize into forms, namely networks. Levine’s association between networks and forms results particularly interesting as it motivates the adoption of an interdisciplinary approach, where the anthology form is analyzed precisely in the interaction with surrounding networks, which are also forms. Before Levine, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari explored system theory in relation to culture, by advancing their own “assemblage theory”, a framework that accounts for socio-cultural, evolutionary dynamics of self-organizations into networks, thus cutting across technological determinism and social constructivism (Bousquet 2014). Assemblage theory observes culture as a constellation of elements - i.e. a network of systems - participating into processes of coding - or else ordering -, and stratification. They call this model of culture “rhizome”, a net that “ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles.” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 7) Furthermore, in this heterogeneous multiplicity, “what counts are not the terms or the elements, but

what is ‘between’ them, the in-between, a set of relations that are inseparable from each other.” (Deleuze and Parnet 1987: viii) This postmodern perspective on the study of cultural systems as assemblages is particularly interesting in application to digital culture and the diffusion of the internet, where the emphasis is on networked dynamics, fluidity, interoperability between systems.

Assemblage theory and the rhizomatic paradigm were adopted, among others, by the Mexican-American philosopher Manuel DeLanda, who advocates that instead of reducing social analysis to either a microscopic or macroscopic view, it is rather necessary to consider social phenomena as multi-scalar (DeLanda 2006: 32), made of components linked together within a complex and non-linear network forming an assemblage - or assemblages of assemblages, in the case of a larger scale (*ivi*: 33). In DeLanda’s model, whereas assemblages are historically contingent, it is suggested that components exist in a relation of exteriority with the assemblage, meaning they don’t change their essence as they are moved from one assemblage to another through processes of coding/decoding (*ivi*: 19). This might sound very abstract, but it helps solving the dialectic found in Levine between forms as both transhistorical and yet historically contingent. While forms as single entities are transhistorical and do present the same set of affordances in potentiality, on the contrary, as assemblages - i.e. systems - they become contingent, since they are defined by the actuality of their uses and interactions. As remarked by the literary scholar Hubert Zapf, this notion of the “evolution of aesthetics and imaginative forms of textuality as double-coded” (Zapf 2016a: 141) - that is to say as both transhistorical and historical-specific - recurs also in the application of cultural ecology to literature.

Despite the challenges encountered by both Levine’s and DeLanda’s theoretical frameworks as

they approach such a complex matter, their perspectives still come useful for understanding the anthology form in its potential affordances and actual uses, as it emerges, on the one hand, as a transhistorical feature across human societies for the organization and distribution of culture, and, on the other hand, as a contingent entity that manifest itself in the relationship with other entities or systems - i.e. platforms. Ultimately, a cultural-ecological and system-theoretical perspective offers an interesting point of departure for the analysis of television narratives. However, they lack of a more pragmatic vision, which is necessary for defining a full methodology in application to the media landscape. To this regard, Peter Finke provides a more concrete explanation of cultural ecosystems, by stating that “information and communication have become major driving forces of cultural evolution (see Finke 2005, 2006).” (Finke, quoted in Zapf 2016b: 79) Starting from this broad conception of culture as a structured, complex and dynamic ecosystem, and reasoning more closely on information and communication ecosystems, I therefore want to introduce a second theoretical framework that guided my methodological choices: that of media ecology.

3.1.2. Media Ecology

As Lynn Spigel noted years before the arrival of internet-distributed television, “if TV refers to the technologies, formations, government policies, and practices of looking associated with the medium in its classical public service and three-network age, it appears that we are now entering a new phase of television - a phase that comes after ‘TV.’” (Spigel and Olsson 2004: 2) In the context of non-linear television, it becomes even more necessary to rethink the positioning of television in the contemporary mediascape. In addition to a cultural ecological approach, I will therefore adopt a media ecology approach, to account for changes happened over time in relation

to media, where media are to be understood as technological, social and economic systems or environments where forms act and leave traces. I will however start by taking into consideration system theory in application to media studies, as it poses the premises both for a media ecological perspective and for its connection with forms, where forms are to be intended as in Levine's definition (see chapter 1). Niklas Luhmann, one of the most prominent sociologists who addressed system theory in relation to complex mechanisms of communication and social behavior, notably discussed the relationship between medium and form by observing forms as actualizations of the medium, which themselves mediate other forms in a recursive process.

In other words, "media can be recognized only by the contingency of the formations that make them possible" (Luhmann 2000: 104) In this mutual relationship between media and forms, media impose non-arbitrary "limits on what one can do with them" (*ivi*: 105) and yet they don't actively oppose to the creation of formal variations: "forms are always stronger and more assertive than the medium." (*ibidem*) Furthermore,

The difference between medium and form implies a distinctly temporal aspect as well. The medium is more stable than the form [...]. No matter how short-lived or lasting they turn out to be, forms can be created without exhausting the medium or causing it to disappear along with the form. As we noted earlier, the medium receives without resistance the forms that are possible within it, but the form's resilience is paid for with instability. [...] The medium manifests itself only in the relationship between constancy and variety that obtains in individual forms. A form, in other words, can be observed through the schema of constant/variable, because it is always a form-in-a-medium.

(*ivi*: 106)

This is a fundamental point on which I started building my methodology, by accounting for a temporal perspective on the anthology form as it always evolve within a medium, or better yet, a media system. Chapter 4 deploys this perspective for defining a comparative historical methodology able to examine both resilience and instability of the anthology form in U.S. television,

throughout its diachronic evolution. The chapter notably relies on archival research for mapping the evolution of the anthology form, as well as on previous studies on the U.S. media industry (Lotz 2007; Hilmes 2013).

An additional theoretical framework however is needed as I observe television not as a single entity, but as a technological, social, economic system, or else as a technology *and* cultural form (Williams 1974). No redefinition of a form - being a narrative, media or technological form - is without effect on the evolution of tastes, preferences and social practices. At the same time the proliferation of a particular form is made possible by the existence of cultural conditions that make it spread better than others. Dynamics of emergence, proliferation, convergence, divergence in the evolution of the anthology form are prompted by certain economic and industrial configurations in media, in addition to technological landscapes, in a way that is contextual but not deterministic. If we understand media as social constructions, shaped by human actions (*ibidem*), technologies allow certain affordances of the anthology form, and yet, they do not determine them. Both media and technologies “operate, and are operated upon in a complex social field”, proving that “a relationship between technology and society cannot be reduced to a simplistic cause-and-effect formula. It is, rather, an ‘intertwining’.” (Murphie and Potts 2003: 21) A media ecological framework can therefore be useful to reason on this intertwining, by focusing on the context of internet-distributed television in the Post-Channel Era and the way the anthology form operates in it, in relation with industrial and social practices.

Media ecology found a comprehensive theorization in the work of Marshall McLuhan, who in 1964, while initially not openly declaring an ecological thinking, outlined a vast media theoretical apparatus that fills the gap of a content-oriented cultural analysis by inserting a discourse on media properties. In *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, McLuhan (1964)

discusses media as diverse as roads and print, clocks and radio or television, showing that the content (message) is shaped by the characteristics of the medium. The ecological perspective on media as environments or ecosystems was first defined in 1968 by Neil Postman, who affirmed that “such information forms as the alphabet, the printed word, and television images are not mere instruments which make things easier for us. They are environments – like language itself, symbolic environments with in which we discover, fashion, and express humanity in particular ways.” (Postman 1979: 186) Over the years, media ecology was expanded into several scholarly theorizations (Nystrom 1975; Strate 2006; Scolari 2012). However, in line with cultural ecology, the core assumption in media ecology is always that “the word ecology implies the study of environments: their structure, content, and impact on people. An environment is, after all, a complex message system which imposes on human beings certain ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving.” (Postman 1970: 161)

In this dissertation, I consider the interplay between affordances of media (i.e. television channels or platforms), affordances of forms (i.e. the anthology form) and actual uses (i.e. industrial practices and modes of consumption). The theoretical and methodological perspective adopted in this dissertation therefore inserts itself in a typology of “soft technological determinism” (Marx and Smith 1994), which observes technologies as potential enhancements and not as necessary constraints. In other words, weak (or soft) technological determinism observes technological changes as entangled in historical contexts and ultimately “claims that the presence of a particular communication technology is an enabling or facilitating factor leading to potential opportunities which may or may not be taken up in particular societies or periods (or that its absence is a constraint)” (Lievrouw and Livingstone 2006: 331) As David M. Kaplan puts

it, technology softly determines, it “mediates and steers a society, but it does not quite drive it.” (Kaplan 2009: xvii) Similarly, I argue here, technology mediates forms, without necessarily driving them. As a consequent, I adopt media industry analysis (Holt and Perren 2011) - i.e. media historiography, media industry research, analysis of practices and business models, as well as modes of production and distribution at large - as the methodological operations needed to identify the contextual forces that influenced the emergence and consequent mutations of the anthology form in the landscape of U.S. television.

Furthermore, to account for the most recent transitions that led to a phase “after TV” (Spigel 2004: 2), elsewhere defined as a post-network (Lotz 2007), post-broadcast (Tay and Turner 2009), post-channel (Lotz 2016) era, I decided to integrate a cultural/media ecological (system-theoretical) perspective with platform studies (Bogost and Montfort 2007; 2009). I notably adopted platform theory research to define the specific positioning of anthology form in the context of internet-distributed television and digital platforms. The field of platform technologies engages with a number of interdisciplinary topics (internet infrastructures, digital economies, algorithmic indexing) that are particularly relevant to observe the anthology form as a model for content organization, promotion and circulation, and not just as a package for shaping narrative content and genres, as it came to become in linear television. In particular, thanks to platform research, which is used here as a complementary analysis to media industry research, I will be able to focus more specifically on the outcomes of digital culture as it creates its own set of infrastructures and economies. Platform analysis will be the core component for chapter 5.

3.1.3. Platform Studies

In the past few years, academic agendas engaged into platform research within a diversity of analytical frameworks, ranging from the study of platform industry, economics and management (Gawer 2009; 2014; Gawer and Cusumano 2014), to the analysis of platform technologies, infrastructures and architecture design (Star and Ruhleder 1996; Hanseth and Lyytinen 2010). This broad interest for the multilayered concept of platform has been emerging increasingly across several disciplines in the past twenty years, as a result of technological advancements that affected several domains and that are part of a process of both digitization and digitalization. Closely related to digitization, digitalization means “a sociotechnical process of applying digitizing techniques to broader social and institutional contexts that render digital technologies infrastructural.” (Tilson *et al.* 2010: 749) The scholars David Tilson, Kalle Lyytinen, Carsten Sørensen (*ivi*: 750) advocate that digitalization led to device convergence - i.e. different types of information stored into single devices -, network convergence - i.e. many types of information assembled in the same Internet network -, and eventually to industry convergence - i.e. many activities integrated into one industry. This process was favored by the platformization of the web (Helmond 2015) and, eventually, of culture (Nieborg and Poell 2018). Platformization can be notably “defined as the penetration of economic, governmental, and infrastructural extensions of digital platforms into the web and app ecosystems, fundamentally affecting the operations of the cultural industries.” (*ivi*: 2)

In my analysis, I will account for such a *platform ecology*, by focusing on streaming platforms in their interaction with media systems and the television industry. To do so, I draw upon platform studies as applied to media and cultural research. In order to analyze “the connection

between technical specifics and culture” (Bogost and Montfort 2009: 4), Jan Bogost and Nick Montfort propose to study digital media and computing systems with technical rigor and to pursue an in-depth investigation of “their interactions with creativity, expression, and culture.” (*ivi*: 5) In particular, they call platform studies a discipline dedicated to the study of “detailed technical workings of computing systems” (Bogost and Montfort 2007: 1), or else platforms, meaning programmed environments supported by a hardware and a software framework (*ibidem*). According to Bogost and Montfort (*ivi*: 2), in *New Media Studies*, analytical approaches have been touching different levels inherited from Media Studies: a reception/operation level, which benefits from reception studies; an interface level, which deploys theories of remediation and human-computer interaction; a form/function level, one of the main interests of cybertext studies and narratology; a code level, investigated by code studies, software studies, code aesthetics. What they propose is to integrate to this list a platform level,

the abstraction level beneath code, a level which has not yet been systematically studied. If code studies are new media’s analogue to software engineering and computer programming, platform studies are the humanistic parallel of computing systems and computer architecture, connecting the fundamentals of new media work to the cultures in which they were produced and the cultures in which coding, forms, interfaces, and eventual use are layered upon them.

(ibidem)

While not openly defining it platform ecology, they do address an ecological framework, in the sense that they observe platforms as environments themselves and as embedded into techno-cultural and media environments. I will therefore adopt platform studies, with their articulated history that involves several disciplines, in application to internet-distributed television. The aim is to understand, on the one hand, a platform ecology - i.e. the platform ecosystem made of technologies, infrastructures and architectural design - and, on the other hand, a platform economics

or economy of platforms, as in the contextual economic and industrial framework activated by the specifics of platforms. Platform ecology and economy, I argue, are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they coexist and are deeply interconnected in the final outcome of generating a platform culture as part of digital culture. As I will show in both chapter 4 and 5, platform culture is the result of the convergence of two forces: social habits inherited by previous cultural systems, and emerging habits that are strictly related to platforms' affordances (such as algorithmic practices and cultures). As Lev Manovich explained in his farsighted introduction to *The New Media Reader*, edited by Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort, new media blend together existing cultural conventions and the conventions of software (Wardrip-Fruin and Montfort 2003: 18). When I analyze a form in a platform (i.e. the anthology form on streaming platforms), I therefore need to account for its tradition of form always embedded in a medium. This contributes to further motivate the use of a comparative historical method.

Moreover, the concept of platform culture appeals to a series of features activated by platforms themselves. To account for this cultural component resulting from an ecological and economic analysis of platforms, I will rely on Tarleton Gillespie's definition of platforms as "content-hosting intermediaries" (Gillespie 2010: 350), thus focusing on the way they changed television culture through distribution. Distribution is where the non-linear revolution happened, in this in-between that connects production with reception. If the study of production is for the most part sufficient for retracing the history of the anthology form in U.S. television, the latest evolution of the anthology form requires a study of modes of distribution. Platformization is in fact not only the process of generating a platform environment on the web, but more importantly the process of making content "platform-ready" (Helmond 2015), meaning ready to inhabit a platform and cir-

culate through platforms. In this dissertation, I aim to demonstrate that the anthology form and model is one of the ways content is made platform-ready. Additionally, the use of coding, as I already mentioned, and the presence of digital data, opens up for alternative methods for understanding culture, such as web scraping, data collection, data analysis and analysis of algorithmic practices. I will explore this point more in-depth as I discuss the field of Digital Humanities in paragraph 3.2.

Platform research, however, comes with limits, especially when we examine streaming platforms. Platform data are not always publicly available through APIs, and companies like Netflix are particularly strict about their data. Most platforms shut down or put major restrictions on access to their information (Rogers 2019: 156), in the wake of larger debates and controversies about users' rights and privacy. This poses limitations to television scholars who intend to pursue a platform study of streaming services: methodological tools like APIs retrieval are not always possible, nor reliable (Lomborg and Bechmann 2014) and web scraping methods are still being perfected or else need the support of a software engineer background. Digital footprints are hard to map and even more traditional procedures for data collection and analysis might contain some biases. Being aware of such limits is a fundamental premise for positing the necessity of data analysis and visualization in platform studies. In order to minimize the risks of pursuing a platform research, I will therefore integrate cultural and media industries studies, as I delineated in introduction to the present chapter. To conclude, cultural, media and platform-oriented ecosystemic perspectives will be altogether concurring to outline a hybrid methodology used for my research project.

3.2. Proposal for an Interdisciplinary Approach to Television Studies

3.2.1. Digital Humanities

Since the debate on humanities computing or digital humanities started to unfold as a structured field of study in the academia in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Presner 2010: 6), the focus on methodology has always been central to the definition of such discipline, whose primary objective is to include a systematic use of computational methods and digital resources in humanistic research. By introducing digital humanities in a research on television and digital media, I intend to embrace an interdisciplinary perspective able not only to account for large corpora and data visualization in historical research (see Chapter 4), but also to bridge the gap between traditional research and digital platform environments. Even without opting for a strictly quantitative methodology, this computational turn calls for the necessity to understand statistical reports, processes of data analysis and algorithmic mechanisms underlying platform ecology (Chapter 5). A first wave of Digital Humanities research projects originally sparked from methodological explorations intended to tackle databases and archives through processes of digitization and text analysis (*ibidem*). However, a second wave soon developed into a wide variety of computational approaches, interdisciplinary paradigms and hybrid methodologies (Schreibman *et al.* 2004; Ramsay 2011; Hayles 2012). In other words, “the second wave is *qualitative, interpretive, experiential, emotive, generative in character*. It harnesses digital toolkits in the service of the Humanities’ core methodological strengths: attention to complexity, medium specificity, historical context, analytical depth, critique and interpretation.” (Schnapp and Presner, quoted in Berry 2012: 3)

It is evident that Digital Humanities, as they evolved into a diverse, interdisciplinary discipline, are rooted into an ecological thinking, by sharing with cultural, media and platform ecology a complexity framework (Morin 2008), a historical perspective on long-term structures (Braudel 1982) and an overall analytical and technical rigor. In 2012, a group of scholars, namely Anne Burdick, Johanna Drucker, Peter Lunenfeld, Todd Presner and Jeffrey Schnapp, engaged in a collaborative effort to define a state of the art of digital humanities, by discussing their history, fundamentals and scholarships. After having listed a wide variety of computation activities and practices involved in digital humanities research - e.g. digitization, classification, curation, but also editing and modeling -, they discuss emerging methods that allow for new forms of knowledge: distant versus close, macro versus micro, surface versus depth (Burdick *et al.* 2012: 39). It is on this set of methods that my research on the anthology form is based, accounting for a distant reading (Moretti 2005) able to operate on a large-scale and identify trends and patterns in the long term. This new paradigm brought to the theorization of a well-defined analytical approach to cultural studies, which was labeled by Jean-Baptiste Michel *et al.* (2011) “culturomics”, As the authors explains, “culturomics extends the boundaries of rigorous quantitative inquiry to a wide array of new phenomena spanning the social sciences and the humanities.” (*ivi*: 176)

Before a definition of culturomics appeared, the new media scholar Lev Manovich outlined a more comprehensive approach to the study of cultural phenomena, not only to refer to the application of quantitative - i.e. economic and statistical - analysis to humanistic research, but also to embrace a computational turn (Berry 2011) and include digital tools in the analysis of cultural data and metadata. In 2005, as part of the Software Studies Initiative²⁸ at the City Uni-

²⁸ Manovich, Lev. “Cultural Analytics.” Retrieved August 28, 2019. <http://lab.softwarestudies.com/p/cultural-analytics.html>.

versity of New York, Manovich announced the new paradigm of “cultural analytics”, as the “analysis of massive cultural data sets and flows using computational and visualization techniques.” (Manovich 2016: 1) Since then, Manovich extensively worked on digital databases and data visualization techniques for analyzing cultural datasets. In other words, Manovich inserts cultural analysis into both a digital and visual turn, recalling a long tradition of visualization and design techniques such as charts of various kinds, graphs, diagrams or cartographic representations. Among this long list of visualization methods, he notably focuses on the necessity of not only mapping cultural data and metadata, but also remapping them. Whereas, on the one hand, he refers to mapping in the abstract, mathematical sense of the term, as a “function that creates a correspondence between the elements in two domains” (Manovich 2011: 11), on the other hand, he declares that “any remapping is a reinterpretation of the original media map, which not just teases out but also creates new interpretation and meanings.” (*ivi*: 12)

The meaning-making process activated through graphic visualization was further explored by Jeffrey Schnapp in the concept of “knowledge design” (Schnapp 2013). Inscribing itself in the vast realm of Digital Humanities, the methodology for this project relies more specifically on cultural analytics and knowledge design through examples of data visualization, which I integrated to my research. Due to time-constraints, as well as problems of accessibility to large datasets in television studies, I opted for inserting in my dissertation both visual models that I personally created as part of this research project, and a selection of data visualizations from other sources, which can effectively depict the current media industry scenario based on reliable data. Hence, before discussing data visualization and knowledge design, it is necessary to provide a background for the processes of data collection, discovery and cleaning that eventually led to the crea-

tion of visual models of my corpus and the use of an interdisciplinary (Klein 1990) and transdisciplinary approach (Isemonger 2018).

3.2.2. *Data Collection, Data Discovery, Data Cleaning*

This section is thought of as a walk-through the process of data collection, discovery and cleaning, as well as on the archival and database sources I used. It is therefore not specifically part of the overview on the theoretical framework that guided my methodological approach, but rather a way to start introducing a more pragmatic description of methodology and *modus operandi* used in this research. A description of the corpus of anthology series I selected can be summed up in the following elements: medium (television), text type (anthology dramas), temporal frame (broadcasted between 1947 and 2019), geographical location (United States). In order to be visualized, the information needs to be organized in a structured database. To this aim, data were preliminarily extracted, collected and organized, through research in physical archives (UCLA Film & Television Archive, Paley Center for Media, AFI Louis B. Mayer Library) and online databases (IMDb and Wikipedia). The data collected therefore come from an uneven set of archives, and include both “vertical”, institutional archives as well as “horizontal”, user-generated and participatory archives. The process of data collection is a fundamental one, as it poses the basis for the data visualization and analysis. In Digital Humanities, this systematic procedure for gathering data was notably observed by Johanna Drucker. Drucker points at the fact that data collection is a method borrowed from natural and social sciences and that it needs to be readapted for the study of culture. In particular, she discusses the concept of data as something that should to be “rethought through a humanistic lens and characterized as *capta*, taken and

constructed” (Drucker 2015: 238) This approach starts from the premises that “capta is ‘taken’ actively while data is assumed to be a ‘given’ able to be recorded and observed. [...] Humanistic inquiry acknowledges the situated, partial, and constitutive character of knowledge production, the recognition that knowledge is constructed, taken, not simply given as a natural representation of pre-existing fact.” (*ibidem*)

A “cultural-type survey” (Lorusso 2015) therefore poses significant problems related to the principle of selection of the corpus, as well as its size, density, complexity and level of interconnectedness. Furthermore, archival collections and online databases both contain messy data, often not ready for a comprehensive information retrieval of the entire catalogue. To facilitate the understanding of the methodology adopted here, I will describe the process I followed for actively collecting data, or, better, capta, which I then displayed through a graphical expression. My research originally started from physical archives. I initially adopted archival research as a means for collecting information in order to define a corpus of anthology series. While the Paley Center for Media was useful for a contextual research on early U.S. television history, the UCLA Film & Television Archive served as the main source for mapping U.S. anthology series, which was integrated with a complementary research at the American Film Institute’s Louis B. Mayer Library. UCLA Film & Television Archive contains “over 160,000 holdings spanning the entire course of broadcast history”²⁹, making it one of the largest television archive collections in the United States. If we browse for television anthologies on the archive’s online catalogue, there are 1072 titles of episodes listed as part of several anthology series (see Fig. 1).

²⁹ See: <https://www.cinema.ucla.edu/collections/explore-collections>.

Titles

New Search :

Collection:Film and Television Archive

1072 results found

Search Request: Topic/Genre/Form(anthologies) AND Keyword(television) AND Keyword(United States)(LANG=ENG)

[Edit Search](#) [Save Search](#)

Print Export Email → Select Page All

- 1 [Alarm \(Television program : 1956\). Pilot no. 2.](#)
 Alarm. [Pilot no. 2] / Roland Reed Productions, Inc. ; a Roland Reed production ; executive producer, Guy V. Thayer, Jr. ; producer, J. Donald Wilson ; director, William F. Claxton ; writer, George Bruce.
 c1956.
 T90855
 , Non-circulating SRLF research copy
- 2 [Alcoa hour \(Anthology\). He's for me.](#)
 Alcoa hour. He's for me / producer, Philip Barry, Jr. ; director, Herbert Hirschman ; writer, Michael Dreyfuss.
 [1957-07-21]
- 3 [Alcoa hour \(Anthology\). Man on a tiger.](#)
 Alcoa hour. Man on a tiger / Showcase Productions, Inc. ; producer, Herbert Brodtkin ; director, Norman Felton ; director, Roger O. Hirson.
 [1956-01-08]

Figure 1. Screenshot of the results for the query³⁰ I run on the *UCLA Film & Television Archive* online catalog.

The list found on the online catalogue, however, includes titles that cannot be screened due to the precarious state of their preservation. A close reading of the entire catalogue is therefore not possible, and, even when it is, the amount of content to retrieve and analyze is very high, thus compromising an unbiased analysis able to offer a complete overview of the corpus. While I did watch single episodes by booking a copy at the archive, I therefore decided to opt for other methods for information retrieval. This is how I began moving towards a digital humanities approach. Even though it is not possible to extract metadata directly from the UCLA Film & Televi-

³⁰ Query/Search request: Topic/Genre/Form(anthologies) AND Keyword(television) AND Keyword(United States) (LANG=ENG).
<https://cinema.library.ucla.edu/vwebv/search?searchArg1=anthologies&argType1=all&searchCode1=SKEY&combine2=and&searchArg2=television&argType2=all&searchCode2=GKEY&combine3=and&searchArg3=United+States&argType3=all&searchCode3=GKEY&year=2018-2019&fromYear=&toYear=&location=all&place=all&language=ENG&recCount=100&searchType=2&page.search.search.button=Search>.

sion Archive's online catalogue through a .csv or .json file, which are the most common formats for data visualization, I was able to save a PDF file containing all the data available for each entry - e.g. title, format, year, subject, publisher (i.e. television network), and other additional notes and descriptions (see Fig. 2). These data were then moved manually into a tabular form and incorporated with data found of Wikipedia, which was used for organizing the UCLA catalogue in a more structured format.

UCLA Library | *Catalog*

Printable View

Alarm (Television program : 1956). Pilot no. 2.
Alarm.

Title: Alarm (Television program : 1956). Pilot no. 2.
Alarm. [Pilot no. 2] / Roland Reed Productions, Inc. ; a Roland Reed production ; executive producer, Guy V. Thayer, Jr. ; producer, J. Donald Wilson ; director, William F. Claxton ; writer, George Bruce.

Format: Visual Material

Subject(s): Coconut Grove (Nightclub)
Fires--Massachusetts--Boston--Drama.
Nightclubs--Massachusetts--Boston--Drama.
Anthologies.

Publisher: c1956.

Notes: Unsold, unaired pilot for a proposed anthology series based on authentic stories from the files of police departments across the United States.
Copyright notice on film: c1956 by Roland Reed Productions, Inc.
A dramatization of the Coconut Grove nightclub fire in Boston on Nov. 28, 1942. Prior to the filmed drama, host Fred Waring presents a plaque to Edward Montgomery, Chief of the Boston Fire Department.

Holdings Information:

Figure 2. Screenshot of a single item's section extracted from the printable view version (file format: PDF) of the query I run on the *UCLA Film & Television Archive* online catalog (see Fig. 2).

For the purposes of my research, in addition to the data collected from the UCLA Film & Television Archive's catalogue and Wikipedia, I extracted data found on online databases, with the intent of making the information more complete and minimizing the biases of choosing a single archival source. I notably referred to two online databases: IMDb, which was used to incorporate missing information, and Wikidata, which was used as the main reference. The work on

Wikipedia is particularly interesting to show possible methods for extracting information from Wikipedia’s lists or items. On the one hand, I manually extracted the list contained on the following page: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthology_series. I then matched this list with the UCLA list in order to group single episodes-items into the correspondent series - e.g. “He’s for me” (S02E21) in *Alcoa Hour* (NBC, 1955-1957). In parallel, I extracted data from the Wikipedia category “American_anthology_television_series” (https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Category:American_anthology_television_series) through the Wikidata Query Service, a tool that allows to access a Wikidata’s dataset through a specific query, using the semantic query language SPARQL. Figure 3 shows the SPARQL Query I used for extracting the information stored in RDF (Resource Description Framework). More specifically, I filtered all the items in the category “anthology series”, and selected the following attributes: title, genre, production company, distributor, original network.

```

1 SELECT ?Category ?title ?genre ?genreLabel ?producer ?producerLabel ?distributor|?original_network ?original_networkLabel WHERE {
2   SERVICE wikibase:label { bd:serviceParam wikibase:language "[AUTO_LANGUAGE],en". }
3   ?Category wdt:P136 wd:Q23653.
4   OPTIONAL { ?Category wdt:P1476 ?title. }
5   OPTIONAL { ?Category wdt:P136 ?genre. }
6   OPTIONAL { }
7   OPTIONAL { ?Category wdt:P272 ?producer. }
8   OPTIONAL { ?Category wdt:P750 ?distributor. }
9   OPTIONAL { }
10  OPTIONAL { ?Category wdt:P449 ?original_network. }
11 }

```

Figure 3. Screenshot of the SPARQL Query I used for extracting the information stored in RDF (Resource Description Framework) format from the Wikidata Query Service’s platform.

The Wikidata Query Service allows to extract data a format that can be read by visualization tools, thus enabling a process of data discovery through visualization. “Visual data discovery is the use of visually-oriented, self-service tools designed to guide users to insights through the effective use of visual design principles [...]” (Ryan 2016: 40) Data discovery is the preliminary step for data cleaning. If the dataset is extracted automatically, there is a high chance of finding errors and null values, which is not a risk if the data are gathered manually from archives, as I did in the first phase of data collection. The query service contains options for either visualizing the dataset in a tabular form or for generating visual models through the use of programs directly embedded on the platform. Polestar, for example (Fig. 4), offers the possibility to visualize the dataset on a graph, by selecting x and y axis (in this case, respectively, genre and original network’s label) and by showing the size (#count).

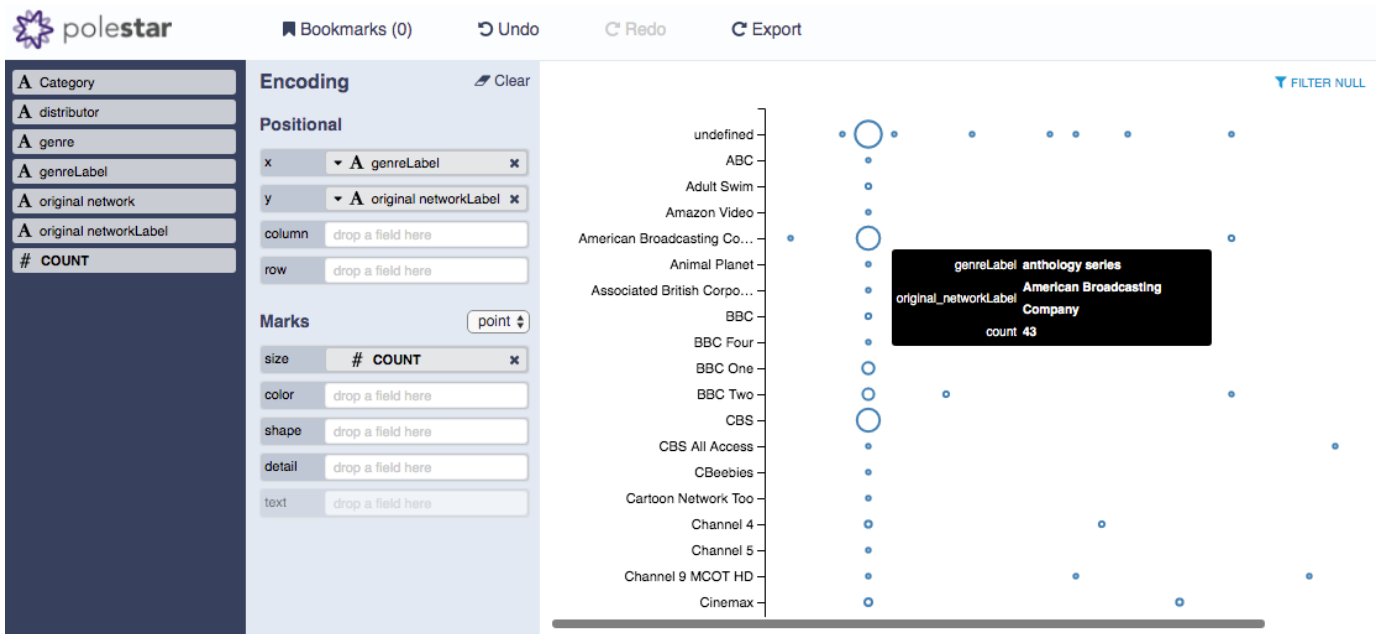


Figure 4. Screenshot of the dataset extracted from the Wikidata Query Service as visualized on Polestar.

In the screenshot above we observe that the dataset contains data labeled as “undefined”, as well as double entities like ABC versus American Broadcasting Company, which should be collapse in the same entity. Nevertheless, despite the messiness of these data, we can still verify that the dataset presents a quite accurate depiction of the occurrences of the anthology form, in the sense that it shows the major networks which originally broadcasted this televisual form (ABC, CBS, NBC). If we scroll down, Netflix emerges as a medium size point, matching the scale of FX, HBO and Showtime as far as anthology content, proving that in its relatively short history as a platform (2007-2019), compared to the longer history of cable channels, it was still able to create a fairly large collection of anthologies. I will observe these dynamics more in-depth in chapter 4 and 5, by combining distant and close reading analysis.

Another tool for visual data discovery is RAWGraphs, which offers an open source visualization framework, by “providing a missing link between spreadsheet applications (e.g. Microsoft Excel, Apple Numbers, OpenRefine) and vector graphics editors (e.g. Adobe Illustrator, Inkscape, Sketch).”³¹ For the visual discovery of the dataset I extracted I used the Alluvial diagram by RAWGraph, which is designed to display relational flows between different categories, by grouping together via coloring the entities belonging to the same label. Figure 5 provides a graphical visualization of flows of anthological content between production company, genre, original network, in order to observe the emergence of certain genres (e.g. drama, science fiction) or networks above others (e.g. ABC, BBC, CBS, ITV, NBC, Netflix). These visual operations do not allow for interpretation. They rather give an overview on the dataset, by indicating where errors, inaccuracies, repetitions are located within it, and what are the nodes that we might want to ex-

³¹ See: <https://app.rawgraphs.io/>

plore further to understand trends and patterns in the industrial-cultural network traced by anthropology series.

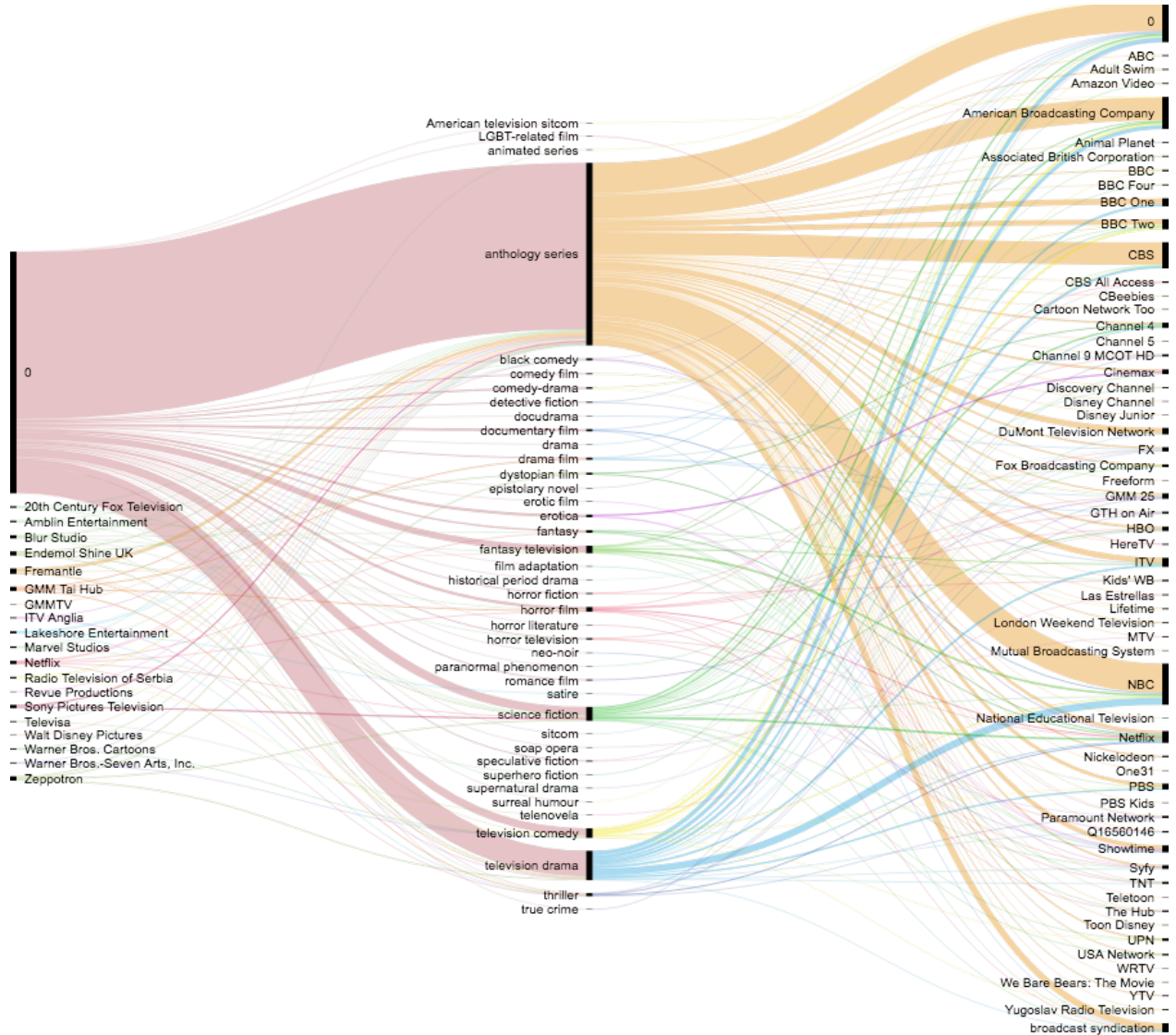


Figure 5. Alluvial diagram made with RAWgraph based on the dataset extracted from the Wikidata Query Service.

As a third step, I therefore proceeded to data cleaning with Python to eliminate null values, compress duplicates in single attributes (e.g. true crime and neo-noir were collapsed under a single umbrella term), and filter items or information I don't need for my analysis (e.g. films, non

U.S. TV series). Finally, by using the fuzzy matching algorithm in Python, I then integrated missing data on production company, original networks, release date, number of episodes by merging the Wikidata dataset with an IMDb dataset accessed via API. The datasets resulting from these processes of data collections and data filtering counts less than 500 items. On the one hand, what I call *dataset I* was the outcome of a manual process for assembling data from the UCLA Film & Television Archive's catalog with data from a web page on Wikipedia about anthology series. On the other hand, *dataset II* was generated through a semi-automated process of data extraction from online databases such as Wikidata and IMDb. Since *dataset I* and *dataset II* are relatively small corpora if compared to other corpora in Digital Humanities, I was also able to compare the two and merge them manually, by moving items from the less complete dataset to the more complete one. The *final dataset* is therefore the outcome of a long process of data manipulation, for organizing the final corpus, making it readable by visualization tools and ultimately for turning messy data into structured data ready for generating meaningful graphic representations.

This sometimes neglected preliminary phase is at the very core of a digital humanities methodology, which does not resolve in the moment of production of visual models or of digitized content, but in the very process of defining a workable corpus. Even before data analysis and interpretation is performed, the creation of a corpus and its visualization already set the premises for the production of knowledge. Much like in cultural semiotics, the corpus I selected tries to be as much unbiased as possible, by blending together different sources. Quoting the semiotician Anna Maria Lorusso, it notably aims to be “significant and representative”, while avoiding “both the logic of *exemplum* (taking a single case and postulating a posteriori that it explains everything else) and the most extreme derivation of *constructivism* (by defining an ad hoc corpus that

confirms the original hypothesis and that, therefore, does not really test it or have the ability to modify it.” (Lorusso 2015: 55) I want to stress on this point, which I believe should represent the core of any Digital Humanities inquiry and was notably adopted for the present project. Of course, the analysis will always present a point of view, as one cannot escape from choosing criteria for the selection or starting from an interpretative hypothesis, but the aim is to render the perspective as much objective as possible. In other words, “while in deconstructionism we proceed by digging inside a single case—all the better if it is exceptional—chosen in a rather idiosyncratic manner, in semiotic analysis we explain our research hypothesis and our own corpus building procedures, avoiding extraordinary examples and focusing instead on a series of *ordinary cases* that are significant because they demonstrate regularity.” (*ibidem*)

3.2.3. *Data Visualization and Knowledge Design*

Data visualization is not only a way for exploring the dataset and doing data discovery, but also a way to present the outputs of the research by displaying *capta* in a way that supports and amplifies a cognitive understanding of the dataset/corpus (Card *et al.* 1999: 7). What is also known as visual analytics is a “science of analytical reasoning facilitated by interactive visual interfaces” (Thomas and Cook 2006: 4), a concept that can be translated with the notion of information design (Meirelles 2013). Once knowledge is collected and discovered in the form of data/*capta*, in order to become understandable, it has to undergo a structural design, which establish a point of access to the “information architecture” (Morville and Rosenfeld 2006) of the dataset/corpus previously selected. In this phase a level of interpretation cannot be avoided. As Drucker reminds us, in Digital Humanities,

to expose the constructedness of data as *capta* a number of systematic changes have to be applied to the creation of graphical displays. That is the foundation and purpose of a *humanistic approach* to the qualitative display of graphical information. Read that last formulation carefully, *humanistic approach* means that the premises are rooted in the recognition of the *interpretative* nature of knowledge, that the *display* itself is conceived to *embody qualitative expressions*, and that the information is understood as *graphically constituted*.

(Drucker 2011, online)

On the one hand, during data collection, researchers tend to move in the domain of a suspension of judgment on the actual content and meaning of the dataset, by limiting themselves to defining a pertinent question and verifying the correctness of the information as preliminary actions to consequent explorations of the data. On the other hand, with data visualization they are called to actively position themselves by visually expressing a perspective on the corpus, and suggesting possible interpretations - such as distant reading does. As Drucker explains, “Information graphics are visualizations based on abstractions of statistical data. All information visualizations are metrics expressed as graphics. Visualizations are always interpretations—data does not have an inherent visual form that merely gives rise to a graphic expression.” (Drucker 2014: 7)

In this sense, visual displays can be used to guide the analysis and orientate possible interpretations about density in production in a certain time frame, networks of distribution and main industrial players. Data visualization and knowledge design are therefore means for pursuing a methodology based on thick description (Geertz 1973). If, together with cultural ecology, we consider culture as a large-scale system of relationships, thick description through visual design is one of the ways to accomplish an interpretative inquiry of such “a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures.” (Geertz 1973: 7) In addition to offering an interpretation of culture, information visualization can be deployed for a variety of contextual purposes: to simply record or store information in the form of data, metadata or multimedia objects over the course of the re-

search, to facilitate the retrieval of such information, to support collateral inferences or provide models for understanding complex cultural dynamics. As Toby Segaran and Jeff Hammerbacher frame it, data visualization can be thought of as a story: “The main character is the user, we can go two ways. A story of charts and graphs might read a lot like a textbook; however, a story with context, relationships, interactions, patterns, and explanations reads like a novel [...] We want something in between the textbook and novel when we visualize personal data. We want to present the facts, but we also want to provide context, like the who, what, when, where, and why of the numbers.” (Segaran and Hammerbacher 2009: 7)

While large corpora bear complexity and contain unrelated data, data visualization helps framing a more intuitive reading of the dataset and contributes in defining relationships, trends, patterns, and a meaningful narrative. It is in this spirit that the Digital Humanities scholar Jeffrey Schnapp proposed the notion of knowledge design (Schnapp 2014), in order to explore the potentialities for creating new forms of knowledge within humanistic inquiry through the use of digital data, digital media, digital tools, digital environments and ultimately digital visualization. In a way, data visualization is therefore a return to the origins of the research and the questions I intended to answer, as to the positioning of the anthology form from the history of U.S. television up until its role in the digital landscape. For the first part of my analysis, I wanted to visualize the diachronic evolution of television anthologies in the United States, by looking at their density in specific decades. This led me to opt for an interactive timeline, designed to visualize data related to timeframes, on which I added complementary information relevant to my project. Starting from the *final database* with the data collected, filtered and cleaned, I generated an Excel’s

spreadsheet, which was then visualized on *Timeline JS*, an open-source tool for the visual representation of temporal data developed by the Northwestern University’s KnightLab.

A visual chronology of the anthology form in U.S. television can take several graphic shapes: from a simple list of titles³², to the more detailed tabular form converted into a Microsoft Excel file (see fig. 6), and eventually transformed into a timeline visualization³³.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
1	Year	Month	Day	Time	End Year	End Month	End Day	End Time	Display Date	Headline	Text	Media
6	1955	10	5		1957	06	12		1955	The 20th Century Fox Hour (CBS)	No. of seasons 2 No. of episodes 37	https://media.lovngtheadas
7	1969				1975				1969	ABC Movie of the Week (ABC)	No. of seasons 6 No. of episodes 7	http://www.forcesofgeek.co
8	1966	9	14		1967	05	04		1966	ABC Stage 67 (ABC)	No. of seasons 1 No. of episodes 26	https://lh5.googleusercontent
9	1949		7	25	1949	09	12		1949	Academy Theatre (NBC)	No. of seasons 1 No. of episodes 5	
10	1948	9	28		1950	06	23		1948	Actors Studio (ABC; CBS)	No. of seasons 2 No. of episodes 65	http://eyesofageneration.co
11	1957	9	30		1960	05	23		1957	Alcoa-Goodyear Theatre (NBC)	No. of seasons 3 No. of episodes 100	https://ia.media-imdb.com/
12	1955	10	15		1957	09	22		1955	The Alcoa Hour (NBC)	No. of seasons 2 No. of episodes 52	http://nostalgiccentral.com/
13	1961	10	10		1963	07	21		1961	Alcoa Premiere (ABC)	No. of seasons 2 No. of episodes 57	https://ia.media-imdb.com/
14	2015	3	5		2017	04	30		2015	American Crime (ABC)	No. of seasons 3 No. of episodes 29	https://upload.wikimedia.or
15	2016	2	2		2018				2016	American Crime Story (FX)	No. of seasons 2 No. of episodes 19	https://upload.wikimedia.or
16	2011	10	5		2018				2011	American Horror Story (FX)	No. of seasons 7 No. of episodes 84	https://upload.wikimedia.or
17	1982	1	12		1993	12	22		1982	American Playhouse (PBS)	No. of seasons 12 No. of episodes 164	https://ia.media-imdb.com/
18	1955	4	3		1956	04	1		1955	Appointment with Adventure (CBS)	No. of seasons 2 No. of episodes 53	https://78.media.tumblr.com
19	1974				1980				1974	The American Short Story (PBS)	No. of seasons ? No. of episodes 17	
20	1989				1990				1989	The American Playwrights Theater: The One Acts (?)	No. of seasons 2 No. of episodes 4	
21	1950	6	6		1963	6	5		1950	Armstrong Circle Theatre (NBC; CBS)	No. of seasons 14 No. of episodes 370	https://media.lovngtheadas
22	1960	9	19		1961	9	11		1960	The Barbara Stanwyck Show (NBC)	No. of seasons 1 No. of episodes 36	https://upload.wikimedia.or
23	1954	9	15		1955	5	4		1954	The Best of Broadway (CBS)	No. of seasons 1 No. of episodes 9	https://ia.media-imdb.com/
24	1960				1961				1960	The Best of the Post (?)	No. of seasons ? No. of episodes 26	https://ia.media-imdb.com/
25	1950	12	10		1951	12	27		1950	The Bighelow Theatre (CBS; DuMont)	No. of seasons 2 No. of episodes 35	https://ia.media-imdb.com/

Figure 6. The *final dataset* as visualized in tabular form (Excel file format).

³² “Anthology Series.” *Wikipedia*. Retrieved September 5, 2019. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Anthology_series&oldid=916126630 ; “Category:American Anthology Television Series.” *Wikipedia*. Retrieved September 5, 2019. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Category:American_anthology_television_series&oldid=889985317.

³³ See: https://cdn.knightlab.com/libs/timeline3/latest/embed/index.html?source=1PwFUBvYgipzBKb6FDTDh73-ZAZ5dpIjWDS5mUfOdc8&font=Default&lang=en&initial_zoom=2&height=650.

Exporting the Excel arrays into *Timeline JS* is a way to convert the tabular form into a more meaningful visualization able to effectively represent temporal data. As in other projects in digital humanities, the data visualization I will present in paragraph 3.3. reaches its scope of going beyond a simple analytical operation by offering a visual model that is: *i)* dynamic, as culture also is, showing a landscape subjected to contextual mutations, evolving practices and new findings; *ii)* interactive, since the interface allows for personalized exploration and the visual design space enacts a customized experience; *iii)* scalar, in order to welcome perspectives at different scales and a level of modularity in the reading (close, distant or mesoscopic); *iv)* open, in the sense that the resulting visualization is available online through open access for public use and reuse.

3.3. Towards a Distant Reading

3.3.1. Distant Reading

Analyzing cultural production poses problems related not only to the size and the scale of the corpus, but also to the distance of the analytical perspective from the text itself - or texts. To clarify different scopes for an analytical reading in digital humanities, in 1999, Franco Moretti proposed to differentiate between a “close reading”, which operates on a small canon of texts, and a “distant reading”, which approaches the study of literature and textual data at large. In opposition to traditional close reading, he outlines an “abstract model for literary history” (Moretti 2005), to put objects in perspective and create a form of knowledge based on distance.

It allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes - or genres and systems. [...] If we want to understand the system in its entirety, we must accept losing something. We always pay a price for theoretical knowledge: reality is infinitely rich; concepts are abstract, are poor. But it's precisely this 'poverty' that makes it possible to handle them, and therefore to know.

(Moretti 2000: 57-58)

The level of abstraction, as Moretti himself notes, is directly proportional to the ambition of the analysis, and it comes with losses. However, if the aim is to account for macroscopic dynamics in literature, as well as in other humanistic disciplines, losses will be minimized by the possibility to marginalize biases and detect large-scale patterns in a more objective way, thanks to the level of abstraction granted by a distant reading. Distant reading can be described as a type of macro-analysis (Jockers 2013), but instead of calling for quantitative methods, it rather appeals to the necessity of understanding cultural production through visual models.

The use of distant reading is to be intended as a response to the need for a new methodology to approach large volumes of data in the humanities, together with the complex digital scape where culture circulates. To face the uncertainties of a traditional, uni-disciplinary methodology, as we find ourselves in front of a growing amount of information, the present research project blends together a qualitative analysis of cultural forms and media industries with the adoption of infographics and the creation of new visualizations at scales. While acknowledging the potentialities of a uniquely distant, abstract view, I therefore position my research at an intermediate level, by adopting an integrative model and combining distant reading with close reading (Coles and Lein 2013). That is to say, we need to adopt visual methods that are able to overcome the risks of both a close reading, which cannot account for the complex ecological context, and a solely distant observation approach, which tend to remain on the surface level of the analysis, by dismis-

sing the specificity of single cases. From a survey on close and distant reading methodologies, Stefan Jänicke *et al.* notably identified in interactive visualizations the solution for providing “distant reading visualizations that allow to interactively drill down to specific portions of the data.” (Jänicke *et al.* 2015), able to both “highlights potentially interesting patterns” and “drill down on these patterns for further exploration.” (*ibidem*)

In 2009, Monika Bednarek proposed a similar approach and reflected on a corpus-based methodology, taking into consideration a “three-pronged approach [*that*] involves a. large-scale computerized corpus analysis, b. semi-automated small-scale corpus analysis, and c. manual analysis of individual texts. As such, this is an approach that incorporates macro- (large-scale quantitative analysis), meso- (small-scale quantitative analysis), and micro- (individual text analysis) levels.” (Bednarek 2009: 19) These three levels of analysis allow to zoom in from a distant reading overview (macro-analysis), to a more detailed close reading (micro-analysis), passing through an intermediate level of meso-analysis. In the application proposed here, I will focus precisely on this in-between meso-level of analysis, while observing and exposing a small-scale corpus with the aid of data visualization. Through this approach, information can be scaled-up and down, thus giving the possibility to pursue both distant and close reading.

Building upon Marta Boni’s work on distant reading in audiovisual studies (Boni 2016a), the purpose is to ultimately consider television series as non-discrete objects that are part of complex cultural, industrial, technological ecosystems in constant evolution. In this sense, abstraction and non-discretion will be the main guides for the selection of visual models able to give overviews of such a complexity. To quote Marta Boni, “non-discretion encourages analysts and researchers to take into account big chunks of data, which could contribute in building historical

operations able to substitute a work based on individual names.” (Boni 2016b, online) I therefore looked for a visual model that could grant the possibility of zooming in and out on the visualization, by allowing to easily switch from non-discretion to discretion. If distance, abstraction and non-discretion do have limits for an accurate interpretation of the corpus, closing in on specific details might help to avoid the biases of a macroscopic view. After all, as I observed, the anthology form is a transhistorical model trapped into historically contingent uses that need to be observed at different degrees. In the following paragraphs, I will first discuss visual models suggested by Moretti to facilitate the comprehension of large-scale dynamics in literary studies, by assessing their possible applications in media studies. In a second part, I will then propose an hybrid visual model of my corpus that both shows collective progression and the specificity of each case, in line with the methodology discussed.

3.3.2. Visual Models: Graphs, Maps, Trees

Graphical conventions help us frame a system of meaning, through indicators for grouping contiguous objects, or line differentiators, color codes, thematic sections to distinguish non-contiguous elements. Because of the variety of applications found in information design, data visualization comes with a long history of graphical user interfaces. As part of a Digital Humanities project, it is important to reach visual representation and analysis with a broad understanding of the tools that such a tradition made available over time for designing graphical representations. An understanding of visual languages, graphical forms and visual epistemology at large is fundamental. Similarly, it is necessary to provide the background motivation that drove the choice of a visual model as opposed to others. Franco Moretti, when outlining his theoretical and methodo-

logical framework for distant reading, notably focused on three main visual models: *i*) graphs, which he uses to assess change in the genre of historical novels; *ii*) maps, for depicting the geographical dimension of fictional narratives; *iii*) trees, to generate a classification of detective stories. Graphs, maps and trees were adopted by Moretti to explore the corpus, illustrate its characteristics and explain results. Nevertheless, each one of these models for knowledge design presents dominant uses, with a consolidated tradition. Here, I will discuss the visual models proposed by Moretti in relation to both their history and their possible applications in the context of the present research. For the review of their previous applications, I will notably refer to the studies of the information designer Isabel Meirelles and of the Digital Humanist scholar Johanna Drucker.

While Meirelles approached the study of visual models as structures (Meirelles 2013), Drucker rather examined them as forms in the cultural oriented sense of the term, as “visual forms of knowledge production.” (Drucker 2014) In both cases, instead of presenting a unidirectional chronology of graphic design, they opt for an overview on the main principles and theories behind the visual information structures and forms. Graphs for instance are traditionally used to display relational structures (Meirelles 2013: 48) and are more often referred to as networks. Drawing upon graph theory, a network is defined, both visually and metaphorically, as a set of points, symbolizing actors (e.g. individuals, groups, institutions, texts, etc.), and a set of lines, symbolizing the relations between these actors (Beauguitte 2016: 2-3). Laurent Beauguitte gives a relatively precise description of what constitutes this branch, by defining network analysis as the body of methods, notions and concepts used for studying a given relational phenomenon identified as network. As he also points out, “analyzing a network does not necessarily involve using

network analysis methods, and conversely network analysis methods can be used to study literary works, ecological systems, and so on.” (*ivi*: 1-2, *my translation*)

Graphs and networks have already been proposed as theoretical and methodological tools in human sciences. In particular, such a theoretical and visual framework has been widely applied to social sciences, from sociometry (Moreno 1951) to analysis of social networks (Wasserman and Faust 1994), but also to the study of cultural dynamics, with historical (Schich *et al.* 2014) or industrial perspectives (Yucesoy *et al.* 2018). The question of a complex structure, being it an ecosystem or a network, and of complexity in general emerges as a central problem in contemporary academic research, in several areas of knowledge. Because of the complexity of real-world systems and patterns of connection, as well as the mathematical theory that explains them, visual models for graph and network analysis are inherently dependent on empirical data and they are quantitative in nature (Meirelles 2013: 48). Among other computational tools, programs like Gephi help introducing Digital Humanities scholars to network analysis. And yet, the effort for visualization will be useless without a valid dataset able to account for at least one of the functions studied in network analysis (e.g. path length, network centrality, hubs, level of connectivity).

While I did work on network/graph visualizations over the course of my doctorate, they will not be included in this dissertation, given their experimental and introductory nature which does not allow for a reliable analysis of the scenario they generate. Such a parallel, ongoing research project is still available in the publication “An introduction to network visualization for television studies: models and practical applications” (Taurino 2019). In the lack of insight on data from major media conglomerates and streaming giants like Netflix and Amazon Video, for the research presented here I therefore relied on graphic visualizations of networks provided by

external, reliable sources like Vox and Variety which do not take the classic shape of a graph (see chapter 5). Instead, they can be described more as a maps of networks.

This brings us to the second abstract model outlined by Moretti for his work on literary studies, that of maps. Maps suggest a geographic dimension, which is used to display processes of “space-making” (Drucker 2014: 76), geo-localization and distribution and the definition of a “spatial structure” (Meirelles 2013: 115) Geographic mapping has many subfields. One can either work with cartographic coordinates based on real-world geography (MacEachren 1995) or simply plot (fictional) geographic spaces (Boni 2016b). Maps can be used for highlighting density or expansion, for illustrating travel routes, relationships between places, geo-localized activity. Meirelles notably discusses more specifically thematic maps, which came from a long history of originally displaying data in mathematics, natural and physical sciences (from navigation purposes to cosmology), to then land in social, economic, political science starting from the mid-1800s, as a result of the increasing use of data for determining population planning and growth (Meirelles 2013: 117). Post-colonial human societies eventually grew into a geographic complexity, made of processes of globalization and increasing interconnectedness. Visual schemes for mapping became even more important with the advent of the Internet and social platforms, which allows for collection of a high amount of data about geolocalized socio-cultural practices.

The spatial turn (Warf and Arias 2008; Bodenhamer *et al.* 2010) in the Humanities further supported mapping as an essential practice for situating academic research. As of today, designing visual models for maps involve “three basic areas: projection, scale, and symbolization.” (Meirelles 2013: 118) These three areas are fundamental for observing spatial attributes not only in terms of physical component, but also in terms of a cultural and media eco-

logy, which is the approach taken here. Over the course of my doctorate, I notably underwent a mapping project as part of a broader project carried out by the research group Labo Télé (University of Montreal) and supervised by professor Marta Boni. The outcomes of such a collaboration are published in the paper “Maps, Distant Reading and the Internet Movie Database: New Approaches for the Analysis of Large-Scale Datasets in Television Studies” (Taurino and Boni 2018). However, for the purposes of this dissertation, the work on maps I pursued remains, at the current stage, too broad. I therefore opted for collecting maps visualization of the United States reported on external sources from different television eras (see Chapter 4 and 5). The purpose was to reconstruct a topology of infrastructures, by comparing different maps of the U.S. telecommunication network and showing how the constructed cultural scape of the television industry still contains a strong geophysical component in the hierarchies of powers.

The concept of hierarchy, which I already discussed in Chapter I relation to Levine’s neo-formalist approach to political forms, is particularly useful to introduce the third model proposed by Moretti, as he adopts trees for classifying literary objects and doing text analysis. Meirelles defines trees precisely as hierarchical structures that can be represented visually as either stacked or nested schemes (Meirelles 2013: 18). “In a nutshell, hierarchical systems are ordered sets where elements and/or subsets are organized in a given relationship to one another, both among themselves and within the whole. Relationships vary according to the field domain and type of system, but, in general, we can describe them by the properties of elements and the laws that govern them (e.g., how they are shared and/or related).” (*ivi*: 17) With regards to stacked schemes, the geometries adopted most often for information design of hierarchical structures are displayed as a group of interconnected, directional lines - i.e. vertical/horizontal/central, superior/inferior, center/peri-

phery - (*ivi*: 18) that resemble trees structures, such as the name itself suggest. Or as Drucker phrased it “The tree’s root and branch structure echo morphologies from natural and cultural worlds pressed into the service of a graphical one.” (Drucker 2014: 32)

Drucker additionally suggests that a tree-structured visualization should be supported by the dataset accordingly to its genealogical nature. With this she does not imply that all tree representations are genealogies, but that such visual models do account for common concepts such as continuities and derivation (Drucker 2014: 87) Hence why, if I would want to approach my corpus via a stacked scheme tree, it would result in the impossibility of creating any visualization at all, given that the television anthology form evolved in the United States in a rather discontinuous way, due to industrial and technological disruptions. Even a nested scheme does not seem appropriate. “Elements in nested schemes are positioned within containers assembled according to their interdependency and subordination.” (Meirelles 2013: 18) A nested graphic form of my corpus translates like this:

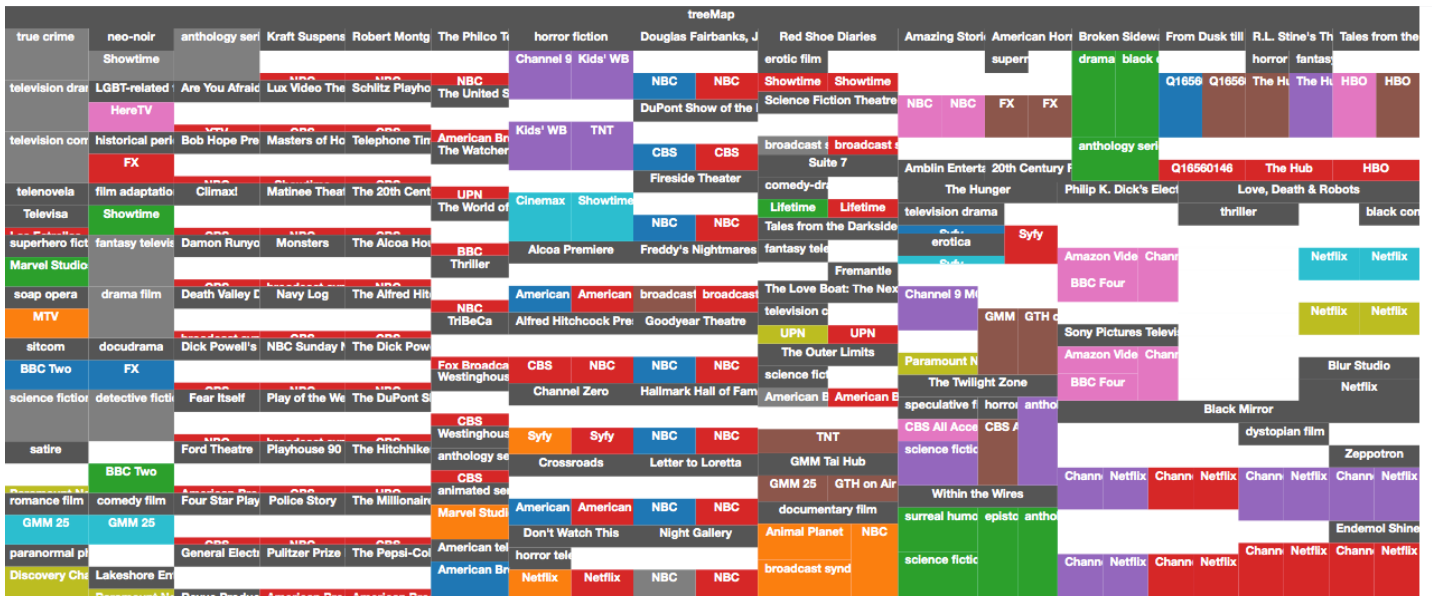


Figure 7. Nested graphic visualization of the dataset extracted from the Wikidata Query Service, created using the treemap visual model available on the Wikidata Query Service Platform.

It is evident that such a visual model appears rather obscure and quite difficult to read. Since the aim of a methodology based on data visualization is to facilitate the cognitive load instead, I decided to pursue a different path, and evaluate another model of visualization based on time, able to account for the evolutionary - but non-derivative - path of the anthology form in television. The next paragraph will discuss the representation I adopted for describing the time-component of my corpus, thus serving as a preliminary introduction to the additional qualitative analysis (media industry analysis, platform analysis) presented in chapter 4 and 5.

3.3.3. Timelines

“The term seriality is generally used to mean objects that are arranged in some form of a series, whether temporal, spatial, or conceptual.” (Boluk and LeMieux 2012: 17) Considering this definition, I decided to starting to reason on my corpus initially in terms of how it inhabited a

temporal dimension, to then consider the spatial and conceptual frameworks in second phase. As I briefly mentioned in the previous paragraph, I wanted to displaying cultural records related to U.S. anthology series by offering an evolutionary but non-derivative interpretation of historical patterns. That is to say, my scope is not so much to give an eschatological, predictive vision of the historical evolution of the anthology form, but rather to opt for a descriptive analysis and propose a visual chronology of the anthology form in U.S. television. In relation to questions of volume, quantity and temporal variation of the anthological form, I notably considered the following factors as the basis for my visualization: on the one hand, the *density* of anthology series throughout different eras of U.S. television, and on the other hand the *temporal evolution* and *variation* of the anthology form (hence the need for a timeline visualization).

Since the intention was to visualize a diachronic evolution of the anthology form, I first asked how historical time can be put in space through visualization tools. Questions related to a *topology* of time arise, for instance, when one opts to describe a spatial understanding of time as linear against cyclical. When tracking historical changes in the state of objects - as in the case of television series -, we deal, both in theory and in practice, with uniform and non-uniform dynamics. These homogeneous/inhomogeneous patterns can be discovered and observed through visualization. Quoting Isabel Mireilles:

Historical time is typically represented with the graphical form of timelines, which are chronological and sequential narratives of relevant historical events. Although ubiquitous nowadays, timelines were not invented until the eighteenth century. Initially, chronologies were represented as lists and tables, and we still see large use of these graphical structures [...]. Different from lists, where each line stands for an event independent of the temporal interval between them, in timelines, space communicates temporal distances, and negative space becomes a relevant graphical element pregnant with meaning. Units of space may represent uniform or nonuniform temporal intervals. In the first case, all spatial units stand for the same temporal interval, whereas in the latter, spatial and temporal intervals vary.

(Mireilles 2013: 87)

In order to visualize cultural change in the diachronic corpus I selected, I therefore chose the form of a timeline.

To simplify, a timeline can be defined as an abstract representation of a temporal structure (Meirelles 2013: 83) that renders, through visual design, one of the many conceptualizations of time: historical time. The temporal dimension of history emerges as central in the distinction made by the French Annales School between a series of short-term historical events and a long-term timescale structure, where the concept of *long durée* (Braudel 1982) is proposed as a preferential path of analysis. With the visualization I created, I intended to cover a long-term historical analysis, not by considering discrete events by themselves, but by tracing the overlapping of serial forms in the context a temporal progression. The following screenshots (fig. 8, 9, 10) are taken from an interactive timeline, which I generated using the open-source tool Timeline JS, developed by the Northwestern University's Knight Lab. The timeline visualization in figure 8 shows temporal data on two axis, horizontal and vertical. The horizontal axis indicates the time span (starting and ending dates, overall duration), and the vertical axis shows the intensity/density of content produced in a certain time frame. Every layer on the timeline corresponds to an anthology series and contains information about the title, original network/platform, number of episodes and seasons. Such a configuration shows dynamics of emergence, convergence, proliferation and divergence in the evolution of U.S. anthology dramas. These four stages trace a systemic model of evolutionary changes. First, dynamics of emergence point out at the moment of appearance of the anthology form. The second moment of convergence is a stage during which the form conforms to a single model (i.e. episodic).



Figure 8. Screenshot of the timeline visualization of the *final dataset* created with the open source tool Timeline JS.



Figure 9. Screenshot of one of the items (FX's *Fargo*) as visualized on the timeline.



Figure 10. Screenshot of one of the items (*Alfred Hitchcock Presents*) as visualized on the timeline.

As Douglas Kiel notes, in this phase “there is coherence with the mutation now being clearly distinct in its environment. A critical mass of the entity now exists providing the chance of further replication.” (Kiel 2014: 73) Proliferation then follows, when “the converged entity, now with some solid grounding in its environment, may reach a stage of environmental fit in which it proliferates.” (*ibidem*) After a moment of lower density in the 1980s and 1990s, a stage of divergence begins, with the diversification of “novel forms of the proliferant entity as it seeks new forms of adaptive fit.” (*ibidem*) In this last stage, a new version of the anthology form appears, showing patterns of variability into episodic and seasonal formulas. While in the original list and the tabular form, major patterns of emergence, convergence, proliferation, decline and divergence remain obscure and hidden in the substrates of data and metadata, the timeline brings them to the surface, to finally show the rate and the extent of the change. Measuring historical time and temporal progression in the evolution of the anthology format through a timeline schema allowed me to isolate the timeframe during which this form emerged (late 1940s), only to converge by the early 1960s in the institutionalized episodic formula within three major sub genres (crime, sci-fi, horror).

By reading this timeline (fig. 8), one can also observe that such a form went through a crisis in the 1980s, where the introduction of cable television marked a phase of transition. Nevertheless, this decline witnessed the survival of the episodic anthology in the horror genre, which then sparked the rebirth of the anthology form in the twenty-first century, century and initiated a path towards divergence, with a new wave of anthology series having a seasonal narrative arc (e.g. *Fargo*, cf. fig. 9). On an abstract level, this data visualization shows the formation of *strata* of content. Considering the temporal structure as a chronostratigraphy of objects helps understand

ding not only the positioning of anthology series in the history of U.S. television, but also their stratigraphic relationships. By proposing a *chronostratigraphic visual model* for analyzing the anthology form, I also align with a vision of culture as a multi-layered ground. Instead of observing this timeline visualization (and history) as a single, linear, homogeneous, directional description of discrete intervals, as one would do in empirical sciences, together with Drucker I suggest to read it as a superposition of layers, since “in the humanities time is frequently understood and represented as discontinuous, multi-directional, and variable.” (Drucker 2014: 75) This visual model is ultimately meant to facilitate the process of analysis and understanding, by exploring the corpus at different scales. It was specifically designed to tackle a dataset that cannot be handled through a solely close reading. With the aid of this timeline, I was able to orientate through a set of information that, although not inherently vast, needs to be observed from a distance for the purposes of this research project. In the following chapters I will give a more detailed contextual framework of the uses of the anthology form in U.S. television.

4.1. Rise and Fall of the Anthology Form in U.S. Television

4.1.1. *Birth of the Anthology Form: 1947-1957*

Discussing the rise and fall of the anthology form is the outcome of a comparative historical research I pursued based on two main scholarly texts considered pillars in the study of U.S. television history: namely, Michele Hilmes' *Only Connect: A Cultural History of Broadcasting in the United States* (2013) and Amanda Lotz' *The television will be revolutionized* (2007). Other edited volumes on the history of U.S. television are included in this chapter, with the aim of retrace the historiographic discursivity bringing, as a result, to the definition of a history of the anthology form. While I present this section as a mainly descriptive chapter of the cultural and industrial dynamics that favored or limited the diffusion of the anthology form over the course of television history, it is also intended to portray a historical perspective often adopted by U.S. television historians, which tended to dismiss the anthology form as an archaic televisual form. Supported by data analysis and visualizations presented in the previous chapter (chapter 3), here I acknowledge the presence of several fluctuations of the anthology form in the scenario of televi-

sion seriality since its early days. Nevertheless, I want to point at the fact that, despite a fall in production and distribution of anthology series, the anthology form turned out to be a resilient cultural and economic model in contemporary U.S. television and digital landscape.

Beyond the main bibliographical source used as references, this chapter offers a historical overview based on a multiplicity of perspectives, thus avoiding a mono-directional and eschatological vision of history. Building on a general consensus among scholars about the past of U.S. television, in this section I therefore propose a possible analytic path that does not provide a single interpretation, but rather a framework for researching the anthology form at the interaction of multiple practices. Given the lack of a comprehensive publication on the anthology form in U.S. television, this research and analysis aims to represent a building site for approaching a corpus of anthology series through a hybrid methodology (archival research, data collection, data visualization) and analysis (comparative historical analysis, platform studies). Furthermore, such a historical and historiographical approach helps us tackle some transversal topics in television seriality: among others, the constant redefinition of intermedial practices and innovative business models, as well as the interaction between forms and genres.

Following its first adoption in 1940s, broadcast television in the United States witnessed a moment of gradual and steady rise commonly known as the first Golden Age of Television. According to *The Television Industry: A Historical Dictionary*, edited by Anthony Slide, “the Golden Age opened with Kraft Television Theatre on May 7, 1947, and ended with the last live show in the Playhouse 90 series in 1957.” (Slide 1991: 121) In this phase, three major networks coming from the radio industry became the main industrial players in U.S. commercial television, together with the DuMont Television Network (which, however, ceased operating in 1956): American

Broadcasting Company (ABC), Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), National Broadcasting Company (NBC). Since the early years of broadcast television up until the 1980s (Hindman and Wiegand 2008), a phase defined by Amanda Lotz (2007) as the Network Era, ABC, CBS, NBC have dominated the U.S. media landscape, consecrating themselves in the traditional oligopoly of the “Big Three”.

As Michele Hilmes notes (2013), the idea of network represented a fundamental change in the history of broadcasting starting from radio, which shifted from a set of separate local radio stations or groups of more powerful stations that covered entire regions, to a web of interconnected broadcasting stations in which one program could be replicated in different areas of the nation. More specifically, each broadcaster was composed of a network of affiliates stations, in a complex hierarchical system that Jeffrey J. Ulin defines as “a grouping of local television stations that are either owned by or affiliated with the parent network company and which are all supplied the same product by the parent.” (Ulin 2013: 224) The consequences of this “centralized control” can be observed also in the early history of U.S. television industry, where three large radio corporations transitioned to television determined for a long time not only the evolution of U.S. media economy, but also the cultural influences it generated.

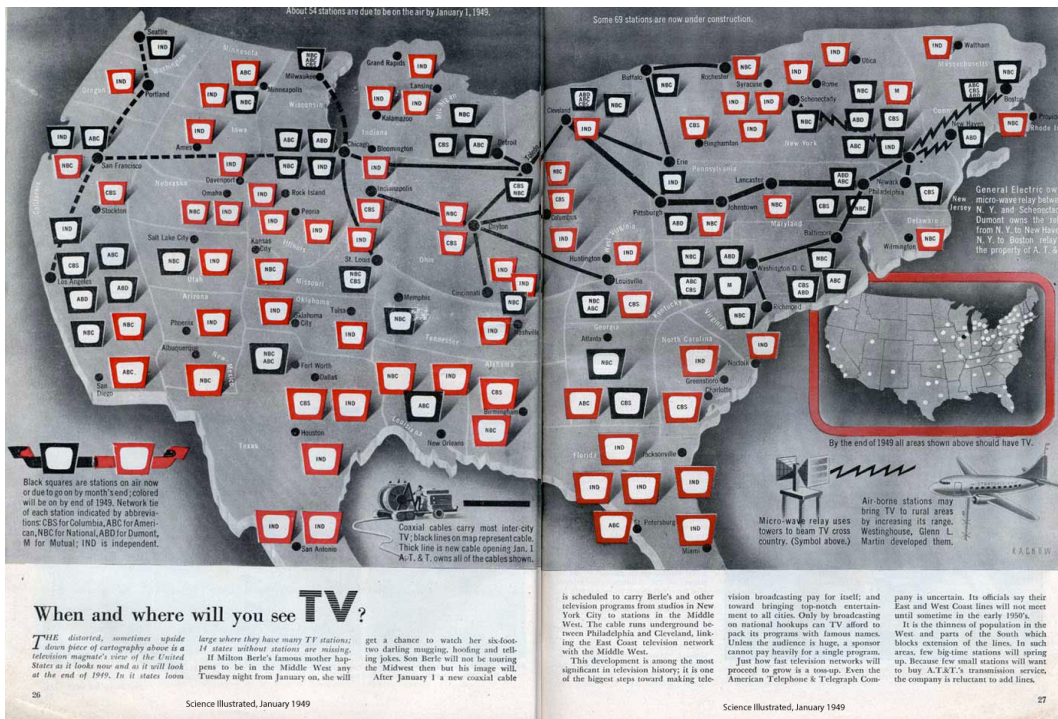


Figure 11. Map of the operational (in black) and expected (in red) network of on air stations in the United States as of 1949. Source: http://www.earlytelevision.org/att_network.html.

An article on *Science Illustrated*³⁴, published in January 1949, reported that the number of networks was increasing substantially, linking different parts of the country (e.g. Philadelphia-Cleveland) and connecting the East Coast to the Middle West, allowing people as far west as St. Louis to see programs telecast in New York and preparing to reach even more remote, rural areas. As we can see in the cartographic visualization contained in that same issue of the magazine (fig. 11), “from the very beginning, local television broadcasts were represented by the networks as nodal events within a larger national network. Even before the means for networking television existed, the notion of networking was a key to the presentation of early broadcasts.” (Sterne

³⁴ “What Every Family Wants to Know about Television - Science Illustrated (Jan, 1949).” *Modern Mechanix (blog)*. Retrieved September 5, 2019. <http://blog.modernmechanix.com/what-every-family-wants-to-know-about-television>.

1999: 507) Analyzing the anthological form in early television thus requires a preliminary understanding of the topological dimension of radio transmitters, along with the socio-economic processes and institutional mechanisms that helped framing television infrastructures and industry. This networked infrastructural and industrial system did in fact shaped, in a broader sense, a narrative on television, which resulted in policies and business models that deeply affected the production and distribution of television content.

“As soon as they could, radio networks took steps to articulate and promote their vision of television as a nationally networked medium that distributed content from a few centralized sources.” (*ibidem*) The outcome of such a centralized and networked control on television programming can be observed, for instance, in the homogeneity of content and narrative forms that distinguish the decade from 1947 to 1957, and even later. The scope was to unify different parts of the nation under a shared sense of belonging to the same confederation of states. Hence, television series produced in the first ten years of television largely served as catalysts for a dominant national culture and identity, thus reinforcing ideas and imaginaries of normativity, ultimately addressing to the wealthy U.S. community that owned television sets. The first episodic, anthological series seem to have precisely the intent to influence and in some way educate the society, by creating behavioral models and promoting the concept of national unity through cultural unity. Relying on a programming schedule controlled by large corporations and sponsors, which supervised the content to be broadcasted, television narratives of this period are very much modulated by hegemonic standards and modeled after specific production norms. Shot live with a multi-camera setup from studios based in New York, U.S. anthology dramas of the late 1940s and early 1950s were made of episodes of variable length (from half an hour to an hour long), each one act-

ing as a sequence or textual unit in its own right and following a separate narrative arc within a cycle of seemingly unrelated episodes and seasons.

One of the first weekly anthology dramas, and one of the first series ever aired in the history of television, was the *Kraft Television Theatre* (NBC, 1947-1958), sponsored by Kraft and originally airing at 7:30 pm on Wednesday evenings only to be moved in the 9pm time slot in 1948. Much like other anthology dramas, this series brought to the small screen European and U.S. plays considered classics of Western theatre, along with original scripts by playwright and dramatist active in the theater scene. Similarly, *The Philco Television Playhouse* (NBC, 1948-1955), one of the most renowned anthological series of the Golden Age of Television, winner in 1954 of the Peabody Award and sponsored by the U.S. company Philco, hosted famous performers and award-winning screenwriters such as Paddy Chayefsky, Arnold Schulman, or Gore Vidal, who were mainly focusing on television adaptations of theatrical plays and literary novels. Also known more generically as *NBC's Television Playhouse*, its mission, as declared by the producer Fred Coe, was to “bring Broadway to America via the television set”³⁵. Among the most famous adaptations were *Dinner at Eight*, a theatrical drama written by George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber, *Pride and Prejudice*, based on the novel by Jane Austen, and the famous novella by Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*.

The connection of anthology dramas with theatre cultural heritage contributed to frame, in this first decade, some features and affordances found in anthology series to come: strong authorial presence, recurring big-name actors and an overall sense of quality. As Jane Feuer noted,

³⁵ Fred Coe. “Television Drama’s Declaration of Independence,” *Theatre Arts*, June 1954, as quoted in Stricken, Frank. 1990. *Live Television: The Golden Age of 1946-1958 in New York*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, p. 40.

“even before a normative notion of ‘everyday television’ had solidified, the idea of ‘quality drama’ existed in the form of the live ‘anthology’ teleplays of the 1950s.” (McCabe and Akass 2007: 146) Episodic television series of this period have indeed succeeded in reinterpreting theatrical and literary masterpieces for television, sometimes even anticipating great cinematic successes and attracting famous film directors. “By the mid-1950s, original television dramas were providing material for feature films. *Marty*, *12 Angry Men*, *No Time for Sergeants*, *Requiem for a Heavyweight*, and other original television plays were made into motion pictures.” (Newcomb 2014: 122) This connection with the cinematographic industry will return in a first evolution of the U.S. television industry, marked by a change of production hub.

Another successful anthology was *The United States Steel Hour*, originally conceived as a radio program with the name of *Theater Guild on the Air*, which hosted a number of performers from theatrical training, including some members of the New York theater company *Theater Guild*. The series aired on ABC from 1953 to 1955, before being moved to CBS until 1963, establishing itself, with its ten years of broadcasting, as one of the longest live anthologies of the first Golden Age of U.S. television. As the *UCLA Film & Television Archive* reports, “Originating from New York and remaining there for the duration of the production of the series (long after most other anthology series relocated to Los Angeles), the live, bi-weekly *U.S. Steel Hour* began its impressive run with adaptations of established stage plays, before expanding into developing literary adaptations of novels and short stories, and original plays written directly for television.”³⁶ The connection of this series with the city of New York and its theater tradition emerged in related marketing campaigns, where it is often defined as the “Broadway of TV”. In this example (fig.

³⁶ “Live from New York: U.S. Steel Hour.” *UCLA Film & Television Archive*. Last modified May 15, 2018. Retrieved September 3, 2019. <https://www.cinema.ucla.edu/blogs/archive-blog/2018/05/15/US-Steel-Hour>.

12), we can spot a specific view of television as a medium that defines itself through other media (theatre, but also literature and cinema), which is a feature that the anthology form acquired since its origins, while other serial reconfigurations will be leaning more towards television-specific forms of storytelling.



Fig. 12. Advertisements for *The U.S. Steel Hour*. 1st row left to right: Variety (Jan. 5, 1955); Variety (Jul. 27, 1960); Variety (Jan. 10, 1962); 2nd row left to right: Broadcasting (Jul. 8, 1957); Variety (Mar. 9, 1955); The Radio Annual and Television Year Book (1961).³⁷

Premiered in 1953 and featuring episodes written by famous screenwriters like Rod Serling, still remembered for the series *The Twilight Zone*, *The United States Steel Hour* received the Emmy Award for *Best Dramatic Program* and *Best New Program*. Part of the success of this anthology series is due to the original way it addressed national issues of great social relevance,

³⁷ “Live from New York: U.S. Steel Hour.” *UCLA Film & Television Archive*. Last modified May 15, 2018. Retrieved September 3, 2019. <https://www.cinema.ucla.edu/blogs/archive-blog/2018/05/15/US-Steel-Hour>.

thus contributing to frame a dramatic and controversial portrait of a nation filled with contradictions. As Rod Serling himself explained, in an open critique of a certain “mainstream” televised theater, this is an atypical television series if compared to other contemporary anthology dramas:

In the television seasons of 1952 and 1953, almost every television play I sold to the major networks was “non-controversial.” This is to say that in terms of their themes they were socially inoffensive, and dealt with no current human problem in which battle lines might be drawn. After the production of *Patterns*, when my things were considerably easier to sell, in a mad and impetuous moment I had the temerity to tackle a theme that was definitely two-sided in its implications. I think this story is worth repeating. The script was called *Noon on Doomsday*. It was produced by the Theatre Guild on The United States Steel Hour in April 1956.

(Serling 1958, online)

The United States Steel Hour was indeed an exceptional case. In the Post-War period, at a time when the U.S. society was experiencing a rise in the demographics, an overall economic growth and a widespread phenomenon of consumerism, a conventional type of “non-controversial and socially inoffensive entertainment” (*ibidem*) helped building a patriotic sensibility and cohesion. This is a consequence of a hierarchical industrial structure as well as of a business model based on a sponsorship system.

Acting as an oligopolistic and centralized force, early broadcasting in the U.S. was influenced by a group of advertisers, namely large companies and corporations sponsoring television programming.

As NBC president Niles Trammel put it to the FCC in 1944, “With national coverage we shall be able to attract the national advertisers to support major program productions. Simultaneous coverage of the nation will enable us to bring into the American home leading events as they occur, and to unite the nation as a single audience to hear and see the great personalities of Government, of education, of the arts, and of entertainment.” (Trammel, 1944) National planning, national advertising and a national infrastructure were to characterize the structure of American television.

(Sterne 1999: 508)

Unlike other countries that supported government-funded public channels, the United States welcomed this type of over-the-air commercial television as the main form of broadcasting of the nation, thus producing television content largely based on the financing of sponsors that were buying time slots to ensure the audience's attention. This model favored a type of standardized television, highly subjected to the sale of advertising space and therefore heavily dependent on the commercial or political interests of the advertisers.

As Anna Everett framed it in Horace Newcomb's *Encyclopedia of Television*,

Much of the criticism of these live television dramas concerned the power sponsors often exerted over program content. Specifically, the complaints focused on the mandate by sponsors that programs adhere to a "dead-centerism." In other words, sponsored shows were to avoid completely socially and politically controversial themes. Only those dramas that supported and reflected positive middle-class values, which likewise reflected favorably the image of the advertisers, were broadcast.

(Newcomb 2014: 1003)

This is a key point to understand the shape taken by the anthology form in this first phase, as well as the affordances acquired in its interaction with early television technological, industrial and institutional structures. Accurately sorted by time slots to fit a demographic target, sponsored anthology series of the 1940s and 1950s usually maintained a moral and political perspective in line with those of the sponsor, which acted as a gatekeeper. A program like the anthology *General Electric Theatre*, sponsored by the General Electric and hosted by Ronald Reagan, is an evident example of such uses of the anthological form to convey both socio-political and commercial interests. About this peculiar interplay between early commercial television and politics, which ended up reflecting on historical events and influencing television programming, the scholar J. Benjamin Taylor stated:

Reagan's own political evolution—from a New Deal Democrat to a *laissez faire* Republican—is often attributed to the people he met and time he spent as the host of his show on CBS (Weisberg 2016; Weisberg and Neyfakh 2016). Reagan developed a very devoted political following as a result of his work on television and political events he headlined for General Electric around the United States (Evans 2006; Raphael 2009). Similarly, CBS reaped benefits from having Reagan's political content on their station without having to run afoul of the fairness doctrine.

(Taylor 2016: 13)

This social climate in which U.S. television anthology series were born prove that narrative forms can indeed be both cultural and political. To briefly sum up what we just outline and bring it back to the original reflexion on the affordances and uses of the anthology form in a media ecological framework, the anthology form in the first decade of its appearance in television shows specific features that can be related to either previous or following anthologization practices. In pragmatic terms, I observed how U.S. television infrastructures contributed creating a centralized and oligopolistic market in the period from 1947 to 1957, resulting in a concentration of power in three large corporations - ABC, CBS, NBC -, which were overseeing the content produced and distributed, thus framing a cultural and national identity. Being these corporations based in New York, television content was influenced by theatre production and adaptation of literary classics for the stage, thus recycling and remediating previous narrative for the televisual medium. Moreover, the business models adopted by the big three fed into an idea of commercial television driven by a sponsorship system, which tended to generate non-controversial and politicized entertainment. Reasoning in more abstract terms, I showed how hierarchical and networked industrial forms affected the anthology form. In such a mediascape, the anthology form became cultural and political, primarily used as a means to educate and activating one of its many affordances.

4.1.2. First Evolution of the Anthology Form: 1957-1977

The anthology form in U.S. television underwent a first evolution as a consequence of changes in their modes of production. A series of events in the television industry anticipated this transformation, such as the construction of the CBS Television City studios in Los Angeles, in 1952, and the merging of ABC with the United Paramount Theaters in 1953, after two years of negotiations, whereas NBC had already made a move to California at the time of radio. Following these events, the main industrial hub and media capital was slowly moved from New York to Los Angeles and by the end of 1957 most television productions were based in the East Coast. At that point, television was firmly established in the United States, with a solid infrastructure and a reliable distributive network. By replacing Broadway's productions, Hollywood productions intervened to finance television series, changing some of their original characteristics. For instance, abandoning the live recording that had dominated the television scene for a decade in New York, anthology dramas have progressively emancipated from a theatrical setting, to create an autonomous industry, with its own rules and style, which, if on the one hand has become increasingly cinematic and less theatrical over time, on the other it has created unique and original narrative forms.

This detachment from the theatrical setting marked the most visible mutation of the form from live anthology series with a multi-camera setup to up to one-hour long, filmed anthology dramas. Anomalous anthology series such as *Playhouse 90* (CBS, 1956-1960), produced in the studios of CBS Television City, began to be distributed in episodes of ninety minutes, exceeding the time traditionally available for live weekly programming. Due to the production difficulties of airing live, together with the costs required to guarantee the length of the episodes, anthology se-

ries produced in New York were originally broadcasting less than sixty-minute long plays, on a weekly basis. Even before 1956, when *Playhouse 90* marked a definitive shift in the anthology form, the one-hour format was introduced as a result of a dislocation in the production of some series from New York to Los Angeles, such as in the case of *Lux Video Theater* (CBS, 1950-1954; NBC, 1954-1957), which started with a thirty-minute format to then switch to a full hour once it was moved to Hollywood.

The transition from live and one-time-only events to recorded episodes, able to be easily placed in the programming schedule and rerun, without the tension, time and money-constraints generated by the live event, was only one of the outcomes of the influence of Los Angeles' cultural economy. "At a time when the Hollywood studio system was disappearing, the television offered jobs and public exposure" (Newcomb 2014: 122), attracting film actors and directors. U.S. television made its way into the entertainment and film industry, demonstrating its value and inaugurating a first historical cycle known as Network Era (Lotz 2007), which lasted until the early 1980s. As the geographer Allen J. Scott explains, reasoning on the intertwining between place, culture and economy,

The film industry of Los Angeles - or more narrowly of Hollywood - draws on a complex web of local cultural assets that play a crucial role in imparting to the products of the industry their distinctive look and feel (Molotch, 1996; Storper and Christopherson, 1987); and the same products in turn create images (real or imagined) of Los Angeles/Hollywood that then are assimilated back into the city's fund of cultural assets where they become available as inputs to new rounds of production.

(Scott 1997: 325)

The Hollywood imprint on the anthology form acted in terms of creative possibilities, boosting a diversification of television genres and the adherence to already consolidated stylistic

and discursive norms typical of cinema. In a cultural landscape in which the studio system, despite having already hit its decline, was still producing noir genre-films as relatively successful formulas, in echoing the rise of the Californian hard-boiled detective novel between 1920 and 1955 (Marling 2015: 199), a similar style spread in television, setting the premises for the consolidation of a long tradition of crime anthology dramas. The link between anthological form and genres is a fundamental one, not only to interpret post-war television heritage but also to understand the subsequent anthological occurrences in television, as echoes of this early productions. Since their appearance on radio and then on television, anthological narratives have shown an inner preference for dramatic genres. On the contrary, the comedy will move in other directions, finding a marginal development in the anthological form only in more recent years. In the course of the late 1950s until the late 1970s, three great dramatic strands were notably defined: crime, science fiction, and horror.

In this dynamic context of initial experimentation, the spread of the anthology drama was still deeply tied to a model with a limited content offering and a sponsorship system. In the mid-seventies, while noticing a sharp difference between the U.K. public television system and the U.S. model for commercial television, Raymond Williams described the latter as a continuous flow of content, a powerful metaphor that will persist as a central debate in television studies for years ahead, often used to assess changes in distribution throughout different U.S. television eras. Raymond Williams' flow model notably references to the U.S. programming of those early years, where television series and advertising sequences were airing without definite intervals distinguishing ones from the others. In his own words,

The notion of ‘interruption’, while it has still some residual force from an older model, has become inadequate. What is being offered is not, in older terms, a programme of discrete units with particular insertions, but a planned flow, in which the true series is not the published sequence of programme items but this sequence transformed by the inclusion of another kind of sequence, so that these sequences together compose the real flow, the real ‘broadcasting’.

(Williams 1974: 90-91)

In sponsored anthology dramas, commercial breaks became modes of storytelling themselves, with narrative functions and “constraints designed to boost advertising revenues.” (Newman 2006: 17) To witness a more substantial change not only in the geography of U.S. television production but also in the very structure of the industry itself, which in this phase was still in the hands of three main players, we need to wait until the mid 1980’s with the advent of cable and the beginning of the Multi-Channel Transition (Lotz 2007).

4.1.3. Decline of the Anthology Form: 1977-2000

The first phase in the history of U.S. television broadcasting, which saw three major broadcasters reign unrivaled, was interrupted by the rise of cable television, already accessible in the United States since 1948 upon subscription, but not yet so widespread. Following some pioneering efforts to set up cable-satellite programming, thus overcoming terrestrial transmission and expanding television’s reach, it was only in 1975 that Home Box Office (HBO) succeeded in creating a solid distribution system of satellite-delivered television content (Parsons 2003: 1). Initially available only in the basic cable option, starting in the late 1970s, cable television began to offer a premium cable paid services, officially initiating its take-over on the U.S. mediascape by decentralizing previous hegemonic industrial powers and inaugurating the beginning of what Amanda Lotz (2007) has defined “Multi-Channel Transition”. The term Multi-Channel Transition

notably refers to a phase of redefinition of the industrial structure, in strong opposition with what happened during the Network Era, where the television industry adapted to a pre-existing media environment, that of radio. From the oligopoly of ABC, CBS, NBC the attention moved onto a multi-channel model, with both emerging cable channels as well as new networks like Fox (1986), UPN (1993) and WB (1995).

Alongside multiple channels made available and a higher quantity of content, commercial television was thus forced to abandon its predominant position and make room for new trends and new ways of doing television. As Robert J. Thompson (1997: 36) reported, by 1980, even though cable television was still far from the size major commercial television channels, the percent of American households receiving basic or pay cable was steadily climbing, while networks were gradually losing their audience reach. In this period of adjustment in U.S. television, which began in the 1980s and continued until the end of the 1990s, the tendency toward a multiplication of content resulted in a further diversification of television series available to the public, and, consequently, in audience segmentation. Or else, as James G. Webster put it, “these changes would produce two features in macrolevel audience behavior: fragmentation and polarization.” (Webster 2005: 367) This niche expansion (Hilmes 2013: 266) was in radical opposition with the numerous attempts of early television to unify content for a limited demographic target. New channels, new content, new audiences, but also new technologies and new legislations, lead to innovative storytelling and ultimately reinvented the television industry (Lotz 2018). As Amanda Lotz explains, “New technologies including the remote control, video-cassette recorder, and analog cable systems expanded viewers’ choice and control; producers adjusted to

government regulations that forced the networks to relinquish some of their control over the terms of program creation.” (Lotz 2007: 12)

One revolutionary factor of cable technology was its emancipation from a total dependence on the sale of advertising space. While commercial television was still entirely advertiser-driven, cable television took advantage of hybrid forms of subsidy and combining revenues from both advertising and subscription, thus gaining a greater freedom in the production of content and possibility for experimentation. The subscription-driven model made pay television more dependent on audience’s demand for content than on the impositions of the sponsors. Moreover, given that cable television was operating outside of public frequencies, cable channels were not under the direct jurisdiction of the Federal Communications Commission and its regulations. At a time when cable television distinguish itself precisely because of its ability to communicate directly with the viewers, U.S. broadcast television responded to new competitors with an unexpected impetus towards renewal.

It is in this scenario that early anthology series, as they were conceived, underwent a rapid decline and almost disappeared only to be replaced by more “complex” serial products. “Pressed into the deployment of target marketing strategies by the proliferation of cable services, network TV began to introduce a new type of complex and sophisticated programming aimed directly at an upscale audience.” (Thompson 1996: 30) John Caldwell (1995) describes the stylistic complexity that distinguished television series produced in this phase using the term “televisuality”, while Jason Mittell observes that “this model of television storytelling is distinct for its use of narrative complexity as an alternative to the conventional episodic and serial forms that have typified most American television since its inception.” (Mittell 2006: 39) The need for narrative ex-

perimentation emerged in strong contrast with the episodic limits imposed by the anthological form, which however survived in the 1980s and 1990s, but also in the early 2000s, thanks to few rare examples of anthological sci-fi and horror series, as well as through television reruns or revivals of earlier anthology dramas, as remainings of the North American post-war television culture.

Furthermore, according to Mark L. Rogers, Michael Epstein, and Jimmie L. Reeves (2002), in this phase, meaning from the 1980s on, HBO inserted itself as an additional player in the industry with a primary strategy: to focus on identity branding and the production of original programming, thus initiating a shift in more conventional commercial paradigms traditionally based on mechanisms of competitive duplication in programming or else on the “law of central tendency” (Dunnett 2010: 57). This behavior was studied by U.S. economists through program choice models, which establish that “if most viewers want the same types of programs and television is supported by advertiser payments, competing broadcasters are likely to offer highly similar programs targeted to this mass audience.” (Owen and Wildman 1992: 99) In strong contrast with such models, as Timothy Todreas remarks, “A handful of digital brands will emerge as the principal means to organize content for the information weary consumer.” (Todreas 1999: 99) During the Multi-Channel Transition, the commercial value of television started to move from the production of a homogeneous pool of similar content options, to the production of a distinct, unique channel brand. Vast narratives with strong running plots, able to generate widespread marketing processes by expanding the narrative ecosystem radially in the various sectors of the entertainment industry, naturally overcame scattered plots of anthology series, which were less likely to create strong brand identities.

Despite them thriving in a mediascape that went toward vast narratives, episodic anthology series were still produced and broadcasted by both commercial networks and cable channels: some examples are *Darkroom* (ABC, 1981-1982), *The Hitchhiker* (HBO, 1983-1987; USA Network, 1989-1991), *Amazing Stories* (NBC, 1985-1987), *Freddy's Nightmares* (Syn, 1988-1990), *Monsters* (Syn, 1988-1991), *The Ray Bradbury Theater* (HBO, 1985-1992), *Tales from the Darkside* (Syn, 1984-1988) and *Tales from the Crypt* (HBO, 1989-1996). Furthermore, the need to expand the offer led to a renewed interest for earlier television series from the Golden Age. Although the production of anthology dramas almost stopped, 1980s and 1990s television witnessed the return of some golden programs. In 1980, Irwin Sonny Fox, president of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, committed to recovering the best anthology dramas series of the so-called "live era". This effort to revive some of the best teleplays resulted in a case of anthology *ex post*, presented by the PBS with the name *The Golden Age of Television* as a collection of the most famous episodes of the 1950s, integrated with interviews and comments of television professionals.

If early anthology series provided socio-cultural cohesion, served as means for consensus and became tools for culture planning, driven by educational, ideological purposes and promoting a system of values, later on the anthology form in U.S. television began to evolve in order to welcome other uses. As soon as the oligopolistic industrial structure opened up to a more competitive and varied media environment, the anthology form showed some additional affordances. Education ceased being the main reason for the creation of anthological narratives. Throughout different television eras and media environments, the anthology form in the United States was used both as a way to structure and define certain genres and formulas in television, and, at the same

time, as a way to subvert a normative idea of culture through narrative innovation and experimentation. Even in a phase of decline of the form, the anthology became a means for the preservation and dissemination of the U.S. televisual cultural heritage, both granting accessibility to previous anthologies and creating profit through revival practices.

4.2. Anthology Form and Genres

4.2.1. Crime

One of the most widespread genres within the macro-genre of anthology drama is crime, which dates back to the Golden Age of U.S. Television. Here, I will trace an overview on some examples of crime series, which evolved in cases of semi-anthologies, such as the police procedural, a sub-genre of detective fiction that, although not strictly anthological, features a narrative structure divided in self-contained episodes. A distinct characteristic of early anthology crime drama is the use of the voice over to orient the audience throughout the plot, filling gaps and providing explanations. This element is peculiar if compared with subsequent evolutions of the genre, where one of the key elements of crime narrative is precisely the moment of untold and suspense. In contrast with later productions, early crime anthologies aspired to a didactic aim, in a broader attempt of U.S. television broadcasters to educating the society and spreading awareness.

One of the first examples of crime anthology in U.S. television is *The Big Story* (NBC, 1949-1959), originally produced as a radio program broadcasted by NBC Radio (1947-1955) and then converted into a television series in 1949 for the NBC network. Sponsored by the American

Tobacco Company, each episode of *The Big Story* takes up news reports turning them into stories based on actual events. The “big stories” selected from national newspapers focused on social issues, such as corruption or organized crime, and they ended with the appearance of the actual reporter in charge of the case history presented, who was given a 500-dollar Pall Mall Award (Brooks and Marsh 2007: 143). Much like in many other television anthologies of the time, *The Big Story* used an external narrator (the host) to accompany events and investigations, following, in this case, a chronological order, and sometimes also acting as a narrative expedient to summarize or explain parts of the plot or, again, as an insight in the minds of the characters. *The Big Story* proclaimed itself as a series entirely dedicated to reproducing the typical “how-I-got-the-story” formula, by simultaneously offering the point of view of criminals and reporters, leaving the classic role of the investigator on the sidelines.

Another less successful series based on real events was *The Black Robe* (NBC, 1949-1950), a semi-documentary which adapted for television the trials followed by the New York City’s Police Night Court, with real life defendants and witnesses appearing in the show together with a cast of actors playing the police and the judge. Similar anthology shows were *They Stand Accused* (DuMont, 1949-1954), recorded in a courtroom in a classic example of dramatized court show, and the more recent *Police Call* (Syn/NTA, 1955-1956), based on true crime cases. Along the same lines, the CBS proposed *The Man Behind the Badge* (1953-1955), where the genre of the police procedural is modeled on international true crime stories. In the episode *The Case of the Hunted Hobo* (s02e33) the viewer is asked to follow detectives’ investigations with the help of a narrator who guides the audience throughout the resolution process, between suspects and witnesses, police interrogations and case histories. In this same episode, the epilogue

concludes with a reflection on the importance of the police man as a patron of the society, with his unique devotion to duty. These typified characters were central in the evolution of early crime anthologies, with their constant need to provide normative narrative canons and convey a politically correct portrayal of U.S. culture.

While in digital culture, the production of canons will rather conflate with cultural repertoires in the form of virtual archives (De Kosnik 2016: 65-67), the presence of a directed canon in this early phase of U.S. television history is still subjected to activities of policy making and censorship that highly influence cultural industries. ABC also conformed to this trend: first aired on ABC and then went on syndication, the detective series *The Walter Winchell File* (1957-1958), reports the cases entrusted to the New York City Police Department and examined by the journalist Walter Winchell for the *New York Daily Mirror*. Walter Winchell later appeared as a narrator in another famous ABC series *The Untouchables* (1959-1963), which develops its narrative arc loosely following a semi-anthological structure and showing an interesting example of the fragmented storytelling of crime series. Based on Eliot Ness's autobiographical book, each episode gives a glimpse on Chicago's organized crime in the 1930s, showing the investigations of the famous team of Prohibition agents known as "The Untouchables", here represented as heroic defenders of justice against Chicago's crime empire using a noir aesthetic. These anthology series are therefore not only canonic in the broader sense of the term, but also political, as they actively engage with debates in favor of the U.S. establishment.

At this stage, when the U.S. television industry had done its strategic move to Los Angeles, noir entered to be part of the stylistic takes of several anthology television series, from the semi-anthological crime dramas *The Man with a Camera* (ABC, 1958-1960) and *77 Sunset Strip*

(ABC, 1958-1964), to police procedurals like *Naked City* (ABC, 1958-1963), with its famous tagline “There are eight million stories in the naked city. This has been one of them.” The noir atmosphere also reflected on sci-fi series, with interesting anthological experiments like *The Twilight Zone* (CBS, 1959-1964) and *The Outer Limits* (ABC, 1963-1965). Semi-anthologies like *The Man with a Camera* and *77 Sunset Strip* are important for understanding the adaptability of crime stories’ scheme to the anthology form. In *The Man with a Camera* the episodes are divided according to different crimes followed by a reporter in New York. The same episodic, self-contained structure is found in *77 Sunset Strip*, where the anthology plots are taken from novels and short stories by Roy Huggins, who had already published some serialized mysteries and short stories on *The Saturday Evening Post*, marking the efficient transition of the anthology form from weekly magazines to television. It is the case for example of the novel *Lovely Lady, Pity me*, which sparked an eponymous episode in the first season (s01e02), which stages the story of a mysterious blackmail happened in the mean streets of Los Angeles during the Great Depression.

In the wake of the great North American twentieth century pulp literary tradition, this series is interesting for its anthological structure based on different stories taking place in the same background location: Sunset Boulevard, the “epicenter of hipness on television, a sun-drenched world of cocktails, cool jazz and convertibles.” (Newcomb 2014: 1148) The peculiarity of this crime series also consists in inserting an ironic vein in the image of the classic hard-boiled detective, showing that even a semi-anthological structure can prompt narrative innovation. According to the Encyclopedia of Television, “it was *77 Sunset Strip* that revived the crime drama on U.S. television [...] by injecting a healthy dose of humor into a genre trapped in grim rites of law and order.” (*ibidem*) The inseparable binomial formula law/order characterized indeed many televi-

sion series in early U.S. television, one of them being the cop drama *Dragnet* (NBC, 1951-1959, 1967-1970). A typical example of long-running show, *Dragnet* was born in 1951 as a television spin-off of a 1949 radio program, and reached its maximum success in the 1953-1954 season, for which the series won second place in the Nielsen chart, with almost 14 million spectators per week³⁸.

Not strictly anthological, but still favoring an anthology plot as opposed to a running plot, *Dragnet* contributed to standardized and stabilized the formula of the police procedural on the prototype of law-and-order, where each case always resolves with the delivery of the criminal to the justice system and where court's final verdict ends each case with a conviction, in a perfect restoration of the social order. Even as a non-controversial product, *Dragnet* rewrites the canons of the traditional anthologies, creating "a unique textual style and innovative use of telefilm, which were instantly recognizable and often imitated in early television." (Mittell, 2004: 125) With its use of the first-person narrator, instead of a voice over, *Dragnet* gave birth to a formula that would have survived for years, influencing, among others, one of the largest contemporary television franchises: *Law & Order* (NBC, 1990-2010), created by Dick Wolf, who was also the producer of *L.A. Dragnet*. Police procedurals are indeed a liminal category, on the one hand following a semi-anthological division and on the other hand producing long-running shows. However, they don't really fit in the vast narrative category in the sense outlined in the previous chapter. Instead, they do tend to adhere to the anthological model both in the microscopic level of episodic storytelling and in the macroscopic level of the creation of a franchise-collection, thus blending a semi-anthology and macro-anthology form in the kind of product.

³⁸ See: <http://www.classictvhits.com/tvratings/1953.htm>.

A more anthological form in the strict sense of the term is found in mystery television series, which had been anthologized already in the Victorian era during its literary debut. In this genre, which was successfully adapted to television, the plot is built around the “whodunit” formula found in British literature, converted in the United States into hardboiled fiction. From earlier more conventional examples of mystery drama on U.S. television - *Hands of Murder* (DuMont, 1949-1951), *The Clock* (ABC, 1949-1952), *Suspense* (CBS, 1949-1954), *Danger* (CBS, 1950-1955), *The Web* (CBS, 1950-1957) -, mystery anthologies evolved into an interesting formula with elements of suspense acting as the main narrative components. A famous example is *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (CBS, 1955-1960, 1962-64; NBC, 1960-1962, 1964-65), created and presented, as the title itself suggests, by the famous director Alfred Hitchcock, stressing on an authorial influence which would later become a feature of most anthology series, much like in literary collections³⁹. In this series, the host structure typical of earlier anthology dramas is maintained as a both a narrative frame and as a branding factor. In the opening sequence of the first episode of the first season, Alfred Hitchcock recites: “[...] Tonight, I’m presenting the first in a series of stories of suspense and mystery called, oddly enough, ‘Alfred Hitchcock Presents’. I shall not act in these stories, but will only make appearances. Something in the nature of an accessory before and after the fact – to give the title to those of you who can’t read, and to tidy up afterwards for those who don’t understand the endings.”⁴⁰

³⁹ Similar experiments of genre anthologies with a strong authorial component emerged also in other television markets, one example being the Spanish anthology series written and directed by the screenwriter Narciso Ibáñez Serrador: *Historias para no dormir* (TVE1, 1966-1982), which blends together a collection of sci-fi, crime and horror stories.

⁴⁰ “Revenge”, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (s01e01)

With the terms suspense and mystery, Hitchcock provides the audience with a tool for classifying the series, by inserting it into a genre of reference through the use of keywords as well as by using his own persona through a logotype as proof of quality and branding (Olsson 2015). Starting from a traditional narrative structure, the episodes create a series of expectations in the viewers that are promptly disregarded by a surprising conclusion, with twists in the plot that differ from more conventional crime plots. The originality of these stories lies precisely in the fact that often the ending does not coincide with the resolution of a murder but with the murder itself, undermining the very principles of the detective story and television crime. Starting in 1985, five years after the British director's death, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* will return to the NBC channel with some remakes of the episodes as well as new stories. This revival not only sets itself as an homage to a cult series, but it also stresses out an intrinsic property of the anthology form, which easily allows for revival practices in broader attempts to create a franchising process. This variegated constellation of crime dramas of the U.S. Network Era helps framing subsequent dynamics in terms of the evolution of the genre within television anthologies. We notably assist to the repurposing of the anthology as a space of experimentation, as well as of encounter between narrative material and imageries inherited from different media (literature, theatre, cinema). Even though it was for the most part abandoned during the Multi-Channel Transition, the core investigative narrative structure, beyond the specificities of each example, lends itself to effectively adapt to the anthological model, mainly built on the basis of stand-alone variations and recurring patterns.

4.2.2. Science Fiction

Another television genre that was initially developed in the anthological form with relevant cases is the science fiction genre, which will also find different paths in the serial scene at a later stage, expanding beyond the episodic boundaries. Together with horror anthologies, sci-fi anthologies are known to have survived during period of decline of the anthology form in U.S. television that marked the 1980s and 1990s, over the course of the Multi-Channel Transition. Even though they did not immediately reach the largest slice of audience, over time some of them have gained the position of cult series for several generations to come and are still remembered among the best examples of early U.S. television series, thus reaching the *status* of narrative canons. One of the first science-fiction series aired in the United States for the total duration of two seasons is *Tales of Tomorrow* (ABC, 1951-1953), with stand-alone plots focusing on supernatural themes and imaginary worlds. A true forerunner, together with *Out There* (CBS, 1951-1952), this series inaugurated a sci-fi formula that would influence U.S. television anthologies ahead. Just a few years later, the series *Science Fiction Theater* (Syn, 1955-1957) appeared, bringing an anthology of stories that explore the boundaries of science and human knowledge: aliens that use the moon as a nuclear dump, magic suitcases, ghost cars, synthetic compounds that lengthen human lives. Each episode is introduced by Truman Bradley, once again following the host structure, who starts from scientific explanations or recent discoveries in the realm of natural sciences to then guide the audience into the potentialities of science fiction to bridge the gap between real and fictional worlds.

Among the first sci-fi series broadcasted in prime time television was *Men into Space* (CBS, 1959-1960), barely fitting in the semi-anthological category but still anchored to an episo-

dic structure, dedicated to the space adventures of the astronaut Edward McCauley. The series was using one common strategy of sci-fi narratives, setting the stories in the near future and portraying an imaginary world as a mirror of contemporary society. Episode eleven was particularly visionary in the way it was announcing the first woman in space only few years before it actually happened.

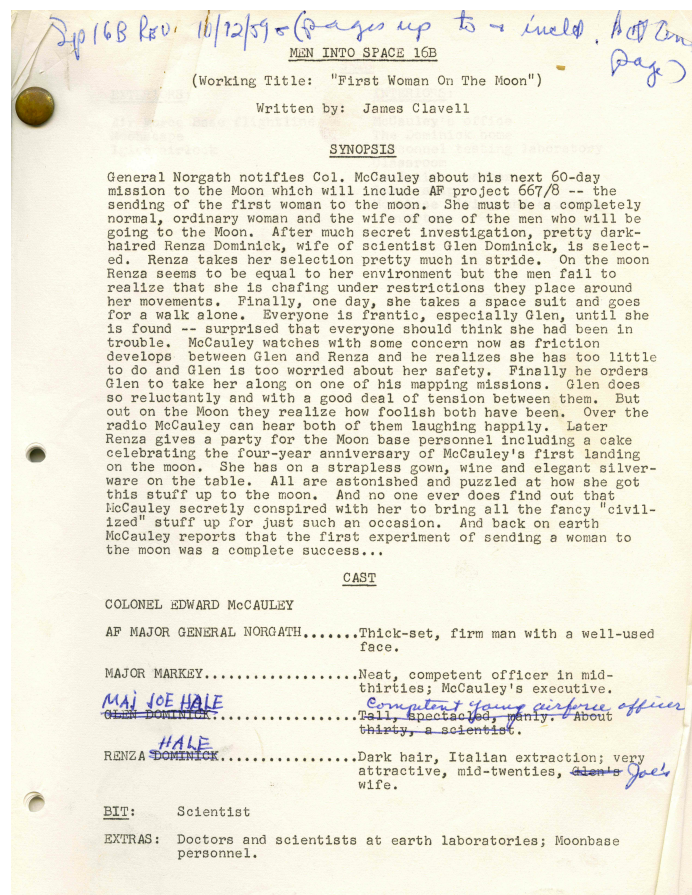


Figure 13. Script of "First Woman on the Moon", *Men Into Space*, s01e11

Cancelled after only one season, with its thirty-eight episodes the series was described as a “sixteen-hour film” (Westfahl 2012: 54), anticipating the ability of the anthology form to stretch the plot, scale it up or scale it down, depending on the production’s necessities and circumstances.

Adhering to a more traditional anthological scheme are two of the most significant anthology series in the science fiction genre: *The Twilight Zone* (CBS, 1959-1964), which will be revived three times making it an example of macro-anthology, and *The Outer Limits* (ABC, 1963-1965), which was less famous than its CBS counterpart and yet still originated one revival with the chance of a second reboot⁴¹. *The Twilight Zone* is undoubtedly one of the most prominent examples of anthological science fiction produced in the United States. As we read in the book *A Critical History of Television’s The Twilight Zone, 1959-1964* (Presnell and McGee 2015), “In the first two months, Serling and the CBS brass kept a watchful eye on the less-than-fabulous Nielsen ratings. It took a little while before its audience warmed up to it, but *The Twilight Zone* was now regularly winning its time slot. Thirty-five percent of television viewers tuned in to the sixth episode, ‘Escape Clause,’ which made it the highest rated Friday night show on November 6, 1959.” (*ivi*: 17)

With its controversial themes, *The Twilight Zone* met an unexpected success that lasted for the years to come, demonstrating its ability to create a dialogue with the society. As Rod Serling himself explained, “The Twilight Zone is about people.” (*ivi*: 16) And Buck Houghton, producer of the first three seasons, pointed out that: “There was no science hardware involved, no magic machines, no interstellar travel. It was about people with common problems who encountered

⁴¹ Otterson, Jow. “‘The Twilight Zone’ Rides TV Horror Anthology Wave.” *Variety*. Last modified April 1, 2019. Retrieved September 5, 2019. <https://variety.com/2019/tv/news/the-twilight-zone-horror-anthology-series-1203176674>.

fantasy. What would it be like if you could go back to the town where you were born and raised, and see that it's just the way it was at the time? That's something you can relate to very easily, and that was the key to the show's success." (*ivi*: 27) Houghton referred to episode five of the first season, *Walking Distance*, where a thirty-six-year-old man returns to his hometown, Home-wood, after being gone for years and finds the town haven't changed at all since he left. He will then discover that he is in 1934 and will meet himself as a child. This is one of the stories that make up the series, often composed by original episodes written by Rod Serling. However, the series also contained adaptations from short stories and novels by Ray Bradbury, true innovator of the sci-fi genre, Charles Beaumont, who also collaborated with Roger Corman, and Richard Matheson. Matheson's subject *Nightmare at 20,000 feet*, published for the first time in the collection of short stories *Alone by Night* (1961), became part of *The Twilight Zone* anthology as the third episode of the fifth season of the series. *Nightmare at 20,000 feet* was also included, a few years later, in the movie-tribute *The Twilight Zone: The Movie* (Joe Dante, John Landis, Steven Spielberg, George Miller, 1983).

The original series ended in 1964, only to return to television from 1985 to 1989 (CBS, 1985-1987; Syn, 1988-1989), with less success than the previous one, due to the tough spot in the programming time-slot - Saturday, 8 am P.M. - which was putting it against four main competitors among the *repertoire* of anthological series: *Amazing Stories* (NBC, 1985-1987), *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (NBC, 1985-1986; USA Network, 1987-1989), *Tales from the Darkside* (CBS, 1983-1988), *The Hitchhiker* (HBO, 1983-1991). While the first series was a success in terms not only of the originality of the narratives, but also when looking at the reception and the great audience feedback it had, becoming a cult and television classic, its first revival was not up to the

success of the original series. Even though the first season of the revival received a warm welcome by the audience, it was not able to meet the standards of the original series in the long run. Talking about the show's low ratings, the screenwriter staff writer Michael Cassutt stated: "I can see why people who were expecting *The Twilight Zone* were disappointed with it. [...] our show always seemed uneven to me. There were episodes perfectly in keeping with *The Twilight Zone* spirit, and then others that could have been from *The Outer Limits* or from anything." (Zicree 1992: 451)

Apart from the actual content, the second revival of the anthology series (CBS/First-Run Syndication, 1985-1989) was symptomatic of a fundamental change in the media landscape, as I discussed previously in this Chapter. Moreover, the first revival (CBS/First-Run Syndication, 1985-1989) had to deal with the Federal Communications Commission. Already in 1970 the FCC had imposed a series of rules to limit the oligopoly of the Big Three, by regulating agreements between networks and television producers. These were called the Financial Interest and Syndication Rules, otherwise known as fin-syn rules, which lasted until 1993, limiting the potential for revenues of CBS, among other networks. And even a second revival of *The Twilight Zone* turned out to be a failure and it was canceled after one season. Aired on UPN - the United Paramount Network (UPN) launched on January 16, 1995 -, the second revival lasted from 2002 to 2003 for a single season of 44 episodes. Each episode was structured within an hour format with two half-hour stories. Despite their lack of success, analyzing these two revivals is fundamental to understand the affordances of the anthology form in relation to media mutations and to its preferential connection with the science fiction genre. This is ultimately one of the reasons why, despite it

thriving in a mediascape that went towards long-narratives, *The Twilight Zone* was still revived a third time, as I will discuss, accounting for an intrinsic affordance of the anthology form.

Later productions of sci-fi series in the 1960s focused on the theme of alien creatures and the encounter with “the others”, developing running plots over the anthological structure. Examples of non-anthological sci-fi series that replaced the anthology model were *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* (ABC, 1964-1968), *The Invaders* (ABC, 1966-1968), not to mention the famous *Star Trek* saga (NBC, 1966-1969) and *Battlestar Galactica* (ABC, 1978-1979). However, examples of episodic structure survived in some examples of sci-fi, such as the anthology series *Night Gallery* (NBC, 1970-1973), a television collection of episodes written by Rod Serling as well as adaptations of literary classics Lovecraft, or, later on, *Amazing Stories* (NBC, 1985-1987), a high-budget anthological series created by Steven Spielberg, whose episodes are created by famous directors like Martin Scorsese, Joe Dante and Robert Zemeckis. *Amazing Stories* represents a tribute to earlier science-fiction anthology series that were making a coming back on the small screen.

Despite predominantly opting for more vast serial products, or else for high budget mini-series, even the cable channel HBO inserted the anthology form in its programming schedule for the Canadian-produced anthology series *The Ray Bradbury Theater* (HBO, 1985-1986; USA Network, 1988-1992), an interesting example of the anthology going cable, dedicated to Ray Bradbury and based on his stories. These cases of anthology series were selected to provide an understanding of the affordances of the anthology form in connection with the sci-fi genre. While crime was still attached to a strict genre-formula, thus generating semi-anthologies with repetitive patterns, such as police procedurals, sci-fi anthologies exploited the affordances of the anthology

form to experiment original narratives. In the words of Erik Barnouw, “Unlike the formula-bound episodic series, the anthology series emphasized diversity. The play was the thing. Actors were chosen to fit the play, not vice versa. The anthology series said to the writer: ‘Write us a play.’ There were no specifications as to mood, characters, plot, style, or locale — at least not at first.” (Barnouw 1990: 154) Horror anthologies will follow a similar path, highlighting this very use of the anthology form to constantly redefine narrative norms and standards, in synergy with parallel experiments of more famous long-running shows of the 1980s and 1990s.

4.2.3. *Horror*

Before transiting in television, in U.S. culture horror had found deep roots in the anthology form both in literature and cinema. Adopting the anthology framing, the anthology form therefore naturally emerged in televisual horror from previous predecessors. Although, as Matt Hills points out, “television has been treated as a para-site for horror; a cultural site that is assumed to be alien to the genre and a space where horror supposedly does not belong.” (Hills 2005: 111), it seems to me that this genre has found an interesting development in the television scene, with regard precisely to its formal positioning within anthology series. As I had already anticipated, horror anthologies in television turned out to be capable of enduring throughout the decline of this form during the Multi-Channel Transition and after. In addition to *Amazing Stories*, which collects both science fiction and thriller, horror stories, a number of other horror anthology series appeared over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, pre-announcing the return of the anthology form in the Post-Channel Era. Most of the examples of U.S. horror anthologies from the early phase

present similar features: a recurring introductory tagline and sometimes even a closing line help framing the collection of stories.

If *Night Gallery* had officially paved the way for horror television series in the 1970s, another less successful NBC production had followed the same direction: *Ghost Stories* (NBC, 1972-1973), which changed title into *Circle of Fear* after thirteen episodes. Following the competitive duplication in programming typically found in the Network Era, ABC relaunched with *The Sixth Sense* (ABC, 1972), a horror semi-anthology following the various attempts of Dr. Michael Rhodes and his assistant to solve mysterious cases of supernatural events. Despite these earlier examples, horror anthology series in U.S. television witnessed a more stable evolution in the 1980s, with series like *Darkroom* (ABC, 1981-1982), narrated by James Coburn. It is singular that the horror genre in anthology series found a moment of diffusion precisely during the years in which most of the Golden Age series had reached, on the contrary, a conclusion. An explanation might be that commercial television had to keep up with a more competitive environment. By inserting horror in their offer, ABC, CBS and NBC found a way to attract a new target. Even the cable channel HBO was able to create some appealing experiments of horror anthology series, with a product like *The Hitchhiker* (HBO, 1983-1988; USA Network, 1989-1991), a US-Canada-France co-production.

Another possible explanation for this late rise of the horror genre in the television within the anthology form might derive from the fact that, in those same years, a sub-genre of horror, known as splatter, was taking shape. Splatter had already arrived on the big screen with the successful films of directors like Wes Craven and George Romero. Wes Craven himself created the television series *Freddy's Nightmares* (Syn, 1988-1990), a spin-off of the film franchise inaugu-

rated by *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Wes Craven, 1984). Each episode, consisting of two stand-alone stories, was introduced by the actor Robert Englund in the guise of the protagonist of the film series, Freddy Krueger, who rarely appears in the episodes as a character actively involved in the plot. Another horror anthology series dating back to the second half of the 1980s is *Tales from the Darkside* (Syn, 1984-1988), created by George Romero, who, just a few years earlier, had directed the horror anthology film *Creepshow* (George A. Romero, 1982), written by Stephen King. Both *Tales from the Darkside* and *Creepshow* are tributes to horror anthology series found in comics, including *House of Mystery*, *House of Secrets*, *The Vault of Horror*, *The Haunt of Fear* and *Tales from the Crypt*, which will be turned into a television anthology.

As a review published on the *New York Times* pointed out:

But at least one form of horror is selling briskly these days. Just ask Home Box Office. Its *Tales from the Crypt* series is back with new episodes, and the ratings are humming. On one recent evening, immediately following the premiere showing of *Gremlins 2* on HBO, the cable network's audience for *Tales from the Crypt* jumped by 50 percent. That's the kind of performance that prompts Crypt-Keeper cackling among the pay-cable crowd.⁴²

This heritage of the horror anthology form helped canalize some additional efforts to revive the anthology form in the Post-Channel Era, before the official birth of the seasonal anthology form with series like *American Horror Story*. In 2005, Showtime Network, together with Starz Production, Industry Entertainment and other production companies, launched the series *Masters of Horror* (Showtime, 2005-2007), an anthology of stand-alone stories created by Mick Garris, who had already directed some episodes of *Freddy's Nightmares* along with the television miniseries *The Shining* (ABC, 1997) adapted for television by Stephen King himself, author of the

⁴² O'Connor, John J. "Review/Television; 'Tales From the Crypt' Raises Ratings for HBO." *The New York Times*. Last modified June 26, 1991. Retrieved September 5, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/06/26/news/review-television-tales-from-the-crypt-raises-ratings-for-hbo.html>.

eponymous novel. As the title of the series proclaims, *Masters of Horror* intends to be a tribute to the great masters of horror cinema. The episodes are conceived as one-hour movies, so that in some countries, including Italy, they were distributed in movie theatres, with episodes directed by Dario Argento (“Jenifer” - s01e04, “Pelts” - s02e06), Joe Dante (“Homecoming” - s01e06, “The Screwfly Solution” - s02e07), John Landis (“Deer Woman” - s01e07, “Family” - s02e02), John Carpenter (“Cigarette Burns” - s01e08, “Pro-Life” - s02e05).

“We were aiming for pure auteurism with *Masters of Horror*”, explains the executive producer and creator of the series Mick Garris:

The idea was not to have a producer’s fingerprints all over the place, but to have each director’s fingerprints all over his own episode. Joe Dante is very political, so his episode, ‘Homecoming’, is a political satire dressed as a zombie movie. Dario Argento is very sexual and twisted, so ‘Jenifer’, which is based on a 1970’s comic book, is very sexual and twisted. John Landis is known more for his comedy than his horror, so ‘Deer Woman’ is a very comedic take on a horror story.⁴³

The horror genre in the anthology form helped creating this multiplicity of authorial voices in television, both supporting a canon (the style and aesthetics of famous directors) and stressing on the necessity for differentiation. This was a particularly original idea, born at a time when most television series were created in a collective environment, with a group of screenwriters working on the same show in the writers room. With the aim to differentiate its products from free-to-air television, the premium context began going in search of a qualitative positioning of content, looking for something unique. By bringing the attention onto the directors, who in some cases also wrote the episode, Garris put his role as creator in the background, giving life to a product that is almost cinematographic. Tobe Hooper, one of the directors of the series, made fa-

⁴³ Stasio, Marilyn. “The Horror Tales You Haven’t Seen.” *The New York Times*. Last modified October 28, 2005. Retrieved September 5, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/28/arts/television/the-horror-tales-you-havent-seen.html>.

mous by the films *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) and *Poltergeist* (1982), and former director of the series *Amazing Stories* and *Freddy's Nightmares* said about this show: "This is the first director-driven television show that I personally know of."⁴⁴

Mick Garris then moved to NBC, signing an agreement with the network for thirteen episodes co-produced by Lionsgate Television and Industry Entertainment. Television horror thus returned to network television with *Fear Itself* (NBC, 2008). In an article appeared on the Hollywood Reporter, Bem Silverman, co-chairman of NBC Entertainment from 2007 to 2009, stated: "We're interested in trying new genres and having scripted programming that can work year-round in different time periods, [...] We're also trying to apply a different thinking in how we produce television through an alternative deal model."⁴⁵ Another attempt to re-use the anthology form in network television was *Masters of Science Fiction* (ABC, 2007), introduced by the astrophysicist Stephen Hawking and composed of a collection of episodes that can be almost considered as short-movies, much like in *Masters of Horror*. The result of these experiments with the anthology form will not be the best and certainly far behind other cases of long-running serials produced at the time. However, they represent some of the first symptoms of a moment of redefinition of the anthology form, which, born in network television, slowly moved to cable and it now seems to better fit a non-linear streaming environment, with more recent horror anthologies by notable directors like Steven Spielberg and Guillermo del Toro (see Chapter 5).

Overall, while it started with a normative intent, the anthological form in television could not escape the "short story potential of expressing the repress knowledge of a dominant

⁴⁴ *ibidem*.

⁴⁵ Andreeva, Nellie. "Lionsgate Instills 'Fear' into NBC." *The Hollywood Reporter*. Last modified September 25, 2007. Retrieved September 5, 2019. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/lionsgate-instills-fear-nbc-150860>.

culture” (Patea 2012: 7) Through the horror genre, U.S. episodic television anthologies produced during the Multi-Channel Transition started to adhere to the affordances of the anthological form, where the main structure of rotating or repeatedly regenerating characters and stories brought to the emergence of “scattered” characters, or else “outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society” (O’Connor 2011: 18). After all, the short story is a genre that “never had a hero” (*ivi*: 17). And this very affordance of the short story form inserted within an anthological form defined one of its uses in media cultures and its close relationship with certain genres that were telling the stories of people existing at the margin of the society. This makes horror television anthologies, by extension, a genre and a form that is as much brief as it is intense in terms of the epistemological outcomes and overall discursivity it brings up, entering the media industry as generators of both narrative canons and possible spaces for alternative knowledge, subverting the idea of “least objectionable programming” (Thompson 1997: 39) in the context of a broader “turn toward ‘relevance’.” (Gitlin 2000: 168)

4.3. Redefining the Anthology Form

4.3.1. Seasonal Anthology Form

Starting from the early 2000s, the U.S. television landscape experienced another mutation, which Amanda Lotz defined in 2007 as the beginning of the Post-Network Era, only to correct the term in Post-Channel Era a few years later, in 2016, to account for further changes in media environments.

Here, “post-network” acknowledges the break from a dominant network-era experience, in which viewers lacked much control over when and where to view and chose among a limited

selection of externally determined linear viewing options – in other words, programs available at a certain time on a certain channel. Such constraints are not part of the post-network television experience in which viewers now increasingly select what, when, and where to view from abundant options.

(Lotz 2007: 15)

Following the Multi-Channel Transition, U.S. television entered a moment of confluence of traditional network and cable technologies with digital technologies. The arrival of digital and technological innovations in television, such as the use of computers and other devices for the consumption of television content (iPod, PSP2, mobile phones, DVD players and digital video recorders), further diversified the offer and opened up to a variety of new practices. As Lotz explains, the outcomes of an increasing choice and control acquired by the viewers during the multi-channel transition can be seen in more evident convenience, customization, and community processes in the post-network television experience (Lotz 2007: 245). Elsewhere, Graeme Turner e Jinna Tay defined this phase in the television industry using the term Post-Broadcast Era, to mark a definitive separation of television from the broadcasting model:

It is evident that new media are re-contextualising television, changing what it is that television can do, for whom it can do it, and under what conditions. Consequently, where once broadcast television was everywhere the fundamental medium to which mass media theory had to address itself, now we need to address a much more complex mediascape where change has been vigorous but uneven, and where the local, national and regional media environments vary significantly.

(Turner and Tay 2009: 72)

In this scenario, “the plethora of programming opportunities is meaningless without a means for viewers to find relevant shows and organize their viewing, which necessitates finding technological and distribution solution for the problem.” (Lotz 2007: 245) The centrality of distribution in bridging the gap between production and consumption was always one of the main topics discussed in the television industry, since the idea of a network-system radiating through

the country up until cable and satellite technologies available on subscription. In 2002, thanks to the introduction of the Web 2.0, a new virtual environment was made available for querying and streaming online television content, with new platforms emerging for distribution of content. While the Network Era had consecrated television as “the cultural hearth around which a society shares media events” (Lotz 2007: 5), in the Post-Network Era, or better, Post-Channel Era (Lotz 2016) the audience is shattered into multiple segments, with a continuous access to media content and an ever-increasing flow of information. This represents an epochal change for television, which up until that moment was conceived in the materiality of a single medium, the television set. With new media entering the cultural industries, television was asked to redefine its very notion, to account for a multiplicity of screens that modified modes of production, distribution and reception of televisual content.

The dissemination of television content on multiple sources led to the creation of narrower targets, distributed among various media, in search of a personalized experience and niche products. In this opposition between mass and niche media, Lotz identified the core of U.S. television industry’s transition from a broadcasting model to a narrowcasting model (Lotz 2007: 199). It is at this stage that cable channels like HBO and Showtime, but also AMC, FX and Starz, finally stabilized their role in television by creating specific identities through large operations of television branding. Branded television (McCabe and Akass 2007: 88), with its aesthetic appeal, inaugurated the birth of hit series and stimulated the production of original and innovative serial products throughout the television scene. It is not a coincidence that a reformulation of the anthology form from an episodic to a seasonal structure first appeared on a cable channel, FX. FX is a satellite-based cable broadcaster established in 1994 under the name FX (Fox eXtended) owned

by Fox Entertainment, a division of 20th Century Fox. FX aspired to HBO's quality standards and immediately aimed at quality programming not only with standard reruns from the 1960s and 1970s, but also with original series.

Basic cable stands in a hybrid territory, where if, on the one hand, a subscription-based model prevents the total dependence on advertising, on the other hand parts of the financing still derives from the sale of advertising spaces. FX could not afford the same creative freedom as premium cable like HBO and Showtime. However, over the years, it has managed to define distinctive features as parts of its programming, which made it a unique and innovative channel. In an article published on *Variety*, the FX' Chief Executive Officer, John Landgraf, announced that the FX brand "is about audaciousness and innovation, and those adjectives are equally applicable to drama and comedy series."⁴⁶ Audacity and innovation are therefore FX trademarks.

Basic cable has [...] emerged in the past few years as a somewhat surprising venue for new iterations of quality TV. Who would have guessed 10 years ago that a basic cable channel like FX would be winning Emmy Awards and critical acclaim with original programming? [...] Midway between the freedoms of pay cable and the restrictions of broadcasting, basic cable channels like FX [...] have created new territories of television content.

(McCabe and Akass 2007: xviii-xix)

In 2008, FX launched the "There Is No Box" campaign - which would last until 2013 - and it officially prepared to compete with cable premium services, with an evident reference to HBO. The phrase alludes to the metaphor "thinking outside the box" and establishes the desire of FX to overcome the limits imposed by the television container, with its conventional forms, formulas and formats.

⁴⁶ Littleton, Cynthia. "More Laffs in FX Lineup." *Variety*. Last modified August 19, 2009. Retrieved September 6, 2019. <http://variety.com/2009/scene/markets-festivals/more-laffs-in-fx-lineup-1118007486>.

Fully adhering to this original view and following a need to innovate television content, in the recent years FX has specialized in the production of a hybrid serial form, that of seasonal anthology series or else anthology miniseries, marking an ongoing trend in the industry. It's 2011 when Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk, who had already worked together for *Glee* (Fox, 2009-2015), created and produced the first season of *American Horror Story* (FX, 2011-). Each story, which is no longer limited to the episodic structure, but it extends throughout the season, portrays different horror stories in the guise of several miniseries with a beginning, a central moment of plot development and a conclusion. Speaking of the series, Ryan Murphy stated in an interview published in the online magazine *Vulture*: "I would say for American Horror Story, I do like the freshness of that and I love that show because it's a miniseries; it's a beginning, middle, and end."⁴⁷ True progenitor of the modern U.S. seasonal anthology series, as we know it today, *American Horror Story* repeats some instances of anthology series from the Golden Age, while reinventing the form. For instance, the cast returns throughout the entire series, with film actors like Jessica Lange becoming the image of the show.

Between one season and another, the actors return, and in some cases even the characters themselves with different roles in the plot, in what can be defined as "internal crossovers" in the anthology system, as I discussed in paragraph 2.4.4. However, what defines its status of anthology is not the cast of recurrent actors, but a set of shared themes, as well as discursive, aesthetics, stylistic elements drifting between one season and another, which altogether define the organizing principle of the anthology. A paratextual element, the opening sequence of *American Horror Sto-*

⁴⁷ Martin, Denise. "Ryan Murphy Dissects Glee and American Horror Story, Addresses Fans and Critics." *Vulture*. Last modified May 22, 2012. Retrieved September 6, 2019. <http://www.vulture.com/2012/05/ryan-murphy-dissects-american-horror-story.html>.

ry also acts as a way of content branding and heralds its atmospheres. In each season the sequence is differentiated by images that characterize the single-story arc, while the tone, the editing and the background music remain unchanged. It can be read as an effective metaphor of the structure of the anthology itself. A similar experiment for its way of following a seasonal narrative arc, although closer to the semi-anthological scheme of the police procedural, arrived at FX two years after *American Horror Story*, with *The Bridge* (FX, 2013-2014), a remake of the Scandinavian format *Bron/Broen* (SVT1, 2011-), co-produced by Denmark and Sweden.

FX then continued the anthology miniseries' legacy with another show, *Fargo* (FX, 2014-), an anthology in the strict sense of the term, based on the eponymous film by Joel and Ethan Coen released in 1996. The series presents many elements in common with the film, starting from the opening, with the quote "This is a true story", but also in the setting and the humorous style. Since these first seasonal anthologies, FX produced *American Crime Story* (FX, 2016-), *Feud* (FX, 2017-), *Trust* (FX, 2018-) and the basic cable channel has recently announced a televisual adaptation of the short story collection *Her Body and Other Parties*, in what is expected to be feminist horror⁴⁸. As the president of original programming for FX Networks and FX Prods, Eric Schrier, declared, the advantages of producing stories with a seasonal arc lies in the fact that "You have to map your brand of a show like 'Fargo,' but you don't have to necessarily produce it on a year-over-year basis if you can follow the creative. [...] One of the tenets of our success is to follow the creative rather than letting the business drive the creative. It's about

⁴⁸ Stephen, Bijan. "FX to Adapt Feminist Horror Collection Her Body and Other Parties." *The Verge*. Last modified October 16, 2018. Retrieved September 6, 2019. <https://www.theverge.com/2018/10/16/17983820/fx-her-body-other-parties-adaptation-feminist-horror-collection>.

letting the creative drive the business and figuring out how to hold the business around that.”⁴⁹

This creative strategy favored alternative business model and FX ultimately started including into its brand value a kind of content that was not limited to long-running series.

Following this lead, several productions based on the seasonal anthology series model have been developed. Mapping anthology series, both seasonal and episodic, that have appeared in recent years shows interesting patterns. Here, I will focus on anthologies released on cable and network channels, to then dedicate a separate section to internet-distributed anthologies as products inserted into the non-linear dynamics of online platforms, thus requiring a more specific analysis. The first channel to understand the potentialities of the model launched by FX was the premium cable HBO. In 2014, HBO responded to FX with the crime anthology series *True Detective*, which preceded *Fargo* of just a few months. Entirely written by Nic Pizzolatto, the first season of the series starred the famous film actors Matthew McConaughey and Woody Harrelson, which later on became executive producers of the series, proving that the anthology business model can generate a self-sustainable creative economy.

By investing on this series, HBO was claiming its leadership in the use of the miniseries form. “In addition to the pricey series commitment – episodes are running in the \$4 million to \$4.5 million range, once tax incentives factor in – HBO was willing to make a big bet on Pizzolatto. According to multiple sources, the network offered the barely known writer a two-year overall deal at nearly \$1 million a year. And like that, the Louisiana novelist became a Hollywood

⁴⁹ Dowling, Amber. “From ‘The Twilight Zone’ to ‘Modern Love,’ TV Anthologies Move Toward Episode-Long Stories.” *Variety*. Last modified May 30, 2019. Retrieved September 6, 2019. <https://variety.com/2019/tv/features/anthology-series-evolution-twilight-zone-true-detective-modern-love-1203227541>.

showrunner.”⁵⁰ Another important presence behind the series is the director Cary Fukunaga, who, with his large contribution to the set the vision for the first season, allowed the creation of a truly cinematographic televisual product. Fukunaga explained: “Before I even started working on *True Detective*, I made a point of telling Nic Pizzolatto, the creator, that one of my priorities as director was to defend craft despite the constraints on my time and budget. In every episode I wanted to at least try to find specific moments in which you could treat the visual side of the medium with the same importance as we were treating the dialogue.”⁵¹ After the first season’s success, HBO continued its bet on *True Detective*, which was renewed into a second and third season, while also including in its offer other anthology series like the web series *High Maintenance* (Vimeo, 2012-2015; HBO 2016-), previously on Vimeo, and the HBO original *Room 104* (HBO, 2017-), by the Duplass Brothers.

The anthology fever spread on other cable channels as well. A television adaptation of *Scream* appeared on MTV in 2015 and the series *Dirk Gently’s Holistic Detective Agency* was produced by BBC America in 2016, both attracting the attention of Netflix, which acquired them for International distribution. Syfy released *Channel Zero* (2016-) and soon after it started considering a revival of Rod Serling’s *Night Gallery*⁵², announced in December 2018. Other cable joined the race in 2018 with the anthology series *Genius* (National Geographic, 2017-), *Unsolved*

⁵⁰ Rose, Lacey. “‘True Detective’s’ Nic Pizzolatto on Season 2, ‘Stupid Criticism’ and Rumors of On-Set Drama.” *The Hollywood Reporter*. Last modified August 6, 2014. Retrieved September 6, 2019. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/true-detectives-nic-pizzolatto-season-723406>.

⁵¹ Fukunaga, Cary. “How we got the shot: Cary Fukunaga on *True Detective*’s tracking shot.” *The Guardian*, Last modified March 17, 2014. Retrieved September 6, 2019. <http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/tvandradioblog/2014/mar/17/true-detective-cary-fukunaga-tracking-shot>.

⁵² Andreeva, Nellie. “‘Night Gallery’: Reimagining Of Rod Serling’s Anthology Series In Works At Syfy From Jeff Davis & David Janollari.” *Deadline*. Last modified December 6, 2018. Retrieved September 6, 2019. <https://deadline.com/2018/12/night-gallery-reimagining-of-rod-serlings-anthology-series-in-works-at-syfy-from-jeff-davis-david-janollari-1202514957>.

(USA Network, 2018-), *The Terror* (AMC, 2018-), *Bobcat Goldthwait's Misfits & Monsters* (TruTV, 2018-), *Shorten* (AMC, 2019-). That same year, Bravo adapted the radio podcast *Dirty John* for a television series by the same name using the seasonal anthology formula. The series was then moved to U.S.A. Network, owned by NBC Universal, for the second season, and distributed outside of the United States by Netflix. As I will show, these examples of anthology series first appeared on network and cable channels often lead to distribution agreements with over-the-top platforms like Netflix, Hulu or Amazon Video.

Attempts of re-inserting the anthology form on network television were made but ended up not being very successful: the seasonal anthology form first tried to land on ABC with the series *American Crime* (2015-2017) and then on Fox with *Scream Queens* (2015-2016), both cancelled after two or three seasons. NBC opted for another strategy, by creating an anthology based on the *Law & Order* franchise, *Law & Order True Crime* (NBC, 2017), which was not officially cancelled but it is not set to come back for another season either⁵³. Despite the lack of success of the anthology form on commercial television, further anthological productions are expected on NBC, with a horror anthology by the possible title of *Blumhouse Presents*⁵⁴, and on The CW, with the female-driven *Black Rose Anthology*, produced, written and directed by women⁵⁵, and *Two Sentence Horror Stories*. On the contrary, the anthology form turned out to be a relatively

⁵³ Porter, Rick. “‘Law & Order True Crime’ Isn’t Canceled, but It’s Also Not Coming Back next Season.” *TV By The Numbers*. Last modified May 14, 2018. Retrieved September 6, 2019. <https://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com/more-tv-news/law-order-true-crime-isnt-canceled-but-its-also-not-coming-back-next-season>.

⁵⁴ Andreeva, Nellie. “NBC Developing Horror Drama ‘Cul-De-Sac’ As Part Of Possible ‘Blumhouse Presents’ Franchise.” *Deadline*. Last modified May 31, 2018. retrieved September 6, 2019. <https://deadline.com/2018/05/nbc-developing-drama-cul-de-sac-blumhouse-television-1202399886>.

⁵⁵ Andreeva, Nellie. “‘Black Rose Anthology’ Horror Series Written & Directed By Women In Works At The CW With Drew Barrymore Producing.” *Deadline*. Last modified August 31, 2017. Retrieved September 6, 2019. <https://deadline.com/2017/08/black-rose-horror-anthology-series-written-directed-women-cw-drew-barrymore-scream-alumna-1202158659>.

good fit for internet-distributed television, which is investing more and more in anthological content.

4.3.2. *Internet-distributed Television*

In 2014, the Observatorio Latinoamericano de Regulaciòn Medios y Convergencia (OBSERVACOM) published the article “United States: The Instinctive Illusion of Media Diversity”, problematizing the diffused idea of an existing diversity across contemporary media as an illusory belief, not compatible with an industry having such a high concentration of power in just a few major players. In particular, “one of the questions that must be addressed [...] is why concentration continues to be an important issue in today’s seemingly disperse and chaotic media ecology. [...] The current situation of the U.S. media industry reveals inequity under the illusion of media diversity.”⁵⁶ It is true that, over the course of the Multi-Channel Transition, the U.S. television industry had upgraded to a more composite environment, where a restricted variety of companies controlled a high percentage of the offerings. The article points at the fact that in the Post-Channel Era “this percentage currently is dominated by six mega-corporations: CBS, Comcast, Disney, General Electric, News Corporation and Viacom.”⁵⁷ As of today, the U.S. media industry is managed for the most part by large media conglomerates, which combine production, distribution and other activities in a single corporation, such as in the case of AT&T/Time Warner or Comcast.

What contributed to reverse the multi-channel trend in favor of the return to an oligopolistic structure was the introduction in the U.S. media landscape of over-the-top technologies, which

⁵⁶ “United States: The Instinctive Illusion of Media Diversity.” *Observacom*. Last modified November 26, 2014. Retrieved September 6, 2019. <https://www.observacom.org/united-states-the-instinctive-illusion-of-media-diversity>.

⁵⁷ *ibidem*.

threatened the pre-existing industrial scenario and fostered a phase of reassessment, with an increase in processes of policy-making and merging. In other words, “The media landscape used to be straightforward: Content companies - studios - made stuff - TV shows and movies - and sold it to pay TV distributors, who sold it to consumers. Now things are up for grabs: Netflix buys stuff from the studios, but it’s making its own stuff, too, and it’s selling it directly to consumers. That’s one of the reasons older media companies are trying to compete by consolidating.”⁵⁸ While the narrative on television suggests that we are in a moment of great diversity of content and increasing fragmentation of audiences, a quick look at the U.S. mediascape will tell us otherwise (see fig. 14). However, it is important to note that this scenario is changing, and that further mutations in the industry might lead to another moment of re-assessment.

⁵⁸ Molla, Rani. “Here’s Who Owns Everything in the Media Today.” *Vox*. Last modified January 23, 2018. Retrieved September 6, 2019. <https://www.vox.com/2018/1/23/16905844/media-landscape-verizon-amazon-comcast-disney-fox-relationships-chart>.

Media landscape

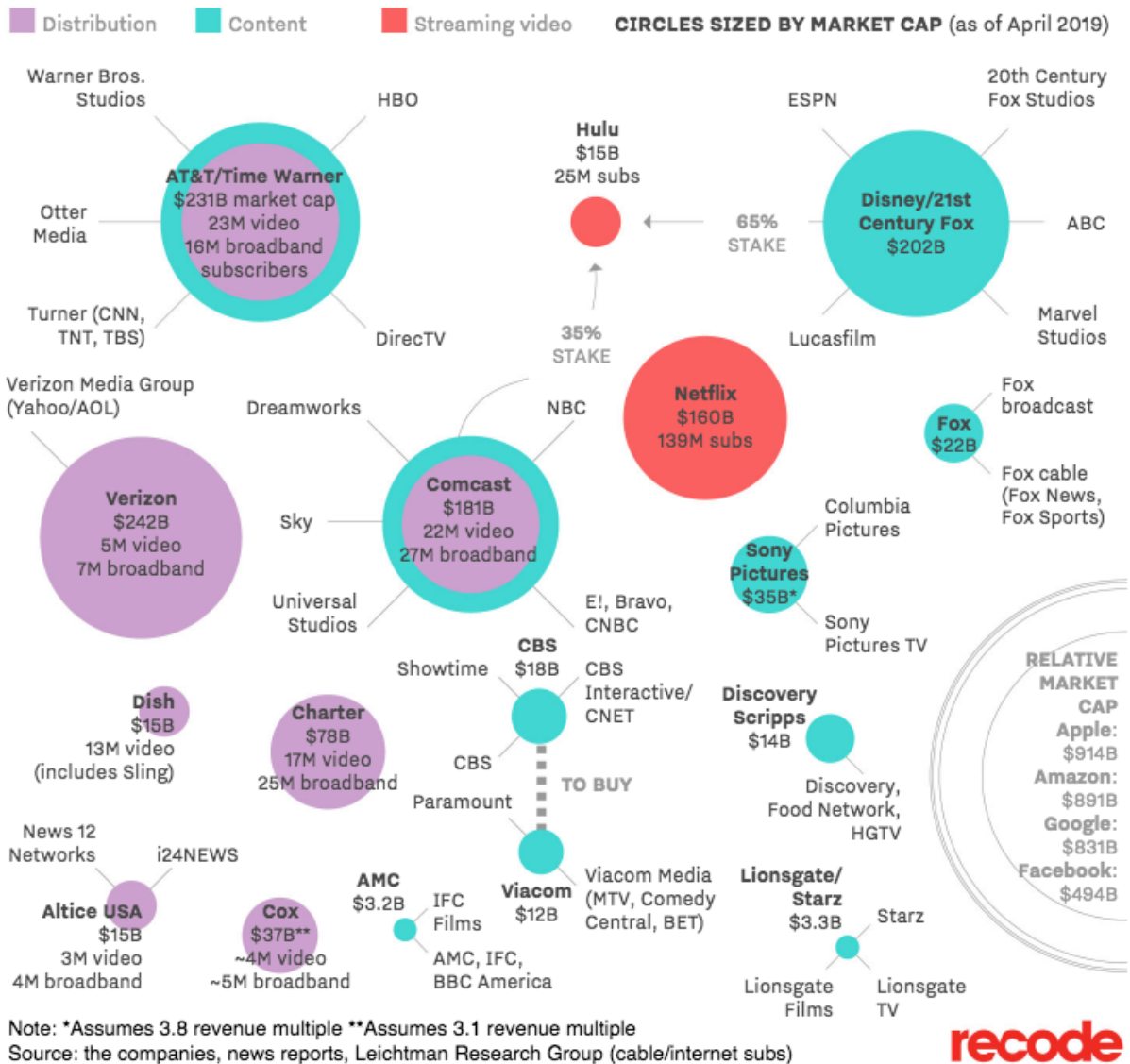


Fig. 14. Infographics of U.S. media landscape as of June 2019. Source: <https://www.vox.com/2018/1/23/16905844/media-landscape-verizon-amazon-comcast-disney-fox-relationships-chart>.

What is evident is that internet-distributed television is reconfiguring the U.S. media industry and introducing new practices of distribution of content. Such a mutating scenario demands an understanding not only of narrative and cultural forms, but also of the media and platform ecology that lies behind dynamics of non-linear distribution in a digital economy. I will the-

refore consider U.S. internet-distributed television at large, as composed not only of streaming giants like Netflix and Amazon, but also of streaming services attached to cable channels and to commercial networks. In this sense, internet-distributed television will be observed here as both an additional competitor in the industry and as an alternative mode of producing, distributing and consuming television content. Being a multi-faceted entity, streaming is to be understood as a technology and infrastructure, as a socio-cultural practice, as a media industry apparatus, as a platform and repository.

As a technology and infrastructure, streaming was available in telecommunications a few years after the invention of the world wide web, dating 1989. Much like any other media technologies and infrastructures, from radio transmitters to satellite, it took a while before streaming reached a level of quality and efficiency able to sustain mass distribution. When streaming services like Google Video, Dailymotion, YouTube first appeared in 2005, broadband penetration in the United States was still not so widespread as it is today, despite U.S. leading position in the global internet scape. A 2006 Pew study shows that the percentage of adult Americans with high-speed connection at home was still lower than 50%⁵⁹. By the end of the 2000s, when the streaming platforms Amazon Unbox (2006) and Netflix (2007) became popular, broadband penetration was registering a rapid growth, which would led the U.S. to reach in a ten-year span (2007-2017) one of the highest broadband internet penetration rates worldwide⁶⁰. While digital

⁵⁹ Horrigan, John B. "Part 1. Broadband Adoption in the United States." *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech (blog)*. Last modified May 28, 2006. retrieved September 6, 2019. <https://www.pewinternet.org/2006/05/28/part-1-broadband-adoption-in-the-united-states>.

⁶⁰ "Internet Penetration Rates Are High in North America, Europe and Parts of the Asia-Pacific." *Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project (blog)*. Last modified June 14, 2018. Retrieved September 6, 2019. https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2018/06/19/social-media-use-continues-to-rise-in-developing-countries-but-plateaus-across-developed-ones/pg_2018-06-19_global-tech_0-01.

divide is still an issue in many countries, overtime, thanks to the spread of internet adoption and access, streaming services were able to create an advanced transnational network with a global reach, paving the way for a new geography of communication infrastructures and opening up windows for circulation of content, making it efficient, cost effective and reducing the time of media distribution.

Together with new media technologies, the internet created a space not only for streaming, but also for digitization, storage, organization of content and data collection. A wide range of media streaming formats was introduced, offering a variety of delivering and viewing options and allowing to stream content on computers and mobile supports. Streaming content does in fact involve two components: a software and a hardware component. On the one hand, the software component of internet-distributed television consists of a web of infrastructures (browsers, protocols, data compression algorithms, codecs and so forth) that allow and facilitate the transmission of content. To this point, the media scholar Ramon Lobato explains that “Streaming platforms, as ‘over-the-top’ video delivery services, are naturally reliant on telecommunications infrastructure – the vast networks of fibre and coaxial cable, copper telephone wires, and satellite data links that form the internet’s underlying foundation.” (Warf 2017: 180) On the other hand, the hardware component is made of a set of technologies that can host such content - namely, computers, laptops, tablets, smartphones, but also television interfaces like Chromecast, or Amazon FireTV.

As a socio-cultural practice, “from the audience perspective, streaming is very much an extension of the television experience.” (*ivi*: 178) Even before streaming platforms were born and consolidated in the media industry, illegal streaming was affecting the circulation of television content, so much so that by the time digital distribution was put in place in contemporary cultural

industries, practices of streaming content were already diffused among audiences as non-institutionalized ways of consuming television content online. Legal streaming in the form of video-on-demand services created an institutional structure for this type of illegal consumption, so that, in the end, what really drove the official shift to non-linear television was not just a technological and socio-cultural process, but more importantly an industrial one. The constitution of an industry and a legal economy officially acknowledged the potential of streaming to be a pervasive technology and a ubiquitous social practice.

The introduction of streaming services turned internet-distributed television into a media industry apparatus, by competing with a pre-existent institutional, industrial, political and economic system. With their predominant position, Netflix and Amazon in particular have conquered a place in the contemporary U.S. media oligopoly (see fig. 14), by producing original content. Considering the most influential U.S. subscription-based video-on-demand services, the over-the-top industrial ecosystem appears like an evolving system functioning by itself, without the help of major media conglomerates. Figure 15 ultimately shows that television has changed consistently and even old networks are adapting in order to offer both a linear and a non-linear viewing experience. It is now evident that the U.S. television industry is traversing a second disruption, a shifting in the paradigm (Lotz 2016). If, on the one hand, cable and network channels reacted to over-the-top services by increasing merging and acquisition activities, in order to create an oligopolistic environment made of media conglomerates, on the other had, they activated a mirroring effect and started offering themselves platforms for non-linear distribution of content, such as HBO Now (HBO) or CBS All Access (CBS).

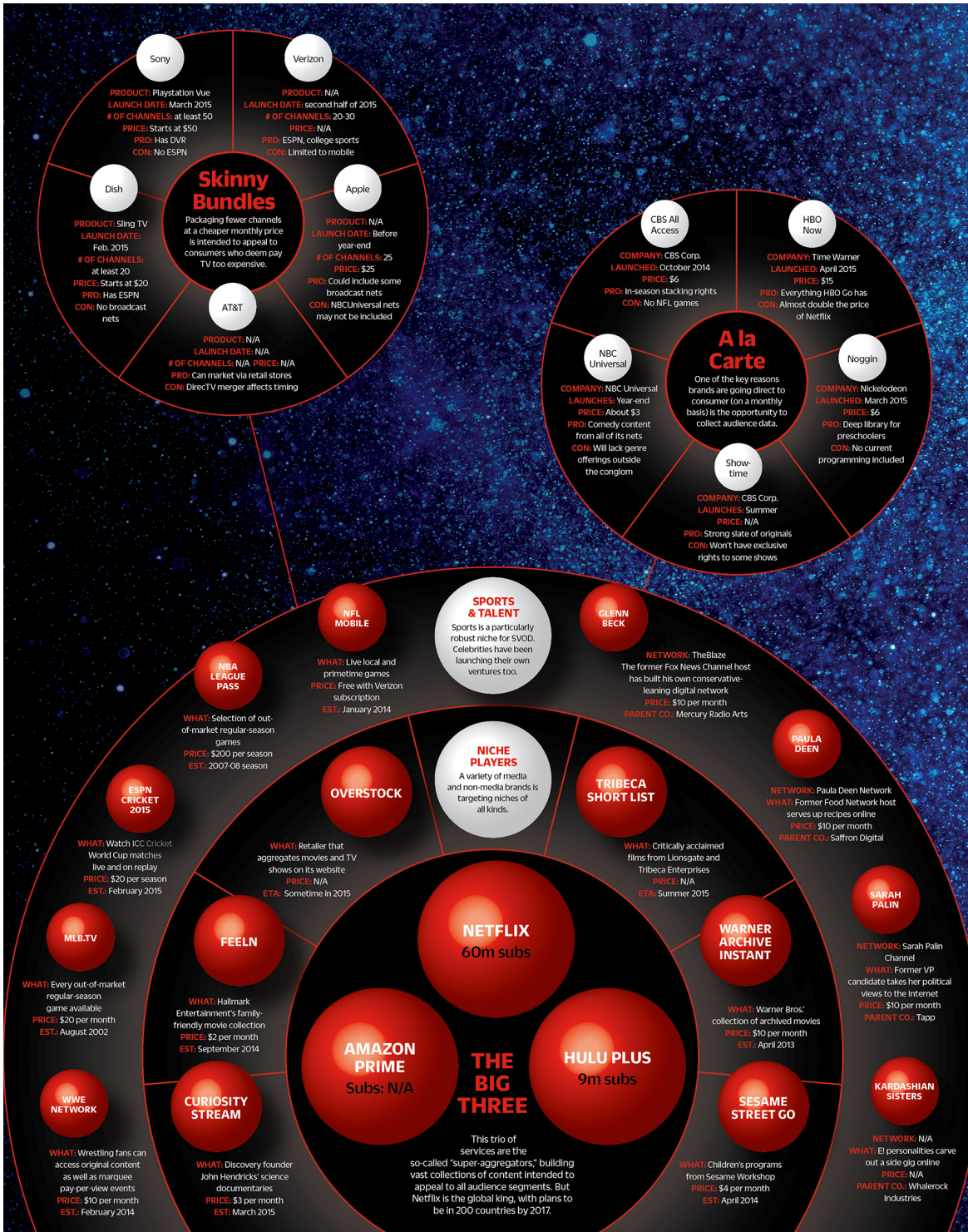


Figure 15. The OTT View-niverse: A Map of the New Video Ecosystem as of 2015.⁶¹

⁶¹ As of 2019, the OTT View-niverse has changed, with new players entering the market, such as Apple TV+, and other competitors shutting down the service, such as Warner Archive Instant. - Wallenstein, Andrew. "The OTT View-Niverse: A Map of the New Video Ecosystem." *Variety*. Last modified April 29, 2015. Retrieved September 18, 2019. <https://variety.com/2015/digital/news/ott-map-video-ecosystem-1201480930>.

Beyond power mechanisms that are more strictly tied to the industry structure, streaming television should be therefore understood as organized into platforms operating at the intersection between infrastructure and technology (software and hardware components), between socio-cultural and industrial movements. Discussing non-linear television in terms of platforms selling content is perhaps the most useful framework to understand the positioning of the anthology form in internet-distributed television. The return of the anthology form and its redefinition coincided in fact with the introduction of over-the-top services in the mediascape and it happened to find in this technological, infrastructural, socio-cultural and industrial scenario a fertile ground. By offering branded content and a reproducible narrative template, the anthology form turned out to be an interesting model both in commercial terms, as a business model for the economy of the platform, and in terms of platform ecology, as a contribution to the modular information architecture (Baldwin and Woodard 2009).

4.3.3. *Forms and Platforms*⁶²

In an interview at the BFI London Film Festival in 2016, Charlie Brooker, writer of the series *Black Mirror*, acquired by Netflix in 2015, explained, “I think that anthology shows like this have been waiting for a platform like Netflix or streaming services in general to come along [...] On Netflix, we can put the whole thing up and it’s like a short story collection, or an album, or tickets to a film festival.”⁶³ In very simple words, he summed up the core idea of streaming platforms: a library of interrelated content in the guise of collections, albums, or else anthologies.

⁶² For an extensive analysis of the complex relation between forms and platforms in contemporary television see Boni, Marta (ed.), forthcoming, *Formes et Plateformes de la Télévision à l’ère du numérique*. Rennes: PUR.

⁶³ See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HVb2qxhDkrc>.

He also explains that, since anthology series are not designed to have narrative continuity or moments of cliffhanger, they strived to survive in a television industry that was based on audience measurement systems as indicators of a series' success. Streaming platforms abandoned the traditional Nielsen ratings points/share model and welcomed new ways for measuring viewership's habits and demographic based on the analysis of data collected on the platform itself. In this context, the focus on creating valuable and appealing content able to catch users' attention became one of the main strategies adopted by subscription-based video-on-demand services. More specifically, "In the era of TVIII, characterised by deregulation, multimedia conglomeration, expansion and increased competition, branding has emerged as a central industrial practice." (Johnson 2007: 5) While the anthology form seems to have lost grip on commercial television, on the contrary, it is slowly becoming a key strategy for both cable and over-the-top providers, as a way of selling branded content and defining an identity (Wayne 2017). Moreover, as I argue here, what seems to be an increasing trend to insert anthology series in the offer of streaming services is closely related to the very structure of digital platforms.

Recalling Levine, in order to understand what platforms are we need to understand what platforms do, their affordances. Joss Hands approached platform studies by discussing the term "platformativity" to include a variety of virtual social spaces and practices.

'Platform' is a useful term because it is a broad enough category to capture a number of distinct phenomena, such as social networking, the shift from desktop to tablet computing, smart phone and 'app'-based interfaces as well as the increasing dominance of centralised cloud-based computing. The term is also specific enough to indicate the capturing of digital life in an enclosed, commercialized and managed realm.

(Hands *et al.* 2013: 1)

The term digital platform can be used to refer to either the interface of social networks like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or the online storage space of cloud services like Dropbox, Google Drive, iCloud or any other virtual environment presenting a “computing system” (Bogost and Montfort 2009), “an infrastructure that supports the design and use of particular applications.” (Gillespie 2010: 349) A platform is indeed computational and yet it also responds to a techno-cultural dimension and logic (Langlois *et al.* 2009).

This is especially true if we think of platforms as repositories of content. Streaming platforms perfectly fit in this metaphor, as they are conceived for distributing content and feed into a stream of data. Such a concept is particularly relevant here, since the anthology form appears as a way of ordering and clustering content at the source, before the process of consumption activates additional, algorithmic-driven streams of content. A terminology brought about by computer science as part of the study on internet of things, a stream is to be intended as “a sequence of data elements that are made available to the processing system over time.” (Buyya and Dastjerdi 2016: 148) In this sense, the process of streaming media on online platforms is an industrial practice that involves several “technical” factors as far as economies of scale: the establishment of a transnational geography of the internet (Warf 2012), the definition of back-end/front-end dynamics and content delivery service management (Lobato 2019), an overall reconfiguration of the global value chain and of the flow of television content (Re 2017), along with a radical transformation of the user experience. Before thinking about the content itself and the narrative/cultural forms it takes, we therefore need to understand how a streaming platform works.

Economic theory provides an initial framework to understand the functioning of streaming media platforms, by considering them as digital markets relying on economies of scale,

where an increase in the content will lead to a decrease in the average cost. In the case of streaming services with a transnational reach, like Netflix or Amazon, webcasting and scaling dynamics entail a global geography of content circulation, which demands a certain technological structure for distribution. A streaming platform like Netflix, for example, can be notably dissected into three parts: the client (front end, user interface), the backend (clouds, data centers), and the content delivery network. When the client computer (and the user) needs to access content, it will do so through the interface provided by the platform, which is the primary gateway available to the user to stream television content. The incoming content is provided by a backend, a cloud computing service like Amazon Web Services (AWS), in the case of Netflix and Hulu⁶⁴, where the library's content is stored. When the user press play, the content is made ready to stream by a content delivery network (CDN), such as Open Connect⁶⁵ for Netflix, via a transcoding process that make the video format - previously encoded in the cloud - readable. After the user has subscribed and watched the video, the data relative to each user's profile and activity is stored on a scalable distributed database (Netflix adopted DynamoDB and Cassandra for storing data), which is then used by the streaming service to process information and analyze the data.

To go back to the concept of economy of scale, such a complex process behind internet-distributed television finds more sense in terms of revenues as the network of distribution spreads:

Consider the digital media company Netflix. The business has been in existence for nearly twenty years, but in recent times, they have scaled to offer 5,000 titles, serve 130 million subscribers and generate \$11 billion annual revenue. Netflix posted profit of \$558m in 2017. One

⁶⁴ "Hulu Case Study - Amazon Web Services." *Amazon Web Services Blog*. Accessed September 15, 2019. <https://aws.amazon.com/solutions/case-studies/hulu>.

⁶⁵ See: <https://openconnect.netflix.com/en>.

reason for this is a technical economy of scale. Netflix can afford to invest heavily in hugely expensive server-side technologies capable of streaming content to millions of users. This includes a joint venture with Amazon Web Services (AWS) along with Open-Connect, the company's own proprietary content delivery network. The unit cost of supplying the product falls as the network expands.⁶⁶

As more and more content is made available on streaming platforms, the operational functioning of the interface becomes fundamental for guaranteeing the user experience, which still drives revenues with a system based on subscriptions. What I am interested in is therefore the way the flow or stream of content is reconfigured in order to *expose* specific televisual products to the user.

One way content can be “exposed” to the user is through algorithmic recommendation. Algorithmic recommendation systems found on streaming platforms are based on a preliminary process of tagging content's metadata, either manually or via automated information processing, followed by a process of selection of content into streams, which is entirely machine-driven on the basis of personal viewing history, five-star-system user ratings and data regarding other users' activity⁶⁷. As Lotz explains, “Personalized queues in combination with recommendation algorithms [are] valuable tools for navigating an environment of post-network programming abundance.” (Lotz 2014: 79, my parenthesis) Another, less pervasive and self-regulatory way of exposing content, I argue here, can be accomplished through models of organization that are designed at the time of production of the content itself, such as in the case of the anthological model. The anthology operates as an aggregator of content, by generating a space for collecting episodes or

⁶⁶ “Economies of Scale and Profits.” *Tutor2u*. Retrieved September 12, 2019. <https://www.tutor2u.net/economics/reference/economies-of-scale-and-profits>.

⁶⁷ “Netflix Recommendations: Beyond the 5 Stars (Part 1).” *Medium - Netflix Technology Blog*. Last modified April 18, 2017. Retrieved September 12, 2019. <https://medium.com/netflix-techblog/netflix-recommendations-beyond-the-5-stars-part-1-55838468f429>.

seasons based on different stories, which can be piled up potentially *ad infinitum* in the same anthological group or stream.

This is something that we observe in a similar way in processes of franchising, transmedia storytelling and other mechanisms of expansion of serial narrative ecosystems through spin-offs, crossovers, sequels or prequels. These processes, however, exist for the most part in financial operations of revival that are closely dependent on the audience feedback or on grassroots practices, usually activated after a first slice of the content is released. On the contrary, the anthology form in television provides a production and viewing framework most commonly generated *a priori*. It declares the creation of a group, of a cluster of content. An anthology is a statement of intent, something that might sound like this: I now create the group of *dystopic narratives set in the near future about the impacts of technologies on human relationships*. And instead of keeping this long reference, I will simply call it Black Mirror. By doing so, I initiated a list of content. We can think of a drawer or a closet, where one puts all the objects fitting into that description, instead of having to open the door onto a room of sparse objects with different colors and shapes (genres and forms). So instead of saying that I want to watch a “British TV show”, half-way between “thriller”, “drama”, “sci-fi & fantasy”, that is both “mind-bending” and “chilling”, as it is categorized on Netflix, I will simply query “Black Mirror”.

In the platform ecosystem, the anthology form contributes to overcome the limits of indexing and tagging, in a moment when content is in fact more and more diversified, with much less rigidity in the production of genre-formulas and a variety of different serial narratives that are not easy to encapsulate into sharp categories. The anthology model proves to be useful in the platform ecology to optimize the manual process of tagging metadata: once the anthology is tag-

ged, each episode or season is likely to return with the same metadata, by exploiting a structural recursivity that is inherent to the anthological model. As Netflix proposes thousands of different genres⁶⁸, commissioning anthology content easy to sort out into clusters contributes to create: *i)* a collective experience by generating a homogenous flow that can be followed from everyone more or less in the same way - since it is not personalized in individual streams -, and *ii)* a canon, or a brand created under an umbrella title - meaning, everyone knows what to expect when people discuss an episode of an anthology like *Chef's Table*, even if they didn't watch that same episode.

If we do some web scraping, anthological content seems to be identified even by streaming platforms like Netflix or YouTube as a collection-type, showing that the platform ecosystem is aware of the forms it contains.⁶⁹ One might argue that in a platform dynamic where “75% of what people watch is from some sort of recommendation”⁷⁰, even long-running shows can be organized into profitable collections in the broader sense of the term. I do not argue otherwise. Nevertheless, the anthology series, although shorter by nature than long-running shows, combines the potentiality for a continuous rebooting (and therefore, more content) with a safer production model. I am not advocating that anthology series are necessarily more successful in terms of revenues in today's mediascape, but they certainly seem appealing to over-the-top services in the context of a long-term platform logic and economy. In terms of production, the anthology de-

⁶⁸ Lilly, Chris. “Netflix Genre List: 23,458 More Secret Genres Not in Other Lists.” *Finder*. Retrieved September 12, 2019. <https://www.finder.com/uk/netflix/genre-list>.

⁶⁹ Even without accessing HTML source code of the web page related to an anthology series (such as this view-source:https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=weird+city+) and analyzing the code in search of keywords like “collection”, it is possible to see the collection typology in the http itself, such as in https://www.netflix.com/search?q=american%20crime%20story&suggestionId=3066731_collection and https://www.netflix.com/search?q=black%20mirror&suggestionId=2939970_collection [bold mine]*.

*these queries were run from Italy.

⁷⁰ “Netflix Recommendations: Beyond the 5 Stars (Part 1).” *Medium - Netflix Technology Blog*. Last modified April 18, 2017. Retrieved September 12, 2019. <https://medium.com/netflix-techblog/netflix-recommendations-beyond-the-5-stars-part-1-55838468f429>.

mands lower financial risks, by investing on a content that can be changed and adapted to viewers' taste, but also monitored, making it, to some extent, more predictable.

Furthermore, in terms of distribution and reception, the anthology form allows a more customizable consumption speed, in a moment when viewers' habits are, once again, in the process of readapting to a mutating mediascape - with practices of long-viewing (binge-watching), fast-viewing (binge-racing), multitask-viewing (carrying out secondary activities while watching), non-sequential-viewing (watching episodes out-of-order). The metaphor of a scalable database as applied to the anthology form finds evidence precisely in the fact that anthology series can be consumed on the platform in a modular way: as the narrative arc can spread outside of the single episode, while still fitting into shorter seasons and even shorter episodes, in anthology series blocks of content can be easily identified, thus improving the user experience. When the televisual content produced and made available overcomes viewers' capacity to consume it and absorb it, or even to simply make a choice on what to watch, the industry needs to rethink its strategy.

Anthology series positioned themselves in this context as attempts to find alternative strategies for content production that better fit the new distribution system. Having provided a detailed technical framework for internet-distributed television and the role of platforms in such a landscape, I can now proceed with more specific examples. If we map contemporary anthology series produced and distributed in the United States from 2011, when *American Horror Story* was first released, to 2019, we will notice an upcoming trend. While they're still present on cable, anthology series are slowly moving to internet-distributed television, either through agreements with cable channels for international distribution on platforms like Netflix or direct acquisition,

like in the case of *Scream* (MTV/Netflix [International] 2015- present) and *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* (BBC America/Netflix [International], 2016-2017), or through the option of watching a cable series like *Room 104* (HBO, 2017- present) via streaming on a number of platforms (*Room 104* is available in the U.S. on HBO Go, HBO Now, HBO Now Amazon), or else through the actual production of anthology series commissioned by over-the-top services.

It is quite evident that the mirror-effect is not just found in the parallel offer of cable and network channels, which now make available content through their own non-linear platforms, but also in a broader tendency to reason on linear versus non-linear television as almost separate environments, which require a double release. While operating in the same media and industrial landscape as I showed in the previous paragraph, streaming platforms obey to different internal strategies and their ecology seems to follow a separate logic, thus pushing linear television channels to sign agreements with over-the-top platforms in order to grant the presence of their content in non-linear television as well. Acknowledging this trend, I will focus on the anthology form in its convergence with streaming platforms, by providing a list of anthology series produced/commissioned by or acquired by/distributed on over-the-top platforms. The list will serve as an overview through distant reading, to then pursue a more case-specific study in the next chapter. Most of the series taken into consideration will be scripted, fictional anthology series. Other examples of anthologies are animated movie-series like *Love, Death & Robots* (Netflix, 2019-), which I will not focus on here since they are part of a different audiovisual tradition⁷¹, and documentaries like *Chef's Table* (Netflix, 2015-). As far as documentaries go, the legacy of documentary-antho-

⁷¹ While the intermedial nature of television might motivate the inclusion of case studies such as animated television series in the discussion, here I prefer focusing on live-action, since animation studies would require an additional set of theories and expertise that are not considered in this dissertation.

logies is quite vast and probably more evident if we think about BBC documentaries in several episodes grouped by major themes, like *Life on Earth* (1979), *Blue Planet* (2001) and *Blue Planet II* (2017), *Planet Earth* (2006) and *Planet Earth II* (2016), *Frozen Planet* (2011). Along similar lines are U.S. documentaries like *Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey* (Fox, 2014), revival of the PBS' series *Cosmos: A Personal Voyage* (1980), which will be followed by *Cosmos: Possible Worlds* (Fox, 2019), or *Defying Gravity* (ABC, 2009).

Other documentaries appeared on over-the-top streaming platforms like Netflix and Amazon Video; however, they are part of a process of encyclopedic circulation of knowledge that is closely tied to the conventions of the documentary-genre. Over the course of their history and evolution in television at large (even outside of the U.S.), documentaries always tended to *anthologize* by their own nature, as products presenting chunks of human knowledge about reality. Anthological documentary series reflect more a contemporary vision of knowledge as multidimensional, encyclopedic (Eco 1976) and non-linear, as in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's (1987) rhizomatic view of culture or in Thomas S. Kuhn's ([1962] 1970) paradigmatic notion in the epistemology of science, rather than the contemporary platform ecology. They exploit the anthology form as a core practice for the organization and diffusion of knowledge and culture, which had already appeared in print and electronic media, way before the internet revolution happened. While I will still mention anthology documentaries as exemplary processes of anthologization and as ways to formalize knowledge, I will therefore focus instead on case studies based on fictional narratives, in order to show how, even when the possibility of opting for longer serial forms is available, some narratives still call for an anthological model.

4.3.4. In Digital Culture

On July 16, 2019⁷², Netflix implemented a recommendation system based on a collection model on its DVD platform (not for streaming). As forms of editorialization and marketing, these collections are examples of *ex post* anthologies. Quoting from the DVD Netflix' blog: "Collections are curated lists of movies centered around certain topics or themes. They're a convenient way to browse all the James Bond movies (without looking up each movie individually) or add our top 10 rented classic films at once. On the desktop website, you can hover over Browse, then click Collections in the dropdown menu."⁷³ By simply entering the collections tab, users' can add blocks of content to their queue of movies to rent⁷⁴. Technically speaking, DVD Netflix is not a streaming platform; it is a platform for movie rental in different formats (DVD, Blu-Rays). However, this example suggests that the collection model, or anthology model, is something that is both coexisting with physical media and present on a variety of digital platforms even beyond streaming. The cultural sociologist David Beer discussed collection practices in relation to new media as part of what he defines a "classificatory imagination" (Beer 2013), by pointing at the fact that classificatory processes "are now central to how culture circulates" (*ivi*: 60) and that, in order to fully understand digital platforms, we need to consider "how classificatory processes work to order culture on commercial, organizational, informal and everyday levels." (*ivi*: 62) Here I will focus on four main classificatory processes that assimilated the anthological model in

⁷² See: <https://twitter.com/dvdnetflix/status/1151285397911212037>.

⁷³ "Collections: Now Available on IOS and Android." *Netflix DVD Blog*. Retrieved September 12, 2019. <http://blog.dvd.netflix.com/new-dvd-releases/collections-in-dvd-netflix-app>.

⁷⁴ "Introducing Collections." *Netflix DVD Blog*. Retrieved September 12, 2019. <http://blog.dvd.netflix.com/new-dvd-releases/introducing-collections>.

digital culture and that present elements in common with practices of anthologization in television: tagging, algorithmic filtering, playlisting and podcasting.

Tagging can be defined as a type of grassroots classification: users tag content in order to insert it in an online feed. The process of tagging creates a self-organizing cultural archive (*ivi*) in a similar way to what happens with metadata schemes, “with an immanent classificatory system produced in the collective classificatory imagination of the users.” (*ibidem*) This seemingly anthological form is interesting precisely because it operates at the convergence of multiple, collective processes of classification. While attempting to trace a history of classification, Geoffrey C. Bowker, professor of Informatics, together with the sociologist Susan Leigh Star, discussed the tension between existing and emergent classification systems, stressing on their non-deterministic nature and by stating that pre-existing cultural grids converge with the affordances of platforms’ technologies and infrastructures. More specifically, tagging “systems are active creators of categories in the world as well as simulators of existing categories” (Bowker and Star 2000: 321) and “with the emergence of new information infrastructures, these classification systems are becoming even more densely interconnected.” (*ivi*: 326) Furthermore, in platform environments like Twitter or Instagram, forms of collection like hashtags additionally operates as key classifiers for running queries and for browsing content, not just for organizing it, therefore generating new ways of accessing and receiving culture. To this regard, while describing an anthological turn in digital culture, the philosopher Milad Doueïhi (2011: 521) points at the fact that tagging practices redefined both processes of dissemination and selection of previously unrelated snippets of content, thus generating new forms of meaning.

On streaming platforms, tagging content metadata is just one part of the process of content retrieval. An additional system for generating collections and filtering the stream is through the use of algorithms. By definition, algorithmic filtering *filters* streams of interrelated content, thus shaping consumption by following, once again, an anthological model. As Beer writes, “we can only imagine the density of algorithmic processes and the complex ways that they are now a part of the ordering, structuring and sorting of culture.” (Beer 2013: 63) Streams have potentially unlimited data. Algorithmic functions found in recommender systems, such as collaborative filtering used on Netflix or pattern matching, operate on these streams to produce other streams based on a selection. These types of algorithmic filters in streaming platforms thus represent secondary processes of classification, once the primary indexing process has been defined through tagging. Even though these two classificatory processes found in digital culture do not create anthologies in the editorial sense of the term, they do create lists having an organizing principle in a way that is similar to the anthological model. The example of Spotify, just to mention one streaming platform based on lists, perfectly outlines how streams can be capitalized through sorting content in multiple lists, which operate “at massive scales under the contemporary conditions of a globalized economy.” (Soon 2018: 195) To this point, perhaps closer to the idea of anthology, as found in editorial practices, are the practices of playlisting and podcasting.

Drawing a parallel with music playlists on Spotify or iTunes turns out to be useful to better understand the mechanism of anthologization in contemporary U.S. television, as something that is happening in close relation with platform environments. As Jeremy Wade Morris remarks, “while à la carte purchasing and the \$.99 solution are examples of economic modularity and pricing models that facilitated disaggregation, iTunes achieved reaggregation most prominently

through playlists.” (Morris 2015: 159) This idea of re-aggregation is slightly different to what drives the creation of anthology series on streaming platforms. However, it is a symptom of the same necessity to organize content in a way that can guide the viewer into repeatable consumption patterns, by organizing content into reusable clusters, and into a shared, collective itinerary. Unlike tagging and algorithmic filtering, which still allows for a wide variety of individual, personalized consumption paths that are constantly changing as soon as consumption happens, playlisting is a practice that fosters regularity in consumption, and, when made public, can generate a collective experience through the creation of a canon. This also part of a broader necessity of organizing an increasingly higher amount of content. As an evidence that playlists are not just artistic practices, Spotify offers a music recommender support called Playlist Machinery⁷⁵, developed by Paul Lamere, intended for helping the users with organizing, sorting and aggregating music tracks into playlists. Additional features connected to Spotify have been created by web developers to enhance the playlisting experience, such as Playlist Manager, which “merges the songs of selected playlists into one view, allowing you to easily add and remove songs from different playlists”⁷⁶, or Magic Playlist, “an intelligent algorithm developed under Spotify’s API that enables users to create a playlist based on a song.”⁷⁷

These three examples of classificatory systems, which produce clusters of content that are somehow similar to anthologies in their intent, portray examples of either grassroots classification (tagging), algorithmic-driven classification (algorithmic filtering), or a mix of both (playlis-

⁷⁵ See: <http://organizeyourmusic.playlistmachinery.com/>; sortyourmusic.playlistmachinery.com/; <http://playlistmanager.playlistmachinery.com>.

⁷⁶ See: <http://playlist-manager.com/#/login>.

⁷⁷ See: <https://developer.spotify.com/community/showcase/magic-playlist>.

ting). Another classificatory process found in digital culture is that of podcasting, which is perhaps more analogous to the process hiding behind the formation of anthology series, since it happens in the very phase of production and formatting of content. Podcasting is in fact a term brought about by the media, who first started discussing online radio and the “Audible revolution”⁷⁸ as something that was rewriting the norms of radio broadcasting, by making periodically available on the internet downloadable radio shows. What started as an experiment, with podcasts released via a RSS feed, slowly attracted the interest of companies like Amazon or Google and of well established music directories like Apple’s iTunes. Podcasting as a practice fully embedded in the media industry notably finds its root in Amazon’s Audible service, which in 1997 “released the first portable audio player designed specifically for listening to audiobooks.”⁷⁹ Much like in contemporary anthology series designed for non-linear television, digital podcasting was originally conceived to sustain a much older radio format, that of audiobooks, first appeared in the United States in the 1930s (Rubery 2011: 5), with audio recordings and adaptations from literary classics. Fast-forward to 1997, audiobooks reappeared in new “born-digital forms” known as podcasts (Hilmes 2013: 420).

Podcasting refers in fact to both a practice (as the use of the verb itself suggests) and a form. In more recent years, podcasts became available not only as part of the content offered by major companies like Apple, Amazon and Google, but also as a rather specific type of content distributed by companies entirely dedicated to the diffusion of podcast-like products. Well-known

⁷⁸ Hammersley, Ben. “Why Online Radio Is Booming.” *The Guardian*. Last modified February 12, 2004. Retrieved September 12, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2004/feb/12/broadcasting.digitalmedia>.

⁷⁹ “A Short History of the Audiobook, 20 Years after the First Portable Digital Audio Device.” *PBS NewsHour*. Last modified November 22, 2017. Retrieved September 12, 2019. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/a-short-history-of-the-audiobook-20-years-after-the-first-portable-digital-audio-device>.

media organizations like NPR implemented the production of podcasts in their online platforms, and smaller start-ups began to offer a platform environment for uploading, so to speak, *podcasted* audio-content. Other media companies are now adopting a podcasting strategy for the diffusion of information, such as the Vox Media Podcast Network. Streaming music services like Soundcloud and Spotify also joined the podcasting movement, which is expected to grow fast: a 2019 report from the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) and PwC estimates that the podcasting industry generated a revenue of about 479.1 million US dollars in 2018 and that by 2021 it will be likely to produce more than 1 billion US dollars⁸⁰. That said, podcast-content came not only to evolve in very similar ways to television anthology series, by proposing factual or fictional narratives with an episodic or seasonal structure, but also to actively influence anthological production in contemporary television, by adopting the same standards and logic.

Audio-podcasting, as a way of formatting culture on a production level, is in fact easily transferable into television anthologies. It is therefore not a coincidence that some anthology series released in the past few years were either based on podcasts, such as Amazon's *Lore*⁸¹, or actively generated themselves fan-based audio-podcasts as new forms of fan-fiction, like in the case of Hulu's *Castle Rock*⁸². The podcast-to-series strategy dates back to 2007, when the cable channel Showtime adapted the podcast *This American Life* into a series by the same name (Showtime, 2007-2008), and it continues to feed the television business with podcasts like *Serial*, which was commissioned to series on HBO Other interesting cases of the anthology form conflating with the

⁸⁰ "Full Year 2018-IAB Podcast Ad Rev Study." *IAB*. Last modified June 2019. Retrieved September 12, 2019. https://www.iab.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Full-Year-2018-IAB-Podcast-Ad-Rev-Study_5.29.19_vFinal.pdf

⁸¹ See: <https://www.lorepodcast.com>.

⁸² See: <https://podcasts.apple.com/it/podcast/castle-rock-tv-podcast-fan-podcast-for-hulu-series/id1253319854?mt=2>.

podcast form can be found online, on aggregators like PlayerFM, which collects anthology podcasts on the webpage <https://player.fm/podcasts/Anthology>. Overall, in all these classificatory processes, from tagging to algorithmic filtering, from playlisting to podcasting, can be detected some variations on the anthological model, as practices that establish “a conceptual grid shaped by the dynamic of the reception and by the specific knowledge related to the texts circulating on the network and to the authorities associated with them.” (Doueïhi 2012: 163, *my translation*)

As I showed, on online platform ecosystems, digital publication starts with data attached to metadata, which then get an algorithmic treatment thus creating lists of titles that serve themselves as streams. In this context, some processes of anthological editorialization emerge to help both indexing and information retrieval on digital platforms. With this brief review of classificatory systems found on contemporary digital platforms, I want to point at the fact that the anthology form has a clustering effect that adds onto a web environment already based on methods for classification. The anthology series in streaming television platforms is just one example of how the anthology form is able to contain many products in one, thus framing a cluster by itself, which is likely to become formulaic, by multiplying and *genrifying*. Furthermore, some interesting concepts unfold from this overview on anthological models in digital culture, such as the need for a digital topology of content (not just where content is mapped in the real world throughout production, distribution and reception, but also where it is positioned in the virtual space of the web through anthological processes), and the definition of entering or emerging points in the stream (i.e. how hierarchies are defined in a platform environment to access or expose content through the use of anthological models).

CHAPTER 5. CASE STUDIES

5.1. Overview

5.1.1. Industrial Context

In the previous chapter I discussed some concepts that I will explore further here in relation to case studies that focus on anthology series as forms deeply embedded in digital cultures, economies and technologies. The present chapter notably intends to consider not necessarily on anthology series appeared on internet-distributed television as self-existent objects, but rather on platforms as case studies themselves, while still assuming the anthology form as the main focus. I will first give a brief overview on the current state of internet-distributed television in the U.S., as well as on its industrial, technological, geographical, but also social implications. The case studies will be then divided into three parts: anthologies branded as “originals”, anthologies appeared as acquisitions, anthologies offered on skinny bundles. For these three sections I used sources found online, such as financial reports, press releases, press articles, interviews to chief executive officers, showrunners, screenwriters, which altogether helped me assess the positioning of the anthology form on television platforms in terms of industrial and economic strategies. To this, I added regular monitoring, observation and research conducted on platforms themselves, in order

to understand platforms' ecology and architecture. Supported by preliminary studies on digital environments, this research is intended to define a starting point for further analyzing anthological collections on online television platforms, by orienting the analysis towards case studies and a perspective based on both distant and close reading.

In contemporary U.S. television industry, the anthology model is not coming back as a massive and homogeneous presence. Rather, it differentiates in scope and extent based on a variety of processes of platformization (Nieborg and Poell 2018; see paragraph 3.1.3.) and editorialization (Vitali-Rosati 2018; see paragraph 2.1.1.) of television content as part of different platform strategies. If, on the one hand, cable television gave a second birth to the anthology form starting from the 2010s (see paragraph 4.3.1.), on the other hand, we can fairly state that now anthology series are growing to fit an increasingly non-linear media environment, instead of following purely linear mechanisms typical of traditional television. In this context, even though it does not appear as a uniform and predominant tendency, the anthological model is becoming a constant, recurring component of all major U.S. streaming platforms dedicated to television entertainment, as I demonstrate in this chapter.

Whether in the form of streams, lists and collections in the platform architecture, or in the form of fictional, scripted content, or else in the new winning formula of the docu-series, the anthological model is where most of the innovation and creativity takes place as far as internet-distributed television goes. For example, innovative topical (i.e. divided by topic) docu-series with an anthological structure have been sold by BuzzFeed and Vox to Netflix - respectively *Follow This* and *Explained* - and Hulu distributed *The Weekly*, a series produced by *The New York Times*, which brings investigative journalism to internet-distributed television. In general, an increasing

amount of short-form and anthology-form originals joined over-the-top platforms, in a comprehensive effort to offer content that can be easily binged, re-watched or screened on mobile devices.

As we find ourselves in a moment of “narrative exhaustion”⁸³, with almost 500 scripted television shows released in the U.S. in 2018, as per data made available on *Variety* based on a report by the FX Networks Research Department⁸⁴, and many series cancelled after only one season, the short-form anthological model might be a solution to avoid chances of digital waste and oblivion on online streaming platforms. By digital waste or digital oblivion I intend phenomena concurring to the formation of digital relicts, such as, in this context, television series intended to be long-running shows and prematurely cancelled after only one season⁸⁵. These phenomena create pending narratives that risk remaining hidden in the depths of online catalogs, as typologies of content that do not connect to any larger network on the platform, in contrast with products like franchises or macro-anthologies, which, on the contrary, create a vast web. By providing at least a sense of narrative closure, standalone episodic or seasonal can afford to become part of longer collections and more efficient streams of anthologized content. A little over 20% of the television

⁸³ Holloway, Daniel. “FX Boss John Landgraf Talks ‘Narrative Exhaustion’ in TV’s ‘Gilded Age.’” *Variety*. Last modified August 3, 2018. Retrieved September 15, 2019. <https://variety.com/2018/tv/news/fx-boss-john-landgraf-tca-netflix-1202894641>.

⁸⁴ Adalian, Josef. “Almost 500 Scripted Shows Aired in 2018, But We Still Haven’t Hit Peak TV.” *Vulture*. Last modified December 13, 2018. Retrieved September 15, 2019. <https://www.vulture.com/2018/12/peak-tv-scripted-originals-2018.html>.

⁸⁵ Many examples can be cited even when looking only at Netflix Originals: from highly acclaimed shows like *House of Cards* (Netflix, 2013-2018) or *Sense 8* (Netflix, 2015-2018), which was officially cancelled but will return for a two-hour final episode, to less successful television series like *Gypsy* (Netflix, 2017). The complete list of cancelled TV shows in 2019 (as of August 2019) can be found on Rotten Tomatoes at the following link: <https://editorial.rottentomatoes.com/article/renewed-and-cancelled-tv-shows-2019>.

series released in 2018 in the U.S. are listed on IMDb as either miniseries⁸⁶ or TV shorts⁸⁷, an amount that had dropped consistently in the late 1970s and 1980s only to slowly come back on both network and cable channels in the 2000s, with some rare examples. Nowadays, as the overall number of television series produced increases, anthology series are also on the rise and find a new place in the U.S. media ecosystem, as a valid complement to dominant vast serial narratives. Furthermore, most anthologies are transitioning on online platforms, contributing to mark a new era of non-linear television.

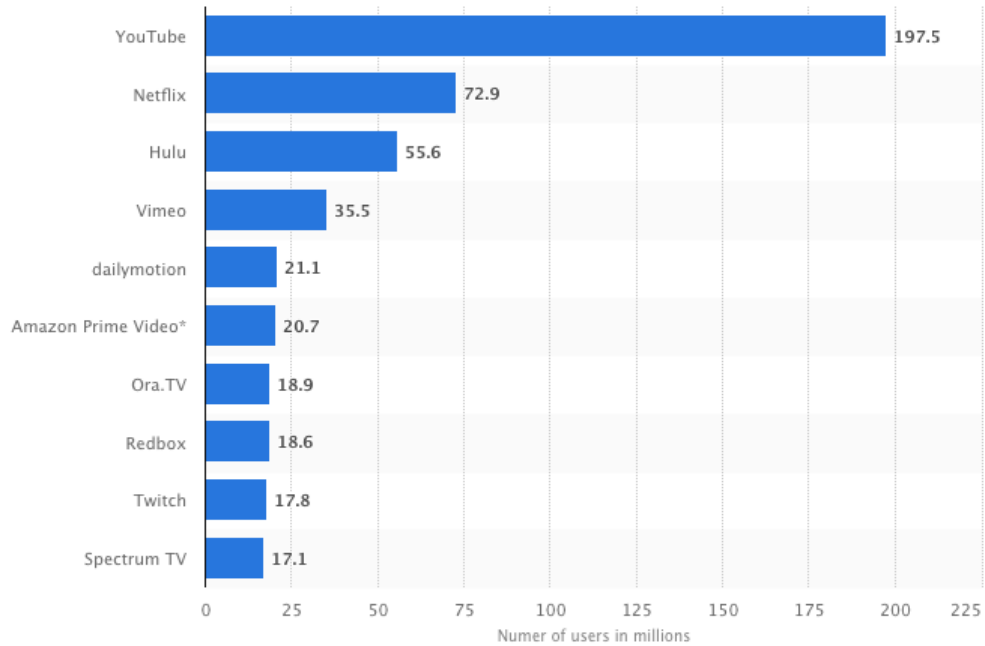
Based on the 2018 Nielsen Total Audience Report, the total media use among U.S. adults amounts at 10-and-a-half hours per day, of which almost 50% is dedicated to streaming content through SVOD services on a variety of devices⁸⁸. The following statistics “shows the most popular video streaming services in the United States as of July 2018, ranked by monthly average users. The most popular video streaming service as of July 2018 was YouTube, with 197.5 million monthly active users. Hulu ranked third with 55.6 monthly average users.”⁸⁹

⁸⁶ https://www.imdb.com/search/title/?title_type=tv_miniseries&release_date=2018-01-01,2018-12-31&countries=us&view=simple&count=250

⁸⁷ https://www.imdb.com/search/title/?title_type=tv_short&release_date=2018-01-01,2018-12-31&countries=us&view=simple&count=250.

⁸⁸ “The Nielsen Total Audience Report: Q3 2018.” Nielsen. Last modified March 19, 2019. Retrieved September 15, 2019. <https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/report/2019/q3-2018-total-audience-report>.

⁸⁹ “U.S. Leading Streaming Video Platforms by Monthly Average Users 2018.” *Statista*. Retrieved September 15, 2019. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/910875/us-most-popular-video-streaming-services-by-monthly-average-users>.



© Statista 2019

Figure 16. Most popular video streaming services in the United States as of July 2018, by monthly average users (in millions) - Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/910875/us-most-popular-video-streaming-services-by-monthly-average-users/>

Several other over-the-top services are now adding up onto these streaming platforms, generating a much more complex scenario that emerges from the convergence between media conglomerates, streaming natives like YouTube, Hulu or Netflix, and so-called “skinny bundles options”, born from a selection of larger cable and network catalogs. In the present chapter, I propose to investigate this evolving platform scenario, by focusing on its interplay with the anthology form. I will notably consider several case studies, divided by the following macro-areas: *i*) original content commissioned by streaming natives; *ii*) content acquired and distributed on streaming native platforms either in the local or international market; *iii*) skinny bundles’ content selection strategy. The aim is to give a clearer picture of how the anthology form is positioned across this variety of platforms, through the combination of distant reading - i.e. an observation

that encompasses the knowledge of a single text to account to the knowledge produced by an ensemble of texts (Moretti 2000) - with a more detailed close reading of specific anthological products. A typological, close observation of anthology series produced or distributed by digital platforms is useful to account for context-sensitive dynamics and avoid assumptions that risk being too generic in a moment when television platforms are evolving so fast.

5.1.2. *A Geography of Streaming Platforms*

Non-linear television exists in parallel with linear television. However, as a different media apparatus consisting of several media entities (metatypes, specifications, roles or simply attributes)⁹⁰, it entails its own digital geography of internet infrastructures, content distribution networks (CDN) and data centers. As Ramon Lobato (2019) suggests, understanding platforms' geography might help us putting the anthology form in context, by analyzing it within an ecology and economics of platforms, as they colonize virtual and physical spaces. Building on the media ecological vision outlined in Chapter 3, together with Lobato, who proposed to observe internet-distributed television as an ecology, "The first step in our analysis is to disaggregate the ecology of services, platforms, set-top boxes, and apps that constitute the field of internet-distributed television. Internet distribution of television content is not a unitary phenomenon; it involves a wide array of different services, institutions, and practices." (*ivi*: 7)

⁹⁰ V.J. Hobbs and Diarmuid Pigott define a media entity "as representing the set of all media artefacts that are related to a particular entity for a particular purpose. We identify potential media entities by considering both the media metatype that is required (sound, image, video, etc) and the role the particular media artefact is to play in the database. For example, in the Earth Sounds database, we wish to include recordings of sounds and photographs of the sites, and we identify the media entities Site Recording and Site Photo. An entity may have one, several or no associated media entities. An entity may also have more than one media entity of the same media metatype: in the Earth Sounds database, we have Site Photo, Site Map and Phenomenon Diagram, all images, but used to represent different things. A media entity is thus somewhat similar to the domain of an attribute, in that it represents not merely a data type, but a pool of allowable values from within a type." (Hobbs and Pigott 1999: 5)

In this sense, the anthological model does not emerge just as the result of a simple cause-effect mechanism related to platform technologies. On the contrary, it inscribes itself into a more complex topology of infrastructures. In order to build their content delivery networks, companies like Netflix can either place servers in correspondence with Internet exchange points (IXPs) or they can opt for agreements with private networks of Internet service providers, such as Time Warner, Verizon, AT&T, and Comcast. A vast network of Internet connection points is therefore fundamental for the existence and efficient functioning of streaming platforms, especially when they reach a global scale. The physical infrastructure behind the online traffic between different networks - i.e. Internet service providers (ISPs) and content delivery networks (CDNs) - is known as Internet exchange point (IX or IXP). “Originally designed as a research network, the Internet has evolved into a massive-scale platform for multimedia delivery.” (Böttger *et al.* 2018: 1) The internet exchange map of the United States looks like this:

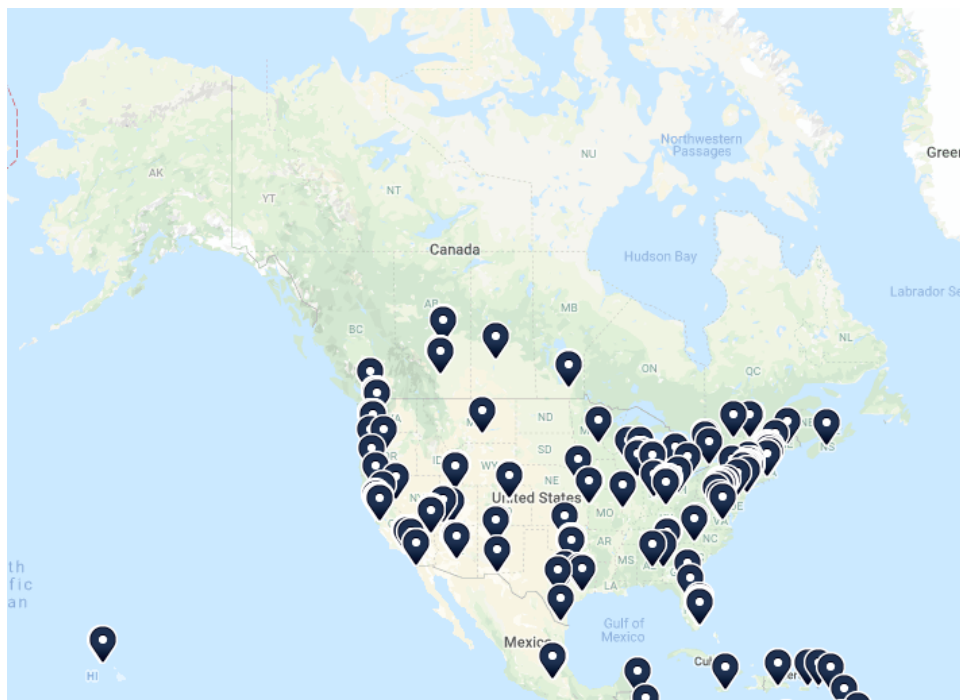


Figure 17. Internet Exchange Map by TeleGeography. Source: <https://www.internetexchangemap.com/#/>.

If we look at major OTT players, content delivery strategies vary. Netflix for example developed its own content delivery infrastructure in 2011, with the name of Open Connect, a “global network that is responsible for delivering Netflix TV shows and movies to [...] members worldwide.”⁹¹ Netflix’s Open Connect functions like common content delivery networks, in the sense that it distributes internet content via HTTP/HTTPS from specific sites to a wide variety of client devices located in different places around the world. The following image shows a map of Netflix’s Open Connect as of March 2016.

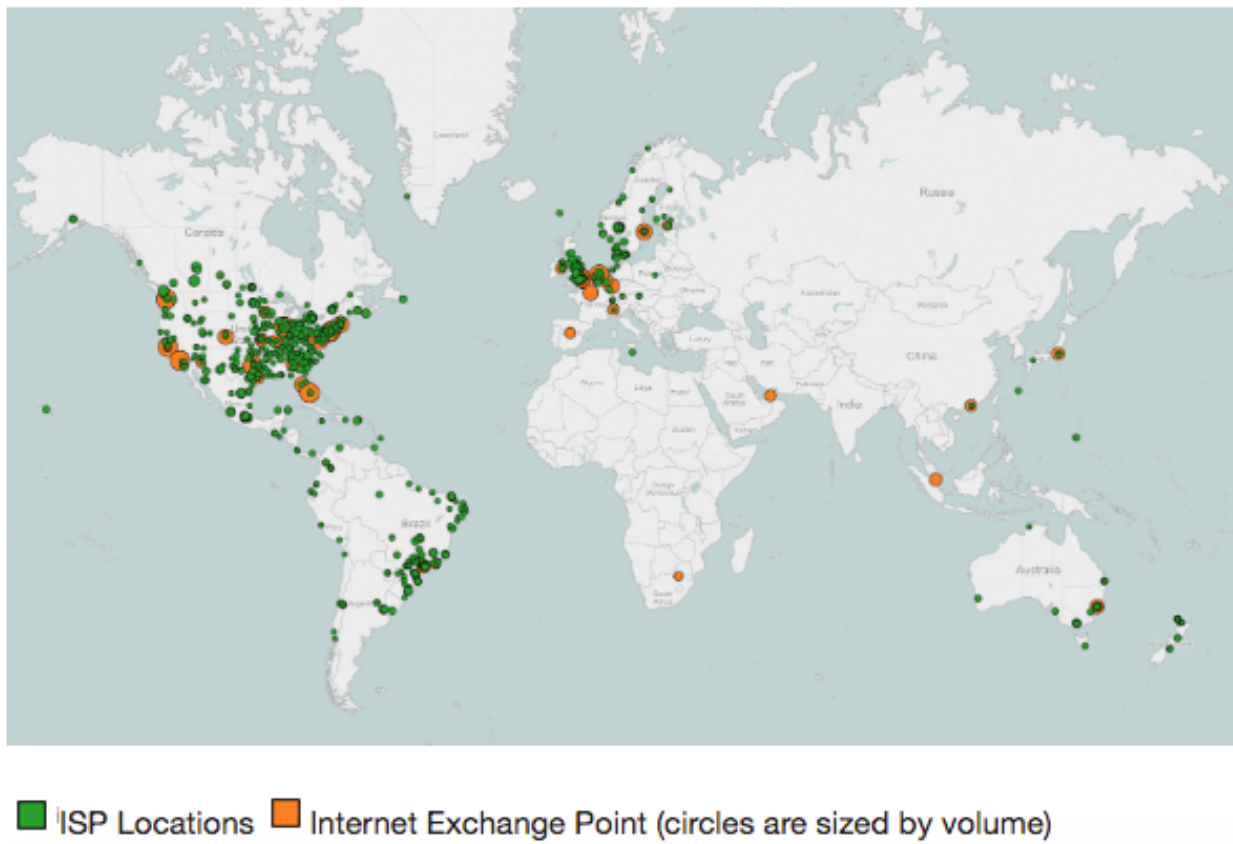


Figure 18. Map of Netflix Open Connect’s global network as of March 2016.⁹²

⁹¹ “Open Connect Overview.” *Netflix*. Retrieved September 15, 2019. <https://openconnect.netflix.com/Open-Connect-Overview.pdf>.

⁹² “How Netflix Works With ISPs Around the Globe to Deliver a Great Viewing Experience.” *Netflix Media Center*. Last modified March 17, 2016. retrieved September 15, 2019. <https://media.netflix.com/en/company-blog/how-netflix-works-with-isps-around-the-globe-to-deliver-a-great-viewing-experience>.

“Traditionally, content delivery services have chosen one strategy or the other. Akamai, for example, hosts a lot of content with Internet service providers, while Google, Amazon, and Limelight prefer to store it at IXPs. However, [...] Netflix uses both strategies, and varies the structure of its network significantly from country to country.”⁹³ Based on a research conducted at the Queen Mary University of London, Netflix turned out to have three servers located within Verizon’s U.S. network, “which do not offer a significant advantage in traffic savings for such a large network, but might be part of a trial.” (Böttger *et al.* 2018: 7) An evaluation of server’s deployment in the local internet ecosystem of the United States shows that “Netflix has 3,236 IXP and 1,007 ISP servers deployed in the USA. Those servers are spread across 24 IXP and 205 ISP locations, reaching into 211 different ISPs.” (*ivi*: 6) Furthermore, the study shows that, even though Netflix partially relies on Internet service providers, “the USA has an IXP ecosystem mature enough, so that the available IXPs are sufficient for Netflix to rely primarily on IXPs to reach its large customer base.” (*ivi*: 7)

Observing a geography of streaming platforms sheds a light on the network effect behind internet-distributed television. Another interesting dynamic is the massive migration of over-the-top services towards the cloud provider Amazon Web Services (AWS). Both Hulu and Netflix decided to deploy AWS for storing their content and for supporting ever-growing volumes of data, a transition that came to completion in January 2016 in the case of Netflix⁹⁴, and that was announ-

⁹³ Nordrum, Amy. “Researchers Map Locations Of 4,669 Servers In Netflix’S Content Delivery Network IEEE Spectrum - IEEE Spectrum.” *IEEE Spectrum: Technology, Engineering, and Science News*. Last modified August 30, 2016. Retrieved September 15, 2019. <https://spectrum.ieee.org/tech-talk/telecom/internet/researchers-map-locations-of-4669-servers-in-netflixs-content-delivery-network>.

⁹⁴ “Completing the Netflix Cloud Migration.” *Netflix Media Center*. Last modified February 11, 2016. Retrieved September 15, 2019. <https://media.netflix.com/en/company-blog/completing-the-netflix-cloud-migration>.

ced in 2017 in the case of Hulu⁹⁵. As of today, Amazon Web Services is the infrastructure behind the three main U.S. streaming providers: Amazon Prime Video, Netflix, and Hulu. This screenshot (fig. 19) of an interactive map found on Amazon’s website shows AWS cloud infrastructure in the United States.

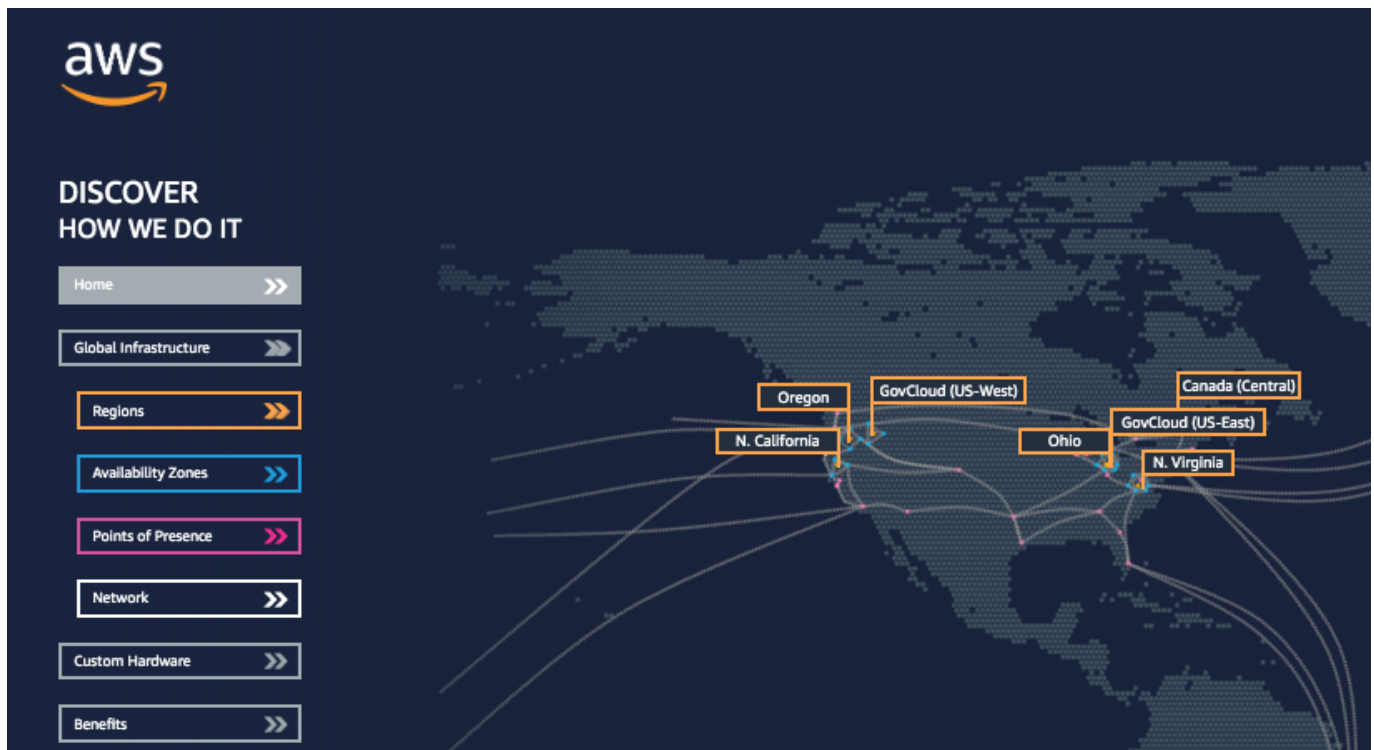


Figure 19. Screenshot of the interactive map of AWS global infrastructure.
Source: <https://www.infrastructure.aws>.

Mapping a geography of streaming services in the United States does not directly facilitate the analysis of the anthology form and its positioning on over-the-top streaming platforms. However, it provides a background of the geopolitical network of infrastructures that influences

⁹⁵ “Hulu Case Study - Amazon Web Services.” *Amazon Web Services Blog*. Accessed September 15, 2019. <https://aws.amazon.com/solutions/case-studies/hulu>.

media industrial strategies and the hierarchies of power hidden behind major over-the-top players.

5.1.3. Time-organization in Non-linear Television

Non-linear television does not only revolutionize the pre-existing geography of television infrastructures, but it also poses some challenges to the traditional linear consumption of television. Streaming platforms are notably built on the idea that the moment of consumption does not need to align with the moment of release and that viewers can freely navigate a library of content in much the same way as they would navigate an online archive. Beyond each platform's specificities, audiovisual libraries allow viewers to generate a personalized flow, instead of a pre-planned flow, with different levels of continuity and length. By giving to the audience accessibility to a greater choice of content, along with a higher control, convenience, customization and a larger community (Lotz 2007), non-linear television amplifies the freedom granted by "discretionary time" (Goodin *et al.* 2008) and let the users personally select their individual flows of content and manage their own viewing time. Each viewer can decide to watch a single unit of one episode separately, as a discrete item, or the entire season or series online in a continuous loop without interruptions. Lacking of programming blocks, as well as of regular phases and rhythms typical of the old season cycle, - which orders linear broadcasting in a daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly or season-long schedule -, non-linear television paved the way for a potentially excessive mode of consumption. Stressing on the pragmatic nature of this process, strictly connected to established practices and potential uses, non-linear television offer the possibility of excessive consumption, and yet it does not necessarily impose it.

In the absence of a fixed, regulatory programming pattern and of a rigid season cycle model, we assist to the redefinition of social practices of over-consumption of television content, already existent in linear television but strongly enhanced by online interfaces. As William Trouleau *et al.* underlined, “easy accessibility can often lead to over-consumption [...]. On video on-demand services, this has recently been referred to as ‘binge watching’, where potentially entire seasons of TV shows are consumed in a single viewing session.” (Trouleau *et al.* 2016: 1215) As much as we need to consider new standards and norms in production and distribution of television series from a media industry perspective, we should therefore observe new behaviors in television consumption from a pragmatic standpoint. In March 2016, a Nielsen survey reported that “among those who watch VOD, more than three-quarters of global respondents (77%) agree they do so because they can view content at a time that is convenient for them. Users are also watching VOD content because it allows multiple people in the household to watch different programming on different devices at the same time.”⁹⁶ (Nielsen 2016) Moreover, the study shows that on online platforms, binge-watching is becoming an increasingly popular practice and it now largely moves viewership: data suggests that catching up on multiple episodes at once is one of the main reasons for streaming audiovisual content among different age groups.

If we look at another research published in the 10th edition of Deloitte’s digital democracy survey, carried out by an independent research firm in November 2015, it is reported that “70% of U.S. consumers binge watch TV content. Among those, nearly a third of consumers are

⁹⁶ “Video on Demand.” *Nielsen Ratings*. Retrieved September 15, 2019. <https://www.nielsen.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2019/04/global-video-on-demand-report-mar-2016.pdf>.

binge watching shows weekly.”⁹⁷ Deloitte also reveals that users watch an average of five episodes per week, and that TV dramas appear to be the most popular content to binge watch, suggesting a possible relation between consumption practices and actual content. Furthermore, 92% of spectators interviewed in this survey are carrying out additional activities while watching television, with only one-quarter of multitasking activities directly related to the programs that consumers are watching⁹⁸. Such phenomenon is addressed as a typology of “time-deepening” (Godbey 1976), a consequential effect of multitasking involved in watching television as a secondary activity itself or while engaging in other, secondary activities (Robinson and Martin 2009: 82-83).

Overall, these data and surveys demonstrate that the main factors that drive the audience toward streaming television are a convenient time management and a general flexibility in viewing. With the possibility of streaming serialized content, modes of consumption become more and more varied. Again, the timing and the modality are central elements to investigate the transition of television shows from a linear to a non-linear medium and the range of consumption practices generated. The availability of content in extensive libraries notably gives the viewer the possibility of watching content in: (i) a continuous stream of several episodes (binge-watching), or (ii) an accelerated form of viewing (speed-watching), or (iii) both (binge-racing). Furthermore, viewers can watch more than one content at the same time on multiple devices resulting in a sort of *simultaneous* watching. This kind of amplified consumption tends to take the shape of the excess. However, binge-watching, speed-watching, binge-racing and other forms of watching should be

⁹⁷ “Digital Democracy Survey | Deloitte | Research Project.” *Deloitte*. Retrieved September 15, 2019. <https://www2.deloitte.com/tr/en/pages/technology-media-and-telecommunications/articles/digital-democracy-survey-generational-media-consumption-trends.html>.

⁹⁸ *ibidem*.

examined not only as simplified examples of over-consumption, but as systems of schemes and dispositions (Bourdieu 1977) toward a partially self-regulated consumption with diversified sub-practices.

In order to study such a diversified set of practices, in an experimental study published in 2016 (Trouleau *et al.* 2016), a research group from the École polytechnique de Lausanne proposed a possible application of data-mining methods to understand binge-watching habits and their inner variety. They notably delineated a data-driven definition of binge watching, to underline the presence of different types of binge-watching. The study shows that while it is common that episodes are watched in a sequential order in a single session to catch-up content, this is not always true for binge-watching (*ivi*: 1222). For instance, users might watch episode 8 and then go back to episode 7 or jump to episode 12 in the same session. While regular sessions are almost entirely sequential (97%), 84% of binge watching sessions and 76% of the hyper-binge watching sessions are non-sequential, indicating that binge viewers are likely to watch content out-of-order (*ivi*: 1223). The connection between binge-watching practices and non-sequentiality brings us back to the very definition of non-linear television: non-linear systems tend to be non-sequential, and affected by phenomena of disjunction and disruption. Non-linearity, however, calls for mechanisms of self-regulation in the consumption of television content.

Mechanisms of self-regulation in television consumption can occur in products like television series on a formal and structural level. In addition to the industrial and sociological perspective, consumption can be analyzed taking into account a narratological perspective and rhythmic forms of chapter division. One of the ways in which viewers regulate practices and habits in watching television is narrative construction. The narrative form and structure of television series can affect

consumption, by guiding the audience through a series of narrative steps that direct the viewing experience. Episodes, seasons and other time units strictly related to storytelling, such as cliff-hangers, temporary closures or other narrative segments, create boundaries, hiatuses and pauses, while still granting an overall sense of continuity in the plot. Such time-units in storytelling always existed; however, strategies of narrative division seem to be undergoing a process of adaptation to non-linear television, where the absence of commercial interruptions makes streaming more efficient.

The idea of a discrete television episode as a single unit existing in the television flow is now revised (VanArendonk 2019) and the process of waiting one week or more for the next episode is replaced by a single-release strategy, thus resulting in patterns of viewing that are more and more tied to the viewers' need to make sense of the narrative as a block of a few episodes or of an entire season. Such a hypothesis is supported by a binge-watching scale based on Netflix's global viewing data released by the platform itself, which shows the average pace of consumption per television series' genre⁹⁹. As Netflix's report suggests, television series with the slowest consumption pace are comedies, followed by political dramas and historical dramas and superhero dramas. Half way between shows "to savor" and shows "to devour" are crime dramas and dramatic comedies¹⁰⁰. Between the television series leaning towards a faster watching pace there are action and adventure series, as well as sci-fi, horror and thriller. Nielsen studies¹⁰¹ show that

⁹⁹ "Netflix & Binge: New Binge Scale Reveals TV Series We Devour and Those We Savor." *Netflix Media Center*. Last modified June 8, 2016. Retrieved September 26, 2019. <https://media.netflix.com/en/press-releases/netflix-binge-new-binge-scale-reveals-tv-series-we-devour-and-those-we-savor-1>.

¹⁰⁰ *ibidem*.

¹⁰¹ "The Database: How Digital Is Evolving Video Content." *Nielsen*. Last modified June 10, 2019. Retrieved September 15, 2019. <https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/podcast/2019/how-digital-is-evolving-video-content>.

dramas are more prone to foster non traditional viewing, and that different types of genres are attached to different viewing habits - i.e. long-running programs or short-programming might result in diverging practices, like weekly viewing versus casual viewing.

To test how genres, forms or formats fit into specific modes of viewing, streaming platforms began experimenting with how much they can release at the same time. Hulu for example usually opts for weekly releases and some YouTube Originals were divided in several episodes uploaded on a monthly basis, whereas Netflix most often releases its series all at once. These factors altogether have outcomes on the production of media content. For instance, products like podcasts, which are now adapted to television series, “gained popularity precisely because they filled a gap in people’s busy lives and busy schedules. Where screens demand that we stop, sit still and watch, podcasts can be squeezed in between commutes, child care and cooking dinner.”¹⁰² In this sense, even miniseries and other forms of short-programming in television are capable to fit interstitial moments of our daily lives. Similarly, anthology series *afford* a flexible experience of time. As television changes its production and distribution models due to technological advancements, different time-logics affect the creation of narrative forms. Time is therefore an important factor to understand emerging industrial practices related to streaming platforms, as well as the narrative forms that circulate in the context of non-linear television.

¹⁰² “The Rise of the Podcast Adaptation.” *The Economist*. Last modified October 12, 2017. Retrieved September 16, 2019. <https://www.economist.com/prospero/2017/10/12/the-rise-of-the-podcast-adaptation>.

5.2. Originals

5.2.1. Vimeo on Demand and Youtube Premium

Despite the tendency of the anthology form to appear in relation with dramatic genres, one of the first anthology series appeared on the web was in fact a comedy: *High Maintenance* (Vimeo, 2012-2015; HBO 2016-). The series premiered on the platform Vimeo and it was later on acquired by HBO. While HBO episodes have a runtime of about thirty minutes in length, the episodes originally released on Vimeo ranged from five to twenty minutes. As we read on *The New York Times*: “Freed of the constraints of thirty-minute or one-hour formulas, the episodes are luxurious and twisty and humane, radiating new ideas about storytelling.”¹⁰³ An article on *Variety* additionally states: “The HBO version of ‘High Maintenance’ can’t quite keep up this format, but attempts to stay true to the original structure with 30-minute episodes that contain sometimes one, two, or three stories.”¹⁰⁴ *High Maintenance* was the first project funded by Vimeo¹⁰⁵, which in 2013 made available Vimeo on demand, a service that enables users to sell their work online. For its original content, Vimeo on demand adopted an “organic approach”¹⁰⁶, leveraging on a pre-existing marketplace and its own existing community as indicators for deciding on which content to invest.

¹⁰³ Nussbaum, Emily. “Taster’s Choice.” *The New Yorker*, Last modified June 2, 2014. Retrieved September 16, 2019. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/06/09/tasters-choice>.

¹⁰⁴ Saraiya, Sonia. 2016. “TV Review: ‘High Maintenance.’” *Variety*. Last modified September 7, 2016. Retrieved September 16, 2019 <https://variety.com/2016/tv/reviews/tv-review-high-maintenance-hbo-1201849219>.

¹⁰⁵ Spangler, Todd. “Vimeo Invests in First Original Series, Comedy ‘High Maintenance.’” *Variety*. Last modified May 29, 2014. Retrieved September 16, 2019. <https://variety.com/2014/digital/news/vimeo-invests-in-first-original-series-high-maintenance-1201195622>.

¹⁰⁶ Moylan, Brian. “Vimeo Launches New Originals and Offers ‘high-Quality’ Alternative to YouTube.” *The Guardian*. Last modified March 10, 2016. Retrieved September 16, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2016/mar/10/vimeo-launches-new-originals-alternative-to-youtube-netflix>.

The long-term project was to fully enter the over-the-top game, but it never did¹⁰⁷, remaining a “direct-to-fan distribution”¹⁰⁸ system. “Vimeo acquired streaming video platform VHX in 2016 to move into the subscription video-on-demand space, and later renamed the business Vimeo OTT. The Vimeo OTT offering is targeted at individual creators, niche programmers and major media partners who can use it to launch subscription video services across platforms like iOS, Android, Fire TV, Roku, Android TV, Xbox and tvOS.”¹⁰⁹ Within this model very much oriented toward community building, other anthology series found, just like *High Maintenance*, a viable option for distribution on the platform Vimeo on demand. Web television anthology series such as *555* (Vimeo on demand, 2017) began being released as Vimeo Originals within more conventional genres. *555*, for example, was marketed as a “*Black Mirror*-meets-Hollywood”¹¹⁰ kind of show, recalling a long tradition of science fiction series.

Although not many cases of anthology series can be reviewed as part of the original content released by Vimeo on demand, it is interesting to observe that Vimeo ended up adhering to the evident tendency to create sci-fi/horror anthologies, on the basis of an already successful anthological formula. If we browse for “anthology” on Vimeo on demand as of July 2019, we will come up with 79 titles of either films or television shows available on the platform, most of

¹⁰⁷ Winfrey, Graham. “Vimeo Surrenders to Netflix: Why the Subscription Video Plan Was Never Going to Work.” *IndieWire*. Last modified June 26, 2017. Retrieved September 16, 2019. <https://www.indiewire.com/2017/06/vimeo-subscription-vod-cancelled-netflix-1201847091>.

¹⁰⁸ See: <https://vimeo.com/61103187>.

¹⁰⁹ McDonald, Andrew. “Vimeo Reveals OTT Stats.” *TBI Vision*. Last modified March 8, 2018. Retrieved September 16, 2019. <https://tbivision.com/2018/03/08/vimeo-reveals-ott-stats>.

¹¹⁰ “Fresh Voices, More Places: All-New Vimeo Originals.” *Vimeo Blog*. Last modified September 22, 2016. Retrieved September 16, 2019. <https://vimeo.com/blog/post/fresh-voices-more-places-all-new-vimeo-originals>. See: <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/fivefivefive>.

them fitting the horror genre¹¹¹. This demonstrates that, even in the dynamic landscape of over-the-top platforms, there is a tendency to replicate certain forms in a quite formulaic, or else repetitive, way, by returning to precedent sets of rules and styles.

A platform similar to Vimeo in the way it relies on a community of users is Youtube, which invested on the subscription-based video on demand service YouTube Premium. Youtube SVOD platform was born in June 2018 from the rebranding of the ad-free subscription-based service YouTube Red. As an article on *The Verge* reported in 2015, “with Red, YouTube is signaling a definitive shift from an ad-funded video-hosting service to a media company that will eventually go head to head with Hulu and Netflix.”¹¹² However, the analyst Brian Weiser warned the company: “In order to really compete as a subscription service against the likes of Netflix, Hulu, and HBO, YouTube will ‘need to start licensing premium content.’”¹¹³ And so it did, realizing a first slate of YouTube Originals in 2016¹¹⁴. Since then, YouTube released a steady number of originals annually, mostly films and television serials. The first YouTube Original anthology series was made available on the platform in February 2019, with a monthly release schedule, under the title of *Weird City*. Described as a “Twilight Zone-esque show”¹¹⁵, in the wake of one of

¹¹¹ See: <https://vimeo.com/search/ondemand?q=anthology>

¹¹² Popper, Ben. “Exclusive: An inside Look at the New Ad-Free YouTube Red.” *The Verge*. Last modified October 21, 2015. Retrieved September 16, 2019. <https://www.theverge.com/2015/10/21/9566973/youtube-red-ad-free-offline-paid-subscription-service>.

¹¹³ *ibidem*.

¹¹⁴ Spangler, Todd. “YouTube Set to Premiere First Original Movies, PewDiePie Series.” *Variety*. Last modified February 3, 2016. Retrieved September 16, 2019. <https://variety.com/2016/digital/news/youtube-first-original-movies-pewdiepie-show-1201695813>.

¹¹⁵ “Weird City (TV Series 2019–).” *IMDb*. Retrieved September 16, 2019. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8633518/>.

the most successful sci-fi series in the U.S. television history, *Weird City* (Youtube, 2019-) is composed of separate episodes collected on the platform into a single playlist¹¹⁶.

The playlist form is a common practice on the YouTube's platform. In fact, by default, YouTube Originals are released into playlists, ordered streams of videos identified as collections. How it works is: "A playlistItem resource identifies another resource, such as a video, that is included in a playlist. In addition, the playlistItem resource contains details about the included resource that pertain specifically to how that resource is used in that playlist. [...] To be more specific, these lists are associated with a channel, which is a collection of a person, group, or company's videos, playlists, and other YouTube information."¹¹⁷ In the case of *Weird City* and other original productions, the channel is YouTube Originals¹¹⁸. In a way, the anthology form is therefore implicit to the platform architecture's itself, since all playlists are organized by topic, forming collections of up to 200 videos "that can be viewed sequentially and shared with other users."¹¹⁹ What anthology series do on Youtube is offering the possibility to view the content inserted in the playlist non-sequentially, in a non-linear mode. To sum up, on Vimeo on demand and on YouTube Premium anthology television series do not appear to be necessarily prominent if compared to other typologies of serialized content. Yet, they offer alternative ways for both organizing audiovisual content, sometimes with the emergence of genre-based shows, and watching it non-sequentially, thus fully exploiting the non-linear affordances of digital platforms.

¹¹⁶ See: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLjq6DwYksrzyimlhWPXR_cxX9kUNLVUer.

¹¹⁷ "API Reference | YouTube Data API." *Google Developers*. Retrieved September 16, 2019. <https://developers.google.com/youtube/v3/docs>.

¹¹⁸ https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqVDpXKLMKeBU_yyt_QkItQ

¹¹⁹ *ibidem*.

5.2.2. Sony Crackles

Another early example of original anthology content released on a U.S. platform is *The Unknown*, which appeared on Grouper (now Sony Crackles) back in 2012 and lasted only one season with six stand-alone episodes. Sony Crackles is a U.S. video-on-demand service offered by Sony Pictures Entertainment. The service was originally available by the name of Grouper since 2004, and it was acquired by Sony in 2006¹²⁰. At the beginning of its venture, Sony Crackles stood half-way between the non-linear space of SVOD platforms and the broadcasting one-revenue-stream model based on advertising. The British press agency Reuters in 2008 reported: “With a mix of comedy, action and unscripted material, Crackle is being positioned by Sony as a brand that transcends genre but appeals to video enthusiasts.”¹²¹ In 2015, Andy Kaplan, at the time of his role as the president of Sony Pictures Worldwide Networks, released an interview with the American screenwriter Neil Landau and described Crackles as a programmed “non-linear cable network” (Landau 2015: 30), moving along the lines of broadcasting television. Yet, Sony Crackles soon tried to integrate a second-revenue stream, by investing in original programming (*ivi*: 31) and adopting a direct-to-series production model.

Before Netflix and Amazon Video took over the OTT mediascape, Sony Crackles was already looking ahead by producing original content for a streaming platform. When *The Unknown* was released in 2012, Sony Crackles had branded itself with a standard selection of original co-

¹²⁰ Felser, Josh. “The True Story of Grouper, a.k.a. Crackle.” *Vox*. Last modified January 9, 2015. Retrieved September 17, 2019. <https://www.vox.com/2015/1/9/11557604/the-true-story-of-grouper-a-k-a-crackle>.

¹²¹ Wallenstein, Andrew. “Sony Restructuring Crackle Online Video Hub.” *Reuters*. Last modified October 29, 2008. Retrieved September 17, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-media-crackle-idUSTRE49S2QX20081029>.

medies and dramas¹²² and it was offering a multi-platform experience in several countries all over the world, along with an “Always On” linear programming option. Instead of being a community-driven choice, like in the case of some Vimeo Originals, *The Unknown* was openly presented as a choice based on an industrial and commercial strategy, which was tailored to fit an emerging platform environment. As Kaplan explains, “the primary reason for doing a 13-episode Crackle Original series with a closed-ended plotline is that [...] it will bring in a lot of viewership and advertising money and that will be the most important part of the revenue stream.” (*ivi*: 34) He then adds: “That’s why a lot of the networks have gone to these kinds of series as opposed to 22 or multi-season, because that is what’s working right now and what audiences want. They seem to like closure. ‘It’s wrapped up and I can move on to my next thing.’” (*ivi*: 34-35)

While *The Unknown* is somehow a genre show, with stories about supernatural events, Kaplan’s words suggest that Sony Crackles was in fact more interested in the anthology form rather than in the content or genre, even though its slow evolution as a free service in the over-the-top mediascape caused it to eventually leave aside the anthological model. On the one hand, we can perhaps presume that there is in fact a spontaneous process of cultural homogenization, where certain narrative forms tend to be passively absorbed by the society and reproduced within a replicable pattern (horror anthologies), even in a creative environment apparently freed from the constraints of the television industry, such as in the case of Vimeo or Youtube. On the other hand, we can advance the hypothesis that top-down commercial decisions to commission anthology series for a platform environment have boosted new experiments with narrative forms detached

¹²² “List of Original Programs Distributed by Sony Crackle.” *Wikipedia*. Last modified September 19, 2019. Retrieved September 19, 2019. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=List_of_original_programs_distributed_by_Sony_Crackle&oldid=916489631.

from conventional genres and based on applying the anthological model as a marketing and business strategy. This idea to adopt the anthology form as an alternative business model in the U.S. television industry, specifically designed to attract both big-name actors or directors and users to streaming platforms, is something that will recur more manifestly in the following reviews of the uses of the anthology form on other streaming platforms.

5.2.3. *Netflix*

If compared to anthological occurrences on digital platforms that have a strong community of content creators, such as Vimeo or Youtube, it is interesting to observe that, on over-the-top platforms lacking of the community-component, the anthology form can take sometimes unconventional shapes, almost *hors-genre*. Netflix was one of the first major over-the-top television streaming services to consistently adopt the anthological model for its productions, starting with the docu-series *Chef's Table* (Netflix, 2015-), where each episode focuses on a different chef. More recently, this same formula sparked the birth of a macro-anthology through the spin-off *Chef's Table: France* (Netflix, 2016), which initiates a cycle of seasonal miniseries on the local cuisines of different countries. Documentaries are somehow a peculiar examples, since, as far back as they appeared on television, they always tended to create episodic or seasonal anthologies, exploiting both television's potential for serialization and the necessity of the documentary genre to organize concepts into specific groups. For this reason, most anthological documentaries are not necessarily defined as such, since the idea of a collection is implicit in their own structure. What Netflix did with *Chef's Table* was inserting itself in the renewed televisual interest for food-driven storytelling, and the anthology form came naturally. As the creator of the show, David

Gelb, put it: “Finally it’s about how do we balance the chefs, how do we make it so each story is different, so that the different stories complement each other. While each film can stand alone, together they should form a greater whole.”¹²³

The same anthological concept - i.e. stand-alone episodes forming a greater whole - was undertaken by another Netflix Original, *Easy* (Netflix, 2016-), an anthology comedy-drama that turns into semi-serial with multiple separate narrative strands. *Easy* represents a curious experiment, precisely because it shows interconnected characters in different stories and builds on the reprise of narrative strands in sparse order, making a statement on the non-linearity of streaming television, where the viewer can *afford* to skip episodes or watch them in an arbitrary order. If we observe its evolution up until today, *Easy* is a perfect example of the scalability and elasticity of the contemporary anthology form, which cleverly redefines the rules for making television narratives in unprecedented ways. This show was created collectively, as an improvised, choral experience based on pitching a recurring scenario in the background (all narratives are based in Chicago). In an interview with Indiewire, the creator Joe Swanberg explained: “I leaned really heavily on the actors, [...] I was in touch with [stars] Jacqueline [Toboni] and Kiersey [Clemons] well in advance of Season 2 and was really leaning on them to help me craft that story and to bring their own belief systems to it so that I’m not overly informing the episode as a straight, white guy and that I’m really having their voices be present in the writing process.”¹²⁴

¹²³ Galarza, Daniela. “Netflix’s ‘Chef’s Table’ Returns for Second, Third, and Fourth Seasons.” *Eater*. Last modified March 8, 2016. Retrieved September 16, 2019. <https://www.eater.com/2016/3/8/11175948/netflix-chefs-table-david-gelb-second-season>.

¹²⁴ Travers, Ben. “Joe Swanberg Wants You to Know a ‘Straight White Guy’ Isn’t the Sole Creative Force Behind ‘Easy.’” *IndieWire*. Last modified December 21, 2017. Retrieved September 17, 2019. <https://www.indiewire.com/2017/12/easy-season-2-joe-swanberg-interview-netflix-1201910035>.

Some additional affordances emerge from a close reading of this series, which offers a new approach to anthology-making as a fluid process: the presence of a setting that helps shape the narrative; the predominance of actors as themselves creators of the story; the portrayal of non-normative, non-conforming stories depicting social issues and minorities through hybrid genres or nonlinear storylines. These affordances are common uses also in other anthology series. I already stressed the importance of the setting and actors as key components in the *formation* of anthology series (such as in pioneering seasonal anthologies like *American Horror Story* or *Fargo*). As to non-normative effects, the presence of continuous variations tend to call for new narratives and new voices, as opposed to a homogeneous view, and that, by building upon the nucleus of the short-story, the anthology dismantles the long-narrative epic principle. Netflix's strategy, which allows for creative experimentation and the redefinition of industrial norms, led to a third peculiar case of flexible anthology, that of *Narcos* (Netflix, 2015-). While *Easy* started with an anthological structure and then tended to expand into a serial, *Narcos* underwent the opposite process.

Originally born as a long serial with three consecutive seasons, the series about Pablo Escobar and the Medellín Cartel was converted into an anthology after the third season (2017), by literally *re-setting* the story in Mexico backed up by new narrative on illegal drug trades. That of re-setting is a narrative strategy that often appears in anthology series as a way of rebooting through world-narrowing (see paragraph 2.4.1.). A similar destiny is expected for *The Haunting of Hill House* (Netflix, 2018), a series based on Shirley Jackson's eponymous novel, which was not set to be an anthology since its very beginning but it is now renewed for another season with a different story. Even though Netflix itself does not seem to adhere to the tendency to create anthologies as adaptations from books, theatre plays or radio programs as much as other platforms,

The Haunting (Netflix, 2018-), as it was renamed with reference to the collection, is still an important case to add to a broader linkage built overtime between the anthology form and previous literary, theatrical, radiophonic works. Additionally, it remarks a historical tendency of anthologies to converge into certain genres, such as horror.

Responding to this predilection of the anthology form for certain genres, Netflix already produced two crime anthology segments in Spanish, which are indexed on the platform as parts of the same Mexican collection¹²⁵ (*Crime Diaries*), even though they appear separately by the titles of *Crime Diaries: Night Out* (Netflix, 2019) and *Crime Diaries: The Candidate* (Netflix, 2019-). Another neo-noir anthology series is *What/If* (Netflix, 2019-), where “each season will tackle a different morality tale inspired by culturally consequential source material, and the power of a single fateful decision to change the trajectory of an entire life.”¹²⁶ Among other upcoming Netflix Original anthologies already announced¹²⁷ are horror anthologies like *Guillermo del Toro Presents 10 After Midnight* (Netflix, upcoming) and the Norwegian-language series *Bloodride* (Netflix, upcoming); crime anthologies like *Criminal* (Netflix, upcoming), divided into separate seasons per country (France, Spain, UK, Germany) with a police procedural formula, and *Overlooked* (Netflix, upcoming), adapted from The New York Times’ obituary column; and the series *Dolly Parton’s Heartstrings* (Netflix, upcoming).

¹²⁵ See: https://www.netflix.com/search?q=crime%20diaries&suggestionId=3052113_collection.

¹²⁶ Goldberg, Lesley. “Renee Zellweger Heads to TV With Lead in Netflix Morality Anthology ‘What/If.’” *The Hollywood Reporter*. Last modified August 17, 2018. Retrieved September 17, 2019. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/renee-zellweger-star-netflix-anthology-what-1135609>.

¹²⁷ “Higher Ground Announces Upcoming Slate of Projects Exclusive to Netflix.” *Netflix Media Center*. Last modified April 30, 2019. Retrieved September 17, 2019. <https://media.netflix.com/en/press-releases/higher-ground-announces-upcoming-slate-of-projects-exclusive-to-netflix>.

It is perhaps unexpected that, given the interest that contemporary U.S. television regained for the anthology form in relation to certain genres, Netflix decided to adopt this form for a wider variety of genres. This suggests that Netflix's approach, whether intentionally or not, is not necessarily based on the anthology as a narrative form with a long genre tradition, but rather on the anthology as a cultural form of organization of different narratives. Overall, Netflix shows that the anthology form can be exploited by streaming platforms not only in connection both with horror or crime formulas, but also with more diverse genres like documentaries, dramas or comedies, thus stressing on the cultural uses of anthologies. Similar cultural, as well as economic, uses of the anthology form return frequently also in the analysis of other anthology platforms.

5.2.4. Hulu

Hulu's programming repertoire is less vast than Netflix, which means, as a consequence, that the number of anthologies released as originals tend to be more limited. Moreover, Hulu's bet on anthology series came slowly, only after some early anthology docu-series such *A Day in the Life* (Hulu, 2011-2013) and always within a pre-established tradition of sci-fi, horror and true crime anthologies. The first scripted Hulu Original to adopt the anthology form is *Dimension 404* (Hulu, 2017-), which echoes famous science-fiction anthologies like *The Twilight Zone* or *The Outer Limits* and the more recent *Black Mirror*. With its focus on technologies, *Dimension 404* represents as an experiment to revive the anthology form with the predominant sci-fi traits it has been absorbing over the course of the U.S. television history. A similar case of episodic anthology released on Hulu and based of a genre-formula are the horror anthologies *Into the Dark* (Hulu, 2018-), and *Castle Rock* (Hulu, 2018-), based on Stephen King's stories taking place in Maine.

Finally, *The Act* (Hulu, 2019-) is designed as a true crime drama and described as a character-driven horror by its own creator, Nick Antosca, who had already written the supernatural horror anthology *Channel Zero*.

To this regard, Nick Antosca noted that “The proliferation of storytelling space has allowed for storytelling innovation. [...] Hulu was incredibly supportive of our take on a sensitive and unusual story. They gave us a lot of freedom and the budget and marketing and storytelling real estate to do it right.”¹²⁸ More and more frequently, television writers point out at the fact that a little over a decade ago a show like the ones just mentioned would not have been produced, or would have been made as a made-for-TV-movie, adopting a movie-of-the-week formula. Even though Hulu is conforming to the standards of more traditional U.S. anthology series, it still accounts for a reprise of the anthology content in the context of internet-distributed television. While still keeping it as a margin strategy in its broader platform economy, Hulu might release more horror/sci-fi anthological content among its forthcoming Hulu Originals. To start with, the series *North American Lake Monsters* was just ordered by Hulu and it is set to be a collection of stand-alone horror stories based on the eponymous book by Nathan Ballingrud.

It is important to clarify that Hulu’s platform strategy had to deal with a number of internal changes since it first appeared in 2007, when it was offering television content online only a few days after its original broadcast on major networks. By 2010, Hulu transitioned from being a free, ad-supported video-on-demand service to giving the option between a AVOD-SVOD hybrid model with limited commercials, based on both advertising as well as subscription revenues, and

¹²⁸ Clark, Travis. “Hulu’s ‘The Act’ Cocreator on How Streaming TV Has Changed the True Crime Genre, and His Thoughts on a Potential Season 2.” *Business Insider*. Last modified July 15, 2019. Retrieved September 17, 2019. <https://www.businessinsider.com/hulu-the-act-cocreator-nick-antosca-interview-true-crime-streaming-2019-7>.

a no-commercial option entirely subscription-based. In 2017, the streaming platform turned to Amazon Web Service, just like Netflix did, for improving its platform experience and relying on a scalable, efficient, cost effective infrastructure. Since then, it built an identity very much based on local and national audiences. More recently, in March 2019, Disney acquired 20th Century Fox, which held a stake in Hulu, and it now controls a 60% interest in the platform, which might reflect on its original content in the following years. As Vox states, this acquisition represents “the end of Hulu as we know it”¹²⁹. In this dynamic and complex scenario, Hulu’s plans for releasing original content are moving slower than other competitors, making the anthology model marginal in its evolution and positioning in the U.S. television industry. Ultimately, not much more can be observed, other than the fact that the anthology form on Hulu appears as a passive adaptation to a surrounding cultural and commercial tendency seen on U.S. non-linear television to produce genre-based anthologies, and not as a more active strategy for a long-term platform vision.

5.2.5. Amazon Video

Launched in 2006 with the name of Amazon Unbox, as part of the Amazon Prime subscription package, Amazon Prime Video started to webcast original television programs in 2013 and it is now ranked among the most prominent video-on-demand service in the U.S. As a streaming service, Amazon Video always tried to focus on offering alternative options to its main rival, Netflix. Instead of opting for a direct-to-series model since the beginning, the platform initially proposed a new business model based on the release of a selection of pilots, which were

¹²⁹ Lee, Edmund. “Disney’s Fox Acquisition Means the End of Hulu as We Know It.” *Vox*. Last modified December 14, 2017. Retrieved September 17, 2019. <https://www.vox.com/2017/12/14/16771712/hulu-disney-acquisition-fox-means-dis-foxa-21cf>.

commissioned to series in the eventuality of a good feedback from the users. This how one of the first Amazon Originals, *Transparent* (Amazon Video, 2014-), was picked. The pilot-vote model was abandoned after the fall 2017, when the last Amazon Pilot Season vote was held. In 2018, the head of Amazon Studios Jennifer Salke officially announced that the company would move on from the pilot-vote-system, to embrace other models based on data and internal metrics¹³⁰. As the Amazon Studios' CEO Albert Cheng explained, "it took too long to get shows that customers wanted. You think about the pilot process, you have the pilot process, you vote, it gets a green-light, and there's this protracted time to get the writing ready. It took way too long to get the actual season. Part of that was making sure customers got their shows as quickly as possible."¹³¹ The Amazon pilot process was not really compatible with the anthology form, since it would simply slow down the production process while not guaranteeing the same audience feedback episode after episode or season after season. It is quite clear that the anthology form better fits the direct-to-series Netflix model.

As Amazon started to skip the pilot process, television anthologies like the horror series *Lore* (Amazon Video, 2017-) began to appear on the platform. *Lore* is an interesting case not only because it is the first fictional anthology series produced by Amazon Studios, but also because it intersects the trending phenomenon of turning podcasts into TV shows¹³². In an interview

¹³⁰ Liptak, Andrew. "Amazon Is Ending Online Voting for Its TV Pilots." *The Verge*. Last modified July 29, 2018. Retrieved September 17, 2019. <https://www.theverge.com/2018/7/29/17627470/amazon-studios-pilot-season-online-voting-ending>.

¹³¹ Schneider, Michael. "Amazon Studios Confirms That Its 'Pilot Season' Voting Gimmick Is No More — Here's Why." *IndieWire*. Last modified July 28, 2018. September 17, 2019. <https://www.indiewire.com/2018/07/amazon-studios-pilot-season-voting-jennifer-salke-1201988874>.

¹³² White, Jordan. "In the Race to Turn Podcasts into TV Shows, the Podcasts Are Winning." *The Verge*. Last modified January 7, 2019. Retrieved September 17, 2019. <https://www.theverge.com/2019/1/7/18172268/podcasts-optioned-tv-adaptation-welcome-to-night-vale-homecoming-lore-justin-mcelroy-jeffrey-cranor>.

uploaded on Soundcloud¹³³, Aaron Mahnke, creator of the podcast, mentions that only four months after the release of the first season in March 2015, which originally started as a way to market its books¹³⁴, he was contacted by some production companies, which then led him to sign a contract with Valhalla Entertainment and Propagate Content and finalize a deal with Amazon. Much like for *American Horror Story*, which shares similar vibes, Amazon's *Lore* puts the focus on characters and the way they can help shaping many details of the story. Even though the amount of anthology series are still quite limited if compared to the plethora of original content available on the platform, this form is now slowly starting to catch Amazon's attention, resulting in the release of the episodic historical anthology drama *The Romanoffs* (Amazon Video, 2018-) and the announcement of new anthological productions. Among the upcoming shows, Amazon placed a two-season order for the horror anthology series *Them*, which will tackle themes like racisms and cultural divide¹³⁵, in favor of a non-normative view, and ordered the anthology comedy-drama *Modern Love*, based on The New York Times' podcast by the same name¹³⁶.

With the anthology-podcast strategy, Amazon is valuing the process of creating content able to attract an already established fanbase to sign up to Prime, as opposed to exploiting the anthology form itself as a means for content organization and retrieval. As part of the Amazon Prime membership, Amazon Video is in fact predominantly based on the convergence of subscri-

¹³³ Rebelo, Ricardo. "Lore Amazon Season 2 Aaron Mahnke Interview." *Soundcloud*. Retrieved September 26, 2019. <https://soundcloud.com/ricardo-rebelo-227909182/lore-amazon-season-2-aaron-mahnke-interview>.

¹³⁴ "The Rise of the Podcast Adaptation." *The Economist*. Last modified October 12, 2017. Retrieved September 17, 2019. <https://www.economist.com/prospero/2017/10/12/the-rise-of-the-podcast-adaptation>.

¹³⁵ Goldberg, Lesley. "Horror Anthology 'Them,' From Lena Waithe, Gets 2-Season Order at Amazon." *The Hollywood Reporter*. Last modified July 28, 2018. Retrieved September 26, 2019. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/horror-anthology-them-lena-waithe-gets-2-season-order-at-amazon-1130530>.

¹³⁶ "Modern Love Podcast" *The New York Times*. Last modified September 25, 2019. Retrieved September 26, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/column/modern-love-podcast>.

bers who are interested in multiple services, ranging from discounts on online purchases to free shipping, and who are not just exclusively interested in Prime television content. This entails a peculiar process of decision-making for commissioning and pitching a show. If Netflix needs to think about a long-term strategy to make its content appealing and organize it in a meaningful way for the users, Amazon Video's primary aim is to draw customers to Amazon Prime at large, and not just to the video service. This is because Prime members are found to be likely to spend more than non-prime members on purchasing content¹³⁷. In other words, Amazon economic model is different from that of any other platform, as it mostly relies on e-commerce. Sources report that Amazon Prime Video "evaluates TV shows by their 'costs per first stream' - effectively, the price to hook a customer on Prime."¹³⁸ On Amazon Video, the anthology form therefore sets itself as one of the many commercial strategies Amazon is using to attract subscribers.

5.2.6. *Apple TV+ and Quibi*

While we can make broad observations and comparisons on the strategies adopted by already established television platforms in relation with the anthology form, it is difficult to make an absolute statement on the future role of the anthology form in the context of U.S. internet-distributed television in the longer term. Nowadays, the anthology form in television still accounts for its traditional affordances, which do create visible genre-based patterns. These patterns, however, are not fixed and they might change as they interact with a variety of different economic

¹³⁷ Kim, Eugene. "Amazon Just Made Thousands of Books Free for Its Prime Members — Here's a Simple Reason Why." *Business Insider*. Last modified October 5, 2016. Retrieved September 17, 2019. <https://www.businessinsider.com/amazon-prime-members-spend-a-lot-more-than-non-prime-members-2016-10>.

¹³⁸ "Reuters Graphics." *Reuters*. Retrieved September 26, 2019. <http://fingfx.thomsonreuters.com/gfx/rngs/AMAZONCOM-RATINGS/010061612F1/index.html>.

models and platform strategies. This pushes us beyond a deterministic analysis of platforms environments and infrastructures. Through the previous analysis, by integrating a close reading and a distant reading approach, I was able to profile the positioning of anthology series on Vimeo on demand, Sony Crackles, Netflix, Hulu and Amazon Video and outline major similarities and differences emerging from their comparison. Yet, it is almost impossible to define a recurring pattern or rule that can be applied to all anthological occurrences on non-linear television. It is therefore necessary to look for more evidences of this anthological turn in U.S. television. To understand whether the practice of anthology-making is just a transitory phenomenon or it is actually turning into a constant norm among streaming platforms, it might be useful to consider the strategies of the latest over-the-top competitors entering the market, such as Quibi or Apple TV+.

Upcoming video-on-demand platforms have the advantage to join the non-linear mediascape in a moment when the streaming television industry can count at least ten years of monitoring its business models and evaluating its best practices. Set to launch in April 2020, Quibi, for instance, was announced as an innovative over-the-top service bringing a unique vision unlike anyone else's. The idea for this upcoming streaming platform, founded by Jeffrey Katzenberg, is to provide a new form of high-quality, bite-size television content made of small video segments that can be watched on-the-go, targeting "viewers looking for quick-hit fare"¹³⁹ intended for mobile devices. As part of this vision, Katzenberg has already announced that the director Steven Spielberg has "written five or six episodes (which Quibi calls 'chapters,' like a novel) of a 10- or

¹³⁹ Koblin, John. "Jeffrey Katzenberg Raises \$1 Billion for Short-Form Video Venture." *The New York Times*. Last modified August 7, 2018. Retrieved September 17, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/07/business/media/katzenberg-streaming-video.html>.

12-chapter story”¹⁴⁰ and that the program is in development with the title *Spielberg’s After Dark*. The vision might be innovative, but Quibi is already showing a tendency to conform to anthological narrative forms that were already implemented by many other platforms. Apple TV+ is following a similar strategy, by commissioning a horror anthology written by Steven Spielberg, along with other anthologies.

Apple TV+ is an over-the-top streaming service set to launch in fall 2019. While Apple is trying to sign deals with HBO, Starz and Showtime to feed the library of its upcoming television platform¹⁴¹, its catalog will be also composed by original productions. As an article on *The New York Times* reports, as of March 2019 “five series have completed filming. Around a half dozen more are on the verge of wrapping production [...]. And the number of original productions is expected to increase in 2020.”¹⁴² Among the ten series listed in the article, three anthology series are announced: *Amazing Stories*, a reboot of the NBC series by the same name broadcasted from 1985 to 1987; *Little America*, described as a collection of stand-alone stories about immigrants coming to the United States¹⁴³; and the horror TV show *Calls*, remake of the French audio-series released on Canal+. Additionally, some Apple TV+ originals are set to be miniseries, such as the science-fiction drama *For All Mankind*, the crime drama *Defending Jacob*, the horror *Lisey’s Story*, and other dramas like *My Glory Was I Had Such Friends*. Miniseries indicates the potential

¹⁴⁰ Schneider, Michael. “Steven Spielberg Writing Horror Series for Quibi That You Can Only Watch at Night.” *Variety*. Last modified June 10, 2019. Retrieved September 17, 2019. <https://variety.com/2019/tv/news/steven-spielberg-quibi-jeffrey-katzenberg-horror-1203237395>.

¹⁴¹ Shaw, Lucas, Mark Gurman, and Julie Verhage. “Apple Courts HBO and Showtime for Service to Challenge Netflix.” *Bloomberg*. Last modified March 13, 2019. Retrieved September 18, 2019. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-03-13/apple-races-to-get-studios-signed-up-for-new-streaming-service>.

¹⁴² Koblin, John. “Apple’s Big Spending Plan to Challenge Netflix Takes Shape.” *The New York Times*. Last modified March 17, 2019. Retrieved September 17, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/17/business/media/apple-content-hollywood.html>.

¹⁴³ *ibidem*.

for a reboot in the anthology form, and docu-series like *Home* are in fact already built on an episodic anthological structure. Based on the list retrieved on Wikipedia, we can fairly state that around 30% of the upcoming Apple TV+ catalog will be composed of anthology series and mini-series that can be potentially turned into anthologies¹⁴⁴.

This scenario will probably change as the library expands. However, as a starting strategy it does suggest that anthological or potentially anthological content counts for at least one-fourth of original productions in launching platform catalogs, at least in this case. A case study approach therefore confirms that there is an interest for the anthology form in synergy with platforms' both creative and commercial strategies, and that this interest can be traced as a marginal but constant trend, which engage television streaming platforms in an anthological process that involves other kinds of non-audiovisual digital platforms. Indeed, the anthology form is not the only form in television, and the platform space is also given to shows with a potential for a long-run. Nevertheless, the anthology form is emerging as a more and more widespread strategic solution to both wrap content up, by restarting a serial that is coming to an end - such as in the case of Netflix' *Narcos* -, and to help initiating a new library through the creation of collections.

¹⁴⁴ "List of Original Programs Distributed by Apple TV+." *Wikipedia*. Last modified September 24, 2019. Retrieved September 25, 2019. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=List_of_original_programs_distributed_by_Apple_TV%2B&oldid=917496311.

5.3. Acquisitions

5.3.1. Netflix

Mapping out the occurrences of anthology series as part of streaming platforms' original productions gave us a relatively complex picture. While digital platforms' infrastructures and technologies are prone to welcome and even induce processes of anthologization that facilitate content indexing and retrieval in the long term, some over-the-top services seem to have adopted this model more radically than others. In general, different platforms are doing it for different reasons. Streaming services heavily relying on a community of users, like Vimeo on demand and YouTube Prime, did not implement the production of anthology series as a commercial strategy for marketing content. The anthology form rather appeared on Vimeo on demand and YouTube Prime either in the creativity of users, who reproduce a narrative form with an ancient tradition, or in online collection practices loosely based on the anthological model. On the contrary, a platform like Sony Crackles foresaw early on the commercial potential of anthology series in close interconnection with a platform environment, in a moment when most anthology TV series were appearing on cable channels. Nevertheless, it was not able to capitalize it and fully benefit from the potential of the anthology form due to contextual reasons: Sony Crackles is a free video-on-demand platform, which does not leave much choice for high budget productions¹⁴⁵ or plans for expansion. In May 2019, the financial results for Sony Crackles were shared on *Variety*, which

¹⁴⁵ Despite the high quality production value, Neil Landau reported a basic cable size budget allocated for Sony Crackles' TV series (Landau 2016).

revealed that “the free, over-the-top streaming network appeared to be in the black, at least for the first quarter of 2019.”¹⁴⁶

It is still early to evaluate to what extent the strategy of Apple TV+ is based on anthology-making process, even though it is already possible to notice an interest of the company for products like anthology series. Leaving niche players and skinny bundles aside, what we should perhaps focus on more are streaming platforms like Netflix, Hulu and Amazon Video, the “big three” of the over-the-top media ecosystem¹⁴⁷. To better assess their connection with the anthology form, here I will consider their acquisition strategies in relation to anthology series initially released on networks or cable channels, by considering anthological content acquired for production and/or distribution. One interesting case is Netflix. Since its first original production in 2013, Netflix marketing campaign for attracting subscribers heavily relied on Netflix Originals. However, an article on *Variety* recently reported that “Original content accounted for 37% of Netflix’s U.S. streams in October 2018, up from 24% a year earlier (and just 14% in January 2017), per video-measurement firm 7Park Data. But that means the majority (63%) of Netflix’s viewing is still from licensed content.”¹⁴⁸ In this precarious battle between original and licensed content, in the past few years Netflix has adopted some strategies to strengthen its internal balance and limit external forces such as large-scale industrial acquisition and merging activities or the entry of

¹⁴⁶ Spangler, Todd. “Sony Crackle Had Q1 Revenue of \$11 Million, Operating Profit of \$3.5 Million.” *Variety*. Last modified May 16, 2019. Retrieved September 18, 2019. <https://variety.com/2019/digital/news/sony-crackle-q1-2019-profit-revenue-1203217318>.

¹⁴⁷ Wallenstein, Andrew. “The OTT View-Niverse: A Map of the New Video Ecosystem.” *Variety*. Last modified April 29, 2015. Retrieved September 18, 2019. <https://variety.com/2015/digital/news/ott-map-video-ecosystem-1201480930>.

¹⁴⁸ Spangler, Todd. “Netflix Original Series Viewing Climbs, but Licensed Content Remains Majority of Total U.S. Streams.” *Variety*. Last modified December 10, 2018. Retrieved September 18, 2019. <https://variety.com/2018/digital/news/netflix-original-series-licensed-viewing-friends-the-office-1203085230>.

new competitors, which might cause a loss of licensed content moving from Netflix to another platform.

Among these strategies, which stand in the grey area between licensed and original content, are the acquisition of exclusive streaming rights and/or exclusive international distribution rights on ongoing series. Acquiring the streaming rights on ongoing series can either bring to a subsequent renewal of the series as a Netflix Original or to the international distribution of content marketed abroad as a Netflix Original (or both). With the option of picking up an ongoing series for the following season and rebrand it as a Netflix Original, Netflix slowly emancipates from the reliance on content providers, shortening the value chain (fig. 20, 21).



Figure 20. Value chain of Netflix's licensed content.¹⁴⁹

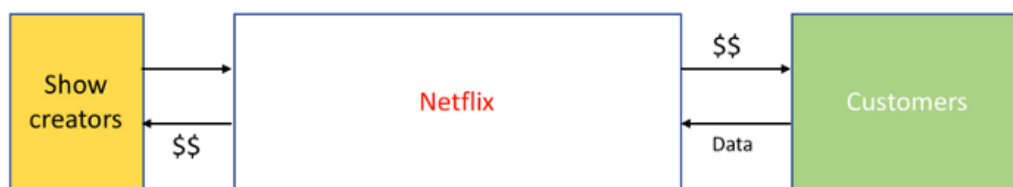


Figure 21. Value chain of Netflix's original content.¹⁵⁰

Netflix's content acquisition strategy notably tends to follow a fundamental principle:

Netflix aims to cover a broad variety of people's taste to guarantee a personalized stream for each

¹⁴⁹ Arifin, Darwin. "Netflix Content Acquisition Strategy [Part 1]." *Medium*. Last modified October 21, 2018. Retrieved September 18, 2019. https://medium.com/@darwin_80923/netflix-content-acquisition-strategy-part-1-469e0836b9af.

¹⁵⁰ *ibidem*.

individual user¹⁵¹. On the one hand, the company does so by opting for shows with a wide, long-established audience, and, on the other hand, it invests on niche shows that offer a smaller yet loyal pool of subscribers.

As the 2018 annual report outlines, Netflix's estimates are based "on historical experience and on various other assumptions [...]. For example, we estimate the amortization pattern, beginning with the month of first availability, of any particular licensed or produced television series or movie based upon factors including historical and estimated viewing patterns."¹⁵² As part of its content acquisition process, Netflix acquired anthological content and, while some titles did not make it to Netflix original productions, some others did. Here, I will examine anthology series acquired from content providers and then turned into Netflix Originals. As I observed, so far Netflix did demonstrate an interest for anthological content, by producing a relatively high amount of anthology series as part of its original offer. One of the first anthologies acquired by Netflix was Channel 4's *Black Mirror*, which was already a hit show at the time of its acquisition. Netflix's first acquired exclusive streaming rights for the British show, originally released on Channel 4. After this first strategic move, the U.S. streaming platform was able to outbid the British channel and gain the rights for distributing the third season of the series¹⁵³. In 2015 Netflix officially pla-

¹⁵¹ "Netflix - Overview - Long-Term View." *Netflix Investors*. Last modified January 22, 2018. Retrieved September 18, 2019. <https://www.netflixinvestor.com/ir-overview/long-term-view/default.aspx>.

¹⁵² Netflix Inc.'s Annual Report: https://s22.q4cdn.com/959853165/files/doc_financials/annual_reports/2018/Form-10K_Q418_Filed.pdf

¹⁵³ Plunkett, John. "Netflix Deals Channel 4 Knockout Blow over Charlie Brooker's Black Mirror." *The Guardian*. Last modified March 29, 2016. Retrieved September 18, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/mar/29/netflix-channel-4-charlie-brooker-black-mirror>.

ced a 2-season order for *Black Mirror*¹⁵⁴, which since then entered the pool of Netflix Originals as a continuation of the series first distributed by Channel 4.

Even apart from the company's internal strategies, a conversation on anthology series in relation to streaming platforms is arising among its content creators. For instance, *Black Mirror*'s creator Charlie Brooker suggested that stand-alone episodes can be considered as "short, individual films" (Landau 2015: 286), thus becoming part of a double stream: the one attached to the anthological collection *Black Mirror* and the other linked to the flow of algorithmic recommendations sparking from single episodes - i.e. "if you just watched *The Wicker Man*, if you just watched *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, it might recommend 'White Bear'." (*ibidem*) "So, in a way, these services that stack everything up are kind of made for anthology shows." (*ibidem*) In this sense, Netflix's choice of acquiring *Black Mirror* is quite easy to profile. Netflix looked at the data and identified certain viewing patterns, it also identified an audience either already or potentially interested in a certain content and then it isolated a series, *Black Mirror*, that was already attracting viewers. The series notably fit within at least three streams: the broad sci-fi genre category, a cluster of nostalgic content à la *The Twilight Zone*, *Black Mirror*'s own collection of episodes. In addition to these three groups, the anthology structure also allows for other associations based on single-episode's topics. Following a similar operational scheme, Netflix acquired other anthology series, such as the Japanese television series *Midnight Diner* (TBS, 2009-2014; Netflix, 2016-), acquired and renewed by Netflix for a fourth season.

¹⁵⁴ Birnbaum, Debra. "Netflix Picks Up 'Black Mirror' for 12 New Episodes." *Variety*. Last modified September 25, 2015. Retrieved September 18, 2019. <https://variety.com/2015/digital/news/netflix-black-mirror-new-episodes-1201602037>.

Another example is the Canadian horror anthology series *Slasher*, which first appeared on Super Channel and Chiller in 2016 and in 2017 it was acquired by Netflix for a second season. *Slasher* positions itself in the platform ecology as a tribute to both the slasher tradition and murder mystery stories. The tendency to acquire anthology series as content that can be easily indexed on the platform, thanks to the activation of several streams, emerges even when the series' acquisition does not lead to the final conversion into a Netflix Original. *Scream*, for example, was initially acquired by Netflix for international distribution and marketed as a Netflix Original. Netflix officially opted out from the deal in 2018 and it will not stream the third season of the series¹⁵⁵, but the initial operation was still interesting in terms of both an economy of the platform and an economy of nostalgia. Other evidences of Netflix's interest for anthology series can be seen in its acquisition of exclusive distribution rights for television content like the true crimes *Unsolved* (USA Network [U.S.]/Netflix [International], 2018-) and *Dirty John* (Bravo [U.S.]/Netflix [International], 2018-) or *Bangkok Love Stories* (GMM Grammy [Thailand]/Netflix [Selected territories], 2018-).

5.3.2. Hulu

As I showed, Hulu is not really at the frontline as far as anthology series produced or distributed. While it is slowly implementing an anthological selection in its original catalog, it is not part of a more solid interest for the anthology form. Rather, it is passively absorbing a broader anthological turn in television. However, while trying to conform to surrounding trends, Hulu did opt for an interesting operation of anthologization of content acquired for distribution. In 2016,

¹⁵⁵ Gardner, Eriq. "Netflix Gets Termination of Weinstein Co. Output Deal." *The Hollywood Reporter*. Last modified July 17, 2018. Retrieved September 19, 2019. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/thr-esq/netflix-gets-termination-weinstein-output-deal-1127805>.

Channel 4 released the four-episode crime series *National Treasure* (Channel 4, 2016). Two years later, the same channel aired *Kiri* (Channel 4, 2018), another four-part crime drama. The two series were broadcasted on British television as separate productions. When Hulu acquired the U.S. distribution rights for both dramas, it marketed them in the same collection under the title of *National Treasure*, rebranding *Kiri* as *National Treasure: Kiri* and adding it to a new slate of Hulu Originals¹⁵⁶. This is a case of *ex-post* anthology, when non-anthological content, or content from different anthological collections are rebranded in a new anthology series, for the distribution into another television market.

Even though this might remain an isolated example on Hulu, it still adds onto an increasing attempt to implement a larger anthological selection. In the acquisition of international content for U.S. distribution, Hulu is also showing interest for products like miniseries, as a complementary offer to long-running television series. One case is the four-episode Australian television series *Safe Harbour* (SBS [Australia]/Hulu [U.S.] 2018), which is listed on IMDb as a miniseries¹⁵⁷. Some co-productions also suggest a possible interest of Hulu for limited-run series like the satirical comedy *Catch-22* (Hulu-Sky Italy, 2019-), with chances of returning following an anthology model¹⁵⁸. Furthermore, Hulu partnered with FX for the distribution of *The Weekly*

¹⁵⁶ “Acclaimed Drama Series National Treasure Joins Hulu Original Slate.” *Hulu Press Site*. Last modified December 13, 2016. Retrieved September 19, 2019. <https://www.hulu.com/press/acclaimed-drama-series-national-treasure-joins-hulu-original-slate>.

¹⁵⁷ “Safe Harbour (TV Mini-Series 2018–).” *IMDb*. Retrieved September 19, 2019. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6816530>.

¹⁵⁸ O’Keeffe, Jack. “Hulu’s ‘Catch-22’ Could Easily Expand Past The Original Novel.” *Bustle*. Last modified May 17, 2019. Retrieved September 19, 2019. <https://www.bustle.com/p/will-catch-22-return-for-a-season-2-the-hulu-series-could-expand-past-the-original-novel-17889176>.

(Hulu-FX, 2019-), a docu-series that covers topics centered on investigative journalism¹⁵⁹. The series is produced by *The New York Times* and features different breaking news-stories per episode, introduced by several journalists, following the traditional episodic anthology structure.

Hulu's case demonstrates that, while it is possible to observe some recurring patterns, it is still difficult to assess the extent of the anthological turn in television in the long run. Even though the platform architecture calls by itself for an anthological model, platforms' diversification makes it hard to define absolute rules or behaviors and each case appeals to diverging industrial strategies. For instance, Hulu follows a different business model than Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, thus finding its own specific positioning in the U.S. over-the-top media industry. Hulu is a platform still profoundly bounded to a U.S. national identity, which makes it "something akin to a traditional American cable provider." (Johnson 2018, online). As a platform that streams content from many television stations, Hulu is more of a multichannel video programming distributor, and its logics obey to dynamics that are relational more than structural, meaning its catalog selection for acquisitions and co-productions relies on Hulu's relations with content providers and partners, even more than in the case of Netflix or Amazon Prime Video.

5.3.3. Amazon Video

With a global reach comparable to that of Netflix, Amazon Video was able to set up a more widespread distribution network than Hulu, opening up to a series of acquisition agreements. Despite its main focus on the e-commerce section of its business, Amazon Prime invested in the Prime Video service, by acquiring exclusive distribution rights to stream content in coun-

¹⁵⁹ "A New TV Series from The New York Times on FX and Hulu," *The Weekly - The New York Times*. Last modified May 14, 2019. Retrieved September 19, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/14/the-weekly/new-york-times-fx-hulu.html>.

tries outside of the U.S. Among the anthology series selected for distribution are: the crime drama *The Missing* (BBC-Starz [U.K./U.S.]/Amazon Video [Switzerland, U.K.], 2014-), the horror drama *The Exorcist* (Fox [U.S.]/Amazon Video [Switzerland], 2016-), the science fiction series *Philip K. Dick's Electric Dreams* (Channel 4 [U.K.]/Amazon Video [U.S., Japan], 2018-), *The Terror* (AMC [United States]/Amazon Video [Japan], 2018-), *The Purge* (U.S.A. Network [United States]/Amazon Video [Japan], 2018-). If we look at a more complete list of titles that Prime Video purchased for international distribution¹⁶⁰, the anthology form does not stand out as the dominant type of content. Distribution rights for anthology series were so far acquired for specific markets - namely, Japan, U.S., Switzerland - and there is no evidence of a wider strategy based on distributing anthological content. Yet, what does emerge from this list is the widespread tendency to select genre-based anthology series (science fiction, horror, crime), which Amazon combined with more innovative original anthological productions like *Modern Love*.

Overall, Amazon's deals for content distribution seems to respond to the strategy announced by Jennifer Salke, head of Amazon Studio, who stated: "We're not going for something small and niche [...]. You can still have something that feels specific. But it needs to invite people in."¹⁶¹ Horror, crime and sci-fi anthologies certainly fit into this target, as products that are both specific and trending. As Amazon Studio signs a deal with Blumhouse, the production company behind *The Purge* and Hulu's *Into the Dark* along with many other horror anthology series, for a

¹⁶⁰ "List of Original Programs Distributed by Amazon." *Wikipedia*. Last modified September 22, 2019. Retrieved September 22, 2019. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=List_of_original_programs_distributed_by_Amazon&oldid=917225992.

¹⁶¹ Barnes, Brooks, and John Koblin. "Amazon Studios' New Boss Is Reshaping Its Strategy. Step One: Lure New Talent." *The New York Times*. Last modified June 11, 2018. Retrieved September 19, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/11/business/media/amazon-studios-jennifer-salke.html>.

themed collection of eight movies¹⁶², it is clear that Amazon is ready to place its bet on the anthological model. Bearing a streaming-platform structure, Netflix, Hulu and Amazon Prime Video all build on anthological models as implicit component of their infrastructure. However, each one of them remodeled it for its own specific need, by embedding the anthological narrative, cultural, economic form for different purposes. If, on the one hand, “platformisation entails the rise of the platform as the dominant infrastructural and/or economic model in the industry” (Evens and Donders 2018: 4), a diversity of pre-existent cultural and industrial dynamics are still influencing platform technologies, showing that the outcomes of the anthological turn on actual content are very much attached to regulatory commercial frameworks, industrial strategies and business models that are not exclusively dependent on the technology itself. This can be better observed on platform environments that are created as over-the-top skinny bundles options offered as part of a network or cable channel like CBS or HBO.

5.4. Skinny Bundles

5.4.1. CBS All Access

The U.S. media industry landscape is still changing. Acquisition and merging activities re-establish media conglomerates (Apple, AT&T / WarnerMedia, CBS, Comcast / NBCUniversal, Discovery Communications, Disney, Viacom), streaming natives like Amazon Prime Video, Hulu, Netflix and YouTube Premium fight to preserve their leading position as non-linear televi-

¹⁶² D’Alessandro, Anthony. “Amazon Studios Pacts With Blumhouse TV For Eight Thematically-Connected Movies – Deadline.” *Deadline*. Last Modified November 14, 2018. Retrieved September 20, 2019. <https://deadline.com/2018/11/amazon-studios-blumhouse-tv-eight-movie-deal-1202502132>.

sion providers, while digital natives like BuzzFeed, Vox and Vice start producing their own content and new streaming platforms like Apple TV+, Disney+ or Quibi, entirely dedicated to short programming, are set to launch in the U.S. television market. This moment of reassessment is having evident influences on the agreements arranged between competing players in the industry for the production and distribution of content, as well as for other services. Netflix and Hulu rely on the competitor Amazon for data storage through the Amazon Web Services; Hulu was always heavily dependent on its network partners; Netflix's library is currently largely based on licensed content coming from external content providers; network and cable channels are still making agreements with over-the-top platforms for streaming their content.

As early as 2014, however, CBS tried to break this vicious circle and it created its own over-the-top platform, launching CBS All Access, the first streaming platform operated by a U.S. broadcast network. CBS All Access started its original programming in February 2017 with *The Good Fight* (CBS All Access, 2017-), followed by *Star Trek Discovery* (CBS All Access, 2017-), which was released in the fall 2017. In October 2018, CBS' streaming platform released two anthology series: *Star Trek: Short Treks* (CBS All Access 2018-), consisting of 15-to-18 minute long stand-alone episodes serving as spin-offs from the series *Star Trek: Discovery*, and the psychological thriller *Tell me a Story* (CBS All Access, 2018-), based on the TV series *Cuentame un Cuento* (Antena 3, 2014). *Cuentame un Cuento* is a Spanish format which had already led to a Mexican remake in 2017 for the video-on-demand platform Blim, under the title *Érase una vez* (Blim, 2017-). CBS All Access continued to adhere to the anthology form for its originals, with the series *The Twilight Zone* (CBS All Access, 2019-), the third revival of the original 1959 CBS' anthology created by Rod Serling. *The Twilight Zone*'s third revival was developed by Simon

Kinberg, Marco Ramirez and the filmmaker Jordan Peele, who narrates the episodes as the host, in the style of early U.S. television anthologies. Furthermore, among the series commissioned for CBS All Access and soon to be released are the miniseries *The Stand*, based on the novel of the same name by Stephen King, and *Interrogation*, a true crime divided in episodes that can be watched in any order.

With the series ordered for its video-on-demand service, CBS proves its interest to fully exploit the non-linear environment of the streaming platform, by profiting of the many advantages of short and flexible narratives. As far as casting and directing options for instance, actors and directors are able to return from one episode to the other, guaranteeing a certain continuity in the overall vision for the anthology and still allowing for a constant update and re-imagining of the narratives. By repurposing an old televisual form for its streaming service, CBS both pays tribute to its long broadcasting history and reinvent itself for the new Post-Channel Era, where non-linear television is on the rise. Among the big three of television's First Golden Age, CBS is perhaps the one network able to successfully resist in the mediascape, not only as a major conglomerate but also as an industrial player able to complete a relatively profitable transition¹⁶³ to non-linear television, while still maintaining a predominant position among linear U.S. media.

5.4.2. HBO Now

Providing television content only through cable providers poses some limits. Since modern cable television relies on a hybrid fiber-coaxial cables network, it is only available near ser-

¹⁶³ Malone, Michael. "TCA 2018: CBS All Access Has 2.5 Million Subscribers." *Broadcasting & Cable*. Last modified August 5, 2018. Retrieved September 20, 2019. <https://www.broadcastingcable.com/news/tca-2018-cbs-all-access-has-2-5-million-subscribers>.

vice providers, with higher costs than satellite, IPTV or OTT television. Over-the-top television in particular offers a valid alternative to linear television programming, coming with a lower price, being available on a higher number of devices and offering to the audience more flexibility and convenience in establishing their own viewing routine. As figure 8 shows, in 2017 the number of Netflix’s subscribers officially surpassed the number of pay-TV subscribers from major cable providers in the U.S.

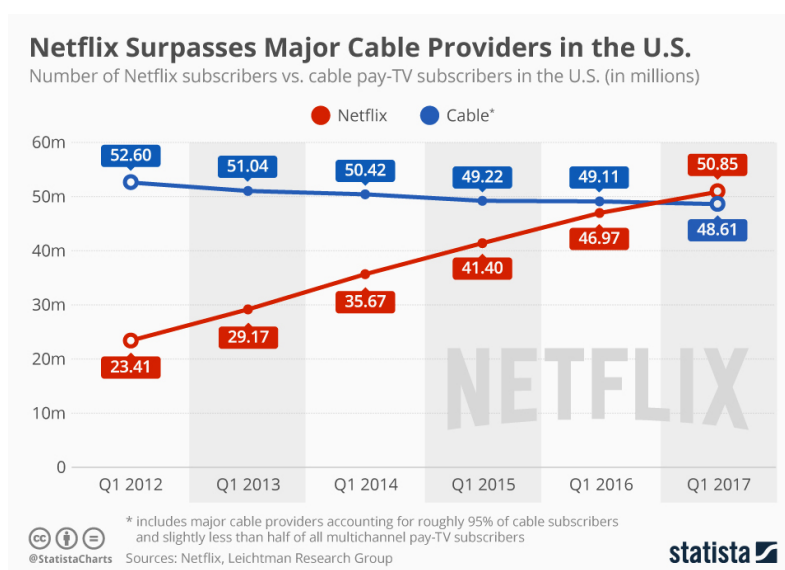


Figure 22. Number of Netflix’s subscribers versus number of cable pay-TV subscribers in the U.S. (in millions).¹⁶⁴

For the first time since its ascent in the U.S. television market, cable television is encountering major losses in the number of subscriptions, and according to multiple sources it is now facing a steady decline¹⁶⁵.

¹⁶⁴ Richter, Felix. “Infographic: Netflix Surpasses Major Cable Providers in the U.S.” *Statista Infographics*. Last modified June 13, 2017. Retrieved September 20, 2019. <https://www.statista.com/chart/9799/netflix-vs-cable-pay-tv-subscribers>.

¹⁶⁵ Littleton, Cynthia. “Inside the Slow Death of Cable TV.” *Variety*. Last modified April 10, 2019. Retrieved September 20, 2019. <https://variety.com/2019/biz/features/traditional-cable-companies-1203183710/>.

As the number of cord-cutters - i.e. cable subscribers canceling their subscriptions - and cord-nevers - i.e. television viewers who never subscribed to cable - rises¹⁶⁶, HBO is trying to find a solution by offering its own over-the-top service not attached to the cable's membership fee. The service is called HBO Now and it is available since April 2015 as a standalone subscription. Data suggests that the value of HBO Now to consumers is very much attached to its hit-shows, such as *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011-2019). "HBO Now subscribers jumped by 91% in the U.S. during Season 7's airing, but steadily declined over the six months after it ended. Only 26% of HBO Now subscribers who made their first payment during Game of Thrones season 7 were still subscribers six months later."¹⁶⁷ As of May 2019, the retention rate for HBO Now subscribers turns out to be much lower than competitors like Netflix, Hulu and even CBS All Access¹⁶⁸. To contain the losses and compete with the upcoming over-the-top platform Disney+, HBO's parent company AT&T/TimeWarner is now preparing to launch at the end of this year¹⁶⁹ a direct to consumer streaming service, which will be offering HBO Now's content as part of a larger single-tier SVOD service¹⁷⁰.

¹⁶⁶ "[...] the share of households without a Telco, cable or satellite TV provider amounted to 30 percent in 2018, up from 26.2 percent the year before. In early 2018, the source forecasted that by the end of that year the number of households without a traditional TV subscription would stand at 36.76 million, up from 22.5 million four years previously." Source: Watson, Amy. "Number and Share of Cord-Cutters/Nevers in the U.S. 2018." *Statista*. Last modified July 12, 2019. Retrieved September 20, 2019. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/258460/number-and-share-of-cord-cutters-in-the-us>.

¹⁶⁷ Perez, Sarah. "Winter Is Coming for HBO NOW Subscriber Growth." *TechCrunch*. Last modified May 17, 2019. Retrieved September 22, 2019. <http://social.techcrunch.com/2019/05/17/winter-is-coming-for-hbo-now-subscriber-growth>.

¹⁶⁸ *ibidem*.

¹⁶⁹ Donnelly, Matt. "WarnerMedia to Launch Direct to Consumer Streaming Service in Late 2019." *Variety*. Last modified October 10, 2018. Retrieved September 22, 2019. <https://variety.com/2018/tv/news/warnermedia-direct-to-consumer-streaming-service-john-stankey-1202975598>.

¹⁷⁰ Frankel, Daniel. "WarnerMedia 'Pulls Back Curtain' on What Will Actually Be Single-Tier SVOD Service." *Multichannel*. Last modified May 29, 2019. Retrieved September 22, 2019. <https://www.multichannel.com/blog/warner-media-reveals-svod-platform-details>.

HBO Now is therefore expected to undergo an additional transition. For the moment, the platform HBO Now lacks of several HBO Originals, such as signature anthology series like *Tales From The Crypt* (HBO, 1989-1996), which is not available to stream on the neither one of HBO video-on-demand platforms possibly due to licensing issues¹⁷¹. HBO Now mostly focuses on HBO's most recent original content, showing an interest, as I previously mentioned, for hit-shows from the late 1990s on, including classic HBO branded content like *The Sopranos* and *The Wire*. Additionally, with its long tradition of quality television series of all forms and genres, HBO added several miniseries and some anthological content in the offer of its OTT platform. However, anthology series available on the platform, such as *True Detective*, *Room 104* and *High Maintenance*, represent only a very small percentage of HBO Now's library. Anthology series do not stand out as the main form in the content selection, showing that, even though appealing, the anthology model is not seen as a key component in the vision for HBO Now's original productions. As much as the anthology form can be specifically adjusted to any platform environment, it does not fit all kinds of online television libraries in terms of television form. The anthology rather emerges on HBO Now as an editorial model for content organization in the form of collections (<https://play.hbonow.com/collections>).

5.4.3. FX+, Shudder, AMC Premium

Not all cable channels have adopted the same strategy as HBO. FX launched FX+ in 2017 as an ad-free streaming service tied to the cable subscription, envisaging the possibility, in the future, of selling directly to cord-cutters or cord-never. However, before it was able to offer this

¹⁷¹ Harris, Will. "It's Not TV—and It's Not Available on HBO Go: 27-plus HBO Originals Unavailable from the Streaming Service." *The A.V. Club*. Last modified May 15, 2013. Retrieved September 23, 2019. <https://tv.avclub.com/it-s-not-tv-and-it-s-not-available-on-hbo-go-27-plus-h-1798238242>.

option, FX+ was set to shut down as early as August 2019. As reported on *AdWeek*, “On Aug. 21, FX Networks will cease operation of its direct-to-consumer non-linear service, FX+. We deeply appreciate every fan of FX original series who subscribed to our service, and we are more optimistic and excited than ever about FX’s future as a key brand supporting the strategic priorities of The Walt Disney Company.”¹⁷² What happened is that, after Disney acquired 20th Century Fox and Hulu, becoming FX’s new parent company, it outlined another strategy than the one adopted by the cable channel, by driving FX content toward Hulu instead of keeping it on FX+. An initiative that was first described by FX’s CEO John Landgraf as “the first of its kind for an ad-supported cable network”¹⁷³ and a strategic move that would put FX “on equal footing with premium networks and streaming services” is therefore coming to an end.

Nevertheless, it might be interesting to observe FX+’ early strategies for streaming content, since FX was one of the first channels to redefine the anthology form. As we read on *Vulture*, Ryan Murphy’s anthology miniseries *American Horror Story* was one of the first titles to fill the library, with all its episodes available to stream on FX+.¹⁷⁴ The platform strategy, however, was significantly affected by previous agreements with other over-the-top services like Netflix. Since FX had already sold streaming rights of several shows to other on-demand platforms, including most titles in the catalog was difficult and famous anthology series like *Fargo* or *American Crime Story* simply never made it to FX+. The upcoming video-on-demand service by

¹⁷² Lynch, Jason. “FX Is Shutting Down Ad-Free Subscription Service FX+ Next Month.” *AdWeek*. Last modified July 15, 2019. Retrieved September 25, 2019. <https://www.adweek.com/tv-video/fx-is-shutting-down-ad-free-subscription-service-fx-next-month>.

¹⁷³ Adalian, Josef. “FX’s Subscription Service FX+ Is a Big Step Toward TV’s Unbundled Future.” *Vulture*. Last modified August 7, 2017. Retrieved September 23, 2019. <https://www.vulture.com/2017/08/fx-announces-streaming-subscription-service-fx.html>.

¹⁷⁴ *ibidem*.

AMC Networks, which had already released the horror-oriented streaming platform Shudder in 2016, might encounter similar problems. The service will be called AMC Premium and it raises a widespread issue: if, on the one hand, cable and network channels are moving their content out of Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, possibly mining future revenues of the two streaming natives, on the other hand, cable and network channels are still tied to previous agreements with streaming giants.

Much like FX+, AMC Premium will not be, strictly speaking, an over-the-top service, given that the platform will be available only through AMC's cable partner, Comcast. AMC Premium is in fact designed as an extra-service for cable consumers already attached to the bundle¹⁷⁵. AMC also pointed out that there is currently no plan to switch to a direct-to-consumer experience, since "AMC Premiere isn't the sort of soup-to-nuts experience as an HBO Now: You won't be able to watch every episode of *Breaking Bad*, *Mad Men*, or many other AMC shows if you subscribe to AMC Premiere, nor will you get on-demand access to the dozens of movies AMC telecasts each month on its linear channel."¹⁷⁶ As AMC officially entered the race of anthology series with the seasonal anthology *The Terror*, which was renewed for a second season, it is not unlikely that the channel will move toward producing more anthology content specifically envisaged for its platforms. An article on *The New York Times* dating May 2019 mentioned that "Shudder is in postproduction on an adaptation of [...] 2014 short story 'By the Silver Water of Lake Champlain' for its anthology series 'Creepshow,' a reboot of the 1982 movie written by

¹⁷⁵ Adalian, Josef. "AMC Is Hoping You'll Pay More Money to Watch Shows Live Sans Commercials." *Vulture*. Last modified June 29, 2017. Retrieved September 23, 2019. <https://www.vulture.com/2017/06/amc-debuts-amc-premiere-a-way-to-watch-shows-live-sans-ads.html>.

¹⁷⁶ *ibidem*.

King.”¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, in 2018, AMC ordered an anthology created by the actor Jason Segel and titled *Dispatches From Elsewhere*. The series was described as a new creative experiment to engage the audience by distributing story elements across multiple media platforms¹⁷⁸. While AMC Networks distributes most of its original or acquired horror content on Shudder, it seems that AMC is keen on widening its anthological offer to include innovative anthological content tailored for a multi-platform media environment.

More recently, AMC Studios announced the production of its first episodic anthology drama, which will be released in 2020¹⁷⁹. This untitled anthology project will be made of six episodes based on the short film written by Brett Goldstein and directed by William Bridges, *For Life* (2013), which will be expanded through several short stories¹⁸⁰. As AMC Networks’ president of programming David Madden stated, while discussing this new episodic anthology project: “This is AMC’s first foray into non-serialized story-telling, and we’re trying to do so in the boldest way possible. The show explores how technological innovation can impact the most delicate matters of the heart, and each episode will turn personal life choices into high-stakes drama.”¹⁸¹ AMC Premium is probably destined to remain a marginal on demand platform in the U.S. over-the-top streaming universe. However, even in the event of sharing the same fate as FX

¹⁷⁷ Considine, Austin. “With ‘NOS4A2,’ Joe Hill Finally Sinks His Teeth Into TV.” *The New York Times*. Last modified May 31, 2019. Retrieved September 23, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/31/arts/television/nos4a2-joe-hill-amc.html>.

¹⁷⁸ “AMC Greenlights First Multi-Platform Series *Dispatches From Elsewhere* By Jason Segel.” *AMC*. Last modified July, 2018. Retrieved September 23, 2019. <https://www.amc.com/talk/2018/07/amc-greenlights-first-multi-platform-series-dispatches-from-elsewhere-by-jason-segel>.

¹⁷⁹ “AMC Greenlights Its First Episodic Anthology Series About the Intersection of Love and Science from Will Bridges and Bett Goldstein.” *AMC Networks*. Last modified May 16, 2019. Retrieved September 25, 2019. <https://www.amcnetworks.com/press-releases/amc-greenlights-its-first-episodic-anthology-series-about-the-intersection-of-love-and-science-from-will-bridges-and-brett-goldstein>.

¹⁸⁰ *ibidem*.

¹⁸¹ *ibidem*.

+, the case of AMC Premium shows some interesting effects of platform environments on the production of television content. Both FX+ and AMC Premium also demonstrate that, in the complex interplay between pay TV channels and platform environments, skinny bundles activate a process of innovation of the anthology form, which is now standing half-way between the creative innovations of cable television and the marketing experiments of streaming platforms.

CONCLUSION

Researching digital culture requires a certain awareness of the balancing between several factors, which are not exclusively related to contextual technological, infrastructural or economic mutations, but are also connected to pre-existing social and institutional practices. Taking the anthology form as a means for exploring the transition from analog to digital culture proved to be particularly effective in order to mobilize a wide range of concepts, since it appeals to a set of affordances that go beyond the limits of medium-specificity, and embrace transitional and disruptive historical evolutions across several media. By activating a series of connection between analog and digital environments, a transmedia observation of the anthology form offers an interesting perspective on digital culture, one that goes past a solely contemporary scenario, and yet still helps us understand it, by superposing it on previous research. The case of television, with its fast and evident transition from a linear to a non-linear model, offered a close-up on the anthology that contributed in framing the affordances of such a form, and in distinguishing its uses in cultural, media, platform ecosystems.

Studying television in the digital or even post-digital era means engaging with an ongoing process, which involves both an understanding of its cultural history, as well as the definition of a research method able to account for its recent mutations. The challenges I encountered in positio-

ning my research in this context were many. If, on the one hand, historical analysis poses problems with finding or accessing data, on the other hand, contemporary television streaming platforms often lock information up or else provide messy data. Turning to an interdisciplinary methodology solved such challenges only partially. The trading zone between quantitative and qualitative analysis offered by a distant reading approach still needs to be perfected in application with messy datasets, which are most commonly found in television studies. Indeed, the field of digital humanities helped insert my research in a broader conversation on the role of the internet in most social and cultural domains. However, television scholars engaged in the application of computational methods still lack of a consensus on the approaches, methodologies and standards for research. Taking into account these limits, the data visualizations I generated still provided me with a visual framework for determining a comprehensive narrative of the evolution of the anthology form in U.S. television.

Overall, the research and analysis, whether interdisciplinary or not, in support of this dissertation contributed in framing the role of the anthology form, by defining a set of uses over-time. What emerges from the analysis carried out in chapters 4 and 5 is that the anthology form in television presents affordances that fit into a number of different categories. For instance, the analysis presented here outlines *structural and narrative-oriented affordances*: anthology series are likely to develop starting from short narratives; without the constraints of sponsors, they tend to portray intersectional identities and address social or political issues; they attract specific genres (crime, horror, sci-fi), generate formulas and create canons. To these, we should add *industrial affordances*: anthology series afford cross-media adaptations, diversity and scalability in production through rebooting, non-linear distribution and a flexible experience of time when it comes to

reception. And yet, to understand the anthology form and how it operates both in digital television and digital culture, we should look at a third group of affordances, which can be defined as *pragmatic* and *ecological*, in that they enable possibilities for action and find themselves in the *actuality* of uses, as well as in the interaction with a mediated *environment*.

By pointing at the pragmatic and ecological affordances of the anthology form in television, I notably refer to anthology series as objects that *afford* processes of editorialization, classification, organization, ordering, indexing, displaying and marketing of content. As a traditional model for content organization, which overlaps with algorithmic culture (Striphas 2015; Seifert and Roberge 2016), the anthology form in non-linear television is now interacting not only with narrative or industrial dynamics, but also with digital culture at large. The case studies examined in chapter 5 suggest that the implementation of anthology series in internet-distributed television is based only partially on a defined and recurring business strategy, and mostly on a certain level of improvisation, which did not generate major patterns or trends yet. Nevertheless, in the context of digital culture and economy, the pragmatic and ecological affordances of anthology series in non-linear television stand out as active forces in the wider process of anthologization on streaming platforms. While we don't have the data to verify whether anthology series are more successful than other types of content, and whether they are predominant in the U.S. market or not, we can fairly state that they interact with a platform ecology in their own peculiar way, which makes them different from other serial forms.

An additional observation of selected streaming platforms (i.e. Netflix, Amazon, Hulu), which I carried out with the intent of assessing the extent of this interaction between the anthology form and algorithmic-driven forms of content organization, seems to suggest that the antho-

logical content tends to emerge in the recommendation stream. Of course, streams of content are generated by a constant negotiation, with “hundreds of hands reaching into them, tweaking and tuning, swapping out parts and experiencing with new arrangements.” (Seaver 2014: 10) At the present state of my research, I am monitoring a larger sample of streaming subscribers’ profiles over the course of a year, in order to collect more data about the tendency of anthological collections to emerge and being exposed within Netflix, Amazon and Hulu’s catalogs. In these platforms, algorithmic recommendation systems notably superimpose a rhythmic stream over the library, by interpreting data and metadata, and translating them into a coded flow of content. When this content is already grouped and organized into an anthology, much like in a database model, which already obeys to internal affordances, the interplay between the two generates interesting outcomes in terms of dynamics of production, commercialization and distribution of content. This demonstrates that, ultimately, to observe digital platforms we need to rethink existing cultural forms, *re-define* them, in order to account for new geographies and spatialities, or better yet for new media ecologies, built on the principle of network interconnectedness.

Drawing upon previous research on practices of anthology-making (Doueihi 2011) and data infrastructures for streaming content (Eriksson *et al.* 2019), I want to point at the epistemological value of the anthology in digital culture, as a primitive form of knowledge organization which has undergone an evolution in synergy with technology. Having defined a technogenesis (Hayles 2012) of the anthology form, I conclude by discussing an ontology of the anthology. As a form, a practice, and a cultural model, the anthology creates a framework for the circulation and the access to narratives. In television, it offers a reproducible structure for each episode, thus creating a large narrative based on a canon of short stories. By putting together randomness and sys-

tematicity, television anthology series feed into the very process of indexing content on streaming platforms, adapting to different interfaces and streams. In this sense, I propose to insert them in a vocabulary of digital culture to account for both an anthological turn (Doueihy 2011) and computational processes of editorialization (Vitali-Rosati 2018), in the same attempt of Raymond Williams (1983) to define fundamental “keywords” for the study of culture and society. Both in television and other media, anthologization proved indeed to be a form of categorization, but even more it demonstrates, as shown here, to be an interpretationally primitive concept (Carey 2009) in both analog and digital culture.

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