

# Dimensions of authorship and style in television serial fiction formats<sup>1</sup>

## *Dimensões da autoria e do estilo na ficção seriada televisiva*

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### ABSTRACT

We establish a reflection on style, as a heuristic category of the analysis of authorship in serial formats of television fiction: such an use links this concept to the social dynamics of authorship once the decision-making instances are recognized in the creative processes and the textual functioning of such works. Thus, we advance the hypothesis of a conjunction of methodological questions deriving from two sources, namely the social processes of authorship (in the definition of responsible agents and the social dynamics of recognition) and those associated with the textual grammars of the serial formats (in the dramaturgical writing and in the principles of audiovisual staging).

**Keywords:** Style, authorship, serial fiction, television

### RESUMO

Estabelecemos uma reflexão sobre o estilo como categoria heurística da análise da autoria nos formatos seriados de ficção televisiva: tal uso vincula essa categoria às dinâmicas sociais de atribuição autoral, uma vez reconhecidas as instâncias de tomada de decisão em processos criativos e o funcionamento textual de tais obras. Avançamos assim a hipótese da conjunção de questões de método vindas de duas fontes, a saber: a observância a processos sociais da autoria (na definição de agentes responsáveis e das dinâmicas sociais de reconhecimento) e aquelas que se associam às gramáticas textuais dos formatos seriados (na escritura dramaturgical e nos princípios da encenação audiovisual).

**Palavras-chave:** Estilo, autoria, ficção seriada, televisão

<sup>1</sup>The first version of this article was presented as a research communication at the conference *Televisões*, organized by the Graduate Program in Communication from the Universidade Federal Fluminense (PPGCOM/UFF) on October 27, 2017. We are grateful to the organization of the event, represented by the colleagues Ariane Holzbach and Mayka Castellano, for the opportunity to present this research, as well as to the colleagues on the discussion table, whose questions helped in preparing the final form of this article.

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11606/issn.1982-8160.v12i2p53-77>

## INTRODUCTION

THE MORE OR less expressed mention about questions regarding style and authorship of television serial fiction products within the contemporary media environment appears increasingly on researches about television – notwithstanding the significant variables of the assignment of specific markers of style, especially in the context of the identification of their precise subjects (whether as individuals, creative teams or even media institutions and/or enterprises).

The tendency to recognize the authorship to the creators of television serial fiction works<sup>2</sup> refers to the importance of screenwriters-authors who can perform other activities during the process, such as a director and executive producer. The emphasis given to the screenwriter's occupation can be explained by the principles and dynamics that directs the conception of these products, which demand narrative coherence and control over the seriality system. Jean-Pierre Esquenazi thoroughly illustrates this idea when stating that (2011: 54-55):

The [series creator] assembles two skills. The first is writing: the ability to conceive an universe and characters that are sufficiently rich to support the [fundamental] serial recurrence. The second is to manage the production of a serial fiction, which involves gathering and directing teams that change very often, organizing their work, maintaining the series' continuity and facing the demands from the networks.

Therefore, in the creative and productive context of audiovisual serials, we underline the management of teams of screenwriters and directors, professionals that must provide the perception of the series' style, stimulating the consumption of such charm by an increasingly attentive and demanding audience. This circumstance makes exceptional partnerships between those who conceive the fictional universe of the series and its audiovisual forms surface, as well as favoring creators who also perform direction roles.

The term *style* is usually adopted to designate how the authors themselves create the serial fictions — something that, in art history's tradition is equally signified by the idea of the manners which are proper of different creators (to the point of creating an undesirable confusion between the concepts of *style* and *mannerism*). Given that the stylistic peculiarity of each author is considered as responsible for recognizable elements that compose the serial fiction, the term *style* also refers to the markers through which the recognition of authorship is originated within the works themselves. Therefore, the term *style* refers to specific forms of making the serial fiction by agents who are recognized as authors. In a multiprofessional ambience of creation and production of television serial

<sup>2</sup>The concept of *serial fiction* (or its similar forms like *series*) was adopted in this article to designate the diversity of fictional narrative formats that are organized into a periodic structure with chapters as its time division. This causes important consequences to its production and consumption logics, as well as to its textual organization (seriality system, continuity and coherence, plots and seasons) – both aspects being discussed by an extensive analytical and theoretical literature. In recent decades, other companies have become producers of serial fiction, in addition to broadcast and cable channels, specialized companies from the streaming market became producers (Netflix and others). Within this digital ambience, the serial formats become diverse and the distribution and consumption become broader, challenging the fields of study dedicated to these new configurations.

works authors tend to be identified as creators-screenwriters, having the power to conduct the narrative and to manage the creative processes that move the multiprofessional creative instance of serial fictions.

In short, regarding the application of *style* as an analytical instrument for the understanding of serial formats, the works tend to be recognized and classified as belonging to certain authorships: this occurs through the ways they were created, from the use of narrative, visual, technological and audio resources, as well as by the identification of teams/agents that performed in it, of the discursive genres organizing it and the desires or horizons of effects on the audience.

The social dimension of the *style* and *authorship* aspects in works of television serial fiction has been a repeated and effective resource to cause the recognition experience on the audience: this is an aspect that contributes to the selection of works by producers/distributors and consumers, in the choice of those who will be followed, cultivated and worshipped, objects of criticism of fans, journalists and scholars (Esquenazi, 2011; Silva, 2014; Tous-Roviroso, 2009). These same concepts of *style* (as a specific form of authorial creation and as the specific mark in the recognition of the works)<sup>3</sup> guide the producer companies in the selection of the series that will be offered on the market, as well as the competitive strategies of the companies that will perform actions to divulge, distribute and formulate these products and the corporate identity to which they are bound: the companies will also develop their brands and franchises as a result from the *style* dynamics that based the production processes and media circulation of fictional serial universes (Buonanno, 2008; Caldwell, 2008; Mittell, 2015)<sup>4</sup>.

Therefore, we believe that the authorship instance of the screenwriter in serial fiction is observable in the principles and dynamics that govern the making of serial works. According to specific seriality systems, the emphasis on the dramaturgic creation of the fictional world is based primarily on the screenwriters' labor – such poetic and aesthetic bases guide, more frequently than usually imagined, the design and manufacture of the style of the series on the dimensions of audiovisual acting. Since the stylistic particularities of the screenwriters-authors are considered as responsible or motives that generate the other recognizable elements on the composition of a series (seriality system, standards of acting, interpreters' performance, soundtrack ambiences, among others), the term *style* also refers to the markers through which the recognition of the screenwriter's style unfolds in his/her own works.

In short, regarding the application of *style* as an analytical instrument for the understanding of television serial fictions, the methodological approach

<sup>3</sup>If we consider two specific cases, we can investigate different forms of recognition by style: on one hand, the long duration of a television serial fiction like *Grey's Anatomy*, by Shonda Rhimes (up to its 14<sup>th</sup> season until this moment), can help us to divert the stylistic trait from the *authorship* towards the *work* itself – by considering a certain autonomy that the work gains in relation to the authorship; on the other hand, from the different incarnations of the same style on several television serial fictions conceived and written by the same author (as in Aaron Sorkin's case in *Sports Night*, *The West Wing*, *Studio 60 in the Sunset Strip* and *The Newsroom*), in which the *style* can be genuinely associated to *markers of authorship*.

<sup>4</sup>Among others, we highlight two studies conveyed in the environment of the Research Group A-tevé (Universidade Federal da Bahia) on authorship and style in serial formats. Marcelo Lima (2016) addresses the stylistic variables of the transmedia universe of serial works orbiting the television serial fiction *The Walking Dead*. João Senna Teixeira (2014) establishes a homology studying serial fiction styles in an enriching way, from considerations about the canonical matrices of seriality in the universe of Batman comics.

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must understand these two authorship instances (screenwriters and directors responsible for the series) manifest and complement each other. Two dimensions derive from this setting: the first comprises the understanding of the recognition and authors' classification systems that occur in specific social environments of production, circulation and consumption of the series, so those creative agents who are recognized as authors can be identified, as well as the effects they intended to cause on the audience and on the agents and organizations that comprise the markets where they operate.

The second dimension in which *style* and authorship are established for our analysis, comprises the forms in which serial works were actually composed, considering their narrative and dramaturgic resources, as well as the seriality systems, its audiovisual materialization and the technological apparatus used.

When examining these two dimensions, we can argue that the perception of style and authorship in these formats occurs through the articulation between the social dynamics of the positioning of agents who are authors of serial fictions and the redundancy of specific markers used to recognize authorship, which are identifiable by the continuous and attentive monitoring (which is reiterated most of the time) of the analysis of their textual operators

The synergy of interests between creator agents and producer and broadcast companies results in a process that attributes authorship roles (recognition of agents and different occupations, negotiations and disputes of the reputation and prestige of producer companies, etc.), from how the attributes of style are returned to specific forms of authors conceiving their serial fictions. Considering this idea, the serial fiction's style depends on the choices made by those who are responsible and recognized as *authors* who control the creative decisions and manage the production variables that constitute the production process of the works – choices that make the *authorship* status depend on business strategies, composition of multiprofessional teams of production, of the formats and genres of the series, as well as competitive systems of circulation of works in varied markets and audiences. These aspects characterize the systems and productive chains of several serial products, in addition to those in television – as is the case of comic book superheroes in the context of their publishers (like Marvel and DC Comics, which are the most well-known cases).

Given this scenario, several researches seek to examine the style of both contemporary authors and serial works of fictions: studies on authorship and style of television serial works of fiction (in its various media platforms) proliferated in recent decades, mainly stimulated by the astonishing increase in the volume of production and cultural consumption of television series worldwide.

Notwithstanding the recognized progress in this area of study, we highlight the still challenging and relatively unexplored area of stylistic examination of television serial fictions – from the appreciation of certain conceptual questions, which are more associated to the heuristic status of the concept of *style* (these questions are very common in cultural history and art history).

When we present this problem of heuristic basis on the stylistic analysis of serial fiction formats (from its specific dynamics of authorship attribution), we must indicate the embryonic character of the conceptual exploration on the category of *style*. We promise to present a deeper discussion about the implications of the conceptual reorientation of *style* in its application to specific serial products in future articles, highlighting the strength of this conceptual matrix.

In this article, we explore an analytical perspective of the dimensions of the style from two fundamental standpoints: on the first we identify the source of the concept as the result of an analytical look on the social dynamics of authorship – especially considering a specific Sociology of cultural production, which is exemplified by Pierre Bourdieu’s pathway on the social field of literary production in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Bourdieu, 1996), and within the matrix of generally sociological cultural history of different European artistic traditions, illustrated by Michael Baxandall’s speculation (2006) about the historical and social dynamics of the consolidation of “patterns of intention” of authorship.

In the second part of the article, we propose another variant for this *heuristics of style*, especially identified through certain disciplinary efforts from art historians in their use of specific semiotic categories (such as *index* or *inference*). Given this context, we can understand the processes in which the expressive works are capable of releasing their own intentional management signals and their redundancy systems, i.e., those that are adequate to determine proper markers of style of their operation. Based on such inferential matrices (derived from the efforts of art historians), a descriptive and analytical work of the surfacing of these indices is constituted as a heuristic horizon for the operation of *style* as an auxiliary category for the examination of authorial or intentional management processes of serial fiction works.

When concluding our argument, we resume the proposal of an analysis of serial fiction products inspired by *aesthetics* to evaluate how the analytical exercise of specific markers of style (formed through the *inferential act* of its recognition within the own works) invokes a certain disciplined system of sensitive attention on the part of the analyst upon the textual operators of television serial fiction formats. However, this aesthetic qualification does not intend on assigning cultural distinction values to the works: above all, its objective is to draw attention to the dynamics of interactions between the

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*patterns of intention* (that guide decision-making and creative processes within the social field of production) and spectatorship skills of appreciation (that invoke the cooperative dynamics of the relationship between the completed works and the presumed horizons of their understanding).

Considering that different types of reception knowledge do not necessarily designate a social corpus of concrete spectators (whom are usually identified in sociological parlance, through *audience* research), such skill is better accepted in our analysis perspective as all assumed interpretative capabilities, which are triggered by the exposure of a narrative text – something that Umberto Eco (1986) designates as the interpreter’s “encyclopedia”: once arranged in that way, they become the probabilistic horizon of what the viewer or reader can or must do to trigger the textual markers of a narrative work.

Even if we consider that a certain dynamic of the probabilistic interaction can be something specific to television serial formats, our objective is not to define such specificity: before that, we assume that a comprehensive horizon of reception is a constitutive property of any artistic expression (maybe even of any phenomenon of meaningfulness). Thus, our discussion uses a *generic* formulation of interactional dynamics, within which markers of style are significantly recognizable and consecrated so we can avoid the limitations of the empiricist paradigm of the phenomena of reception in the field of communication studies.

Considering the study of *style* as a heuristic guide for the analysis of television serial fiction formats, we believe that it must involve the relationship between *patterns of intention* and *encyclopedic skills* assumed from the reception in an *interpretative cooperation* – the most active characteristic of the assumed reception is based on the immanence of textual forms from these media productions. For Umberto Eco (1986) and Wolfgang Iser (1978), the *presumed* character of the interpretive encyclopedia of reception designates the figure of a “model’ or ‘implied’ reader” in the interpretative cooperation processes. This is the element that articulates the visual or textual immanence of works with presumed horizons, as well as the enjoyment and aesthetic consideration of television serial fiction products.

As a final form of clarification in this introduction, we estimate the specific range of our proposals in the scope of this article: here, we focus here on issues regarding the heuristic use of the concept of *style* in the context of the analysis of television serial fiction formats – once we identify the ways in which this category is operated in disciplinary fields like Art History. This is an initial approach that does not consider, at least for now, any other effective advances over empirical materials from this media universe in any of its aspects of exploration (individuals who are creators, narrative genres, types of serial fiction products, among others).

We promise further exploration of these questions using more solid bases for its confirmation, seeking to articulate the implications between style and authorship of these serial fiction formats more precisely. For now, the question that drives us concerns the specific markers of style in processes in which the attribution of authorship depends on the recognition of certain characteristics of the works and their probabilistic relationships with aesthetic horizons of reception and appreciation.

### A SOURCE OF STYLE IN THE SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF AUTHORSHIP

Among the challenges that can be highlighted regarding the style of serial fictions, we stress the one implicated in the association between *style* and *authorship*. The implication between these two concepts is especially remarkable when considering the diversity of methodological approaches that simultaneously articulate the analysis of social conditions of production, creation, circulation and consumption of serial fiction products, on one hand, through the actions of the subjects responsible for the stylistic choices composing it. On the other hand, a form of articulation embodied on the social figures of the authors-screenwriters in association with directors and executive producers. Dramaturgy and staging derive from this as necessary dimensions for the analysis of the materiality of works resulting from the creation and production dynamics of television serial fiction formats.

Considering this, the concept of *style* is an important reference for authors that deal with certain historical and social markers of authorship management processes in the cultural production field. For our purposes, we used Pierre Bourdieu (1996), analyzing the dynamics of the social field of French literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and Michael Baxandall (2006), examining the varied patterns of intention in different historical periods of European art.

Firstly, these are two approaches<sup>5</sup> that articulate social contexts of production and internal characteristics of works to define the dynamics that originate their *style*: from Bourdieu (1996) and Baxandall (2006) we comprehend that separating the instances (contexts and works) is a false dilemma, because the social dynamics of the creative processes of the works are a significant part of the evaluation of style, especially when considering that the instance of the agents responsible for the works is bounded as the mediation of the recognition category.

Both authors advocate a “teleological historical method”, which Baxandall defines as the approach that starts from the works to “infer human actions and the instruments that made them the way they are, as a project or design” (2006: 46). This effort assumes a greater emphasis on the “traces or on what remains from

<sup>5</sup> Bourdieu considers that Baxandall's book (1972) about the painting and experience in Renaissance Florence is an “exemplary performance of Sociology of artistic perception”, which is capable of “removing the traces of intellectualism from his discussions about the artistic perception [...] which considered an artwork as a deciphering act [...]”. In short, the analyst must introduce in his/her theory of perception of artworks an initial perception theory as practice” (Bourdieu, 1996: 348-349).

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the author's action and effects of it [on the work]" and the methodological clarity of the impossibility of needing "the series of acts that culminated in the work" (Ibid.: 47). Therefore, what matters to the analyst is understanding what were the creative issues faced by the agents and what "concrete and definitive solution is the object that is shown to us" (Ibid.: 48). The analyst's challenge is "to rebuild the particular problem that the author wanted to solve and, at the same time, the particular circumstances that led him/her to produce the object as it is". Once again, without losing clarity because "the reconstruction does not recreate the author's internal experience" (Ibid.: 48).

Bourdieu explored this perspective when studying Flaubert's and Baudelaire's literary production to show how the poetics of these works represented solutions to problems of the fictional writing they attributed to themselves – considering interests like the construction of their respective and autonomous authorial positions in the cultural and artistic field of 19<sup>th</sup> century France. In this movement, the sociological concept of *field* (which implies the concepts of *habitus*, *positions*, *position-taking*, *trajectories* of agents, groups and institutions) was formulated to manage these connections, being associated to the concepts of *field of possibilities* and *fields of works*. The matrix concept of *social field* led Bourdieu (1996) to reconstitute, historically and relationally, the circumstances that produced the works and the actions of the agents involved (from producers to consumers).

Only an analysis of the genesis of the literary field in which the Flaubertian project was created can lead to a true understanding of the generating formula that exists at the start of the work and of the labor through which Flaubert applied it, seeking in the same movement this generating structure and the social structure that produced it. (Bourdieu, 1996: 63)

Concerned about the forces at work and with the power systems circulating in it, Bourdieu finally emphasizes that studying the agents' interests of accumulating power to decide and choose must be based on the analysis of the positions historically occupied by each of them in the social field of cultural production – including the paths travelled over their trajectory, the provisions that established them as agents in this field, and the forces that were accumulated to conquer the authorial position that assigns for them a degree of autonomy to formulate and develop works recognized and enshrined as legitimate and unique. The concept of field was created to

escape from the alternative of an internal interpretation and external explanation, where all sciences of cultural works were placed [...] when recalling the existence



of the social microcosm, separate and autonomous spaces, in which these works are produced: in those fields, the opposition between a formalism born from the encoding of artistic practices taken to a high degree of autonomy and a reductionism applied to relate artistic social forms directly to social formations dissimulated that both currents had in common the fact of ignoring the production field as a space of objective relations. (Ibid.: 207)

If Bourdieu's (1996) formulations can cause the impression that works are not a privileged corner in this equation on unsuspecting readers, Baxandall (2006) formulated a careful conceptual construct to reenact those relationships (where the concept of the *triangle of reenactment* and the *troc* are exemplary for our case), to leave no doubts about the importance of the field in the careful examination of the works on studies about style. Baxandall (2006) assigns equal heuristic importance to the concept of style in socio-contextual environments of creation processes that assign to authorship such importance, from a greater attention to the analytical examination of works that show partial signs of their source of *intentional management*.

Considering works as the result of an *approach*, which is not always established by the creator him/herself (but by institutions or the subjects controlling it), a large set of circumstances for their analysis involves a social system that assigns roles, recognized skills and decision-making criteria, which characterizes the creative process. Therefore, Baxandall (2006) proposes an analytical effort that spans a spectrum of conditions, ranging from material limitations, historical traditions in the field of art, to the prevalent mental systems in each artistic period.

When I talk about intention, I am not referring to a real or specific psychological state, not even to a set of events that had happened at a given time [...], in the light of which – if I knew them – I would be able to interpret the Forth Bridge or the Portrait of Kahnweiler. Initially, I think in a general condition of all rational human actions, a condition that I assume when I organize a series of circumstantial facts [...]. In these situations, it seems correct to discuss “intentionality”. The hypothesis is that every historical actor, and even more, every historical object has a purpose – or an intent or, so to speak, an “intentional quality”. Considering this meaning, intentionality characterizes both the actor and the object. (Ibid.: 81)

Therefore, we reaffirm the prospect of a stylistic analysis (like the one made by an art historian confronted with pieces of art from remote times) that considers the works as original and privileged instances of this study, which places the

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authorship problem as something determined *in retrospect*, so to speak: we start from the markers showed by the work and add the ideas constructed about it overtime, considering the constancy of these aspects and the additional data that that can be found about the circumstances of its creation in a historical series (which can belong to the history of artistic techniques, social recognition strategies, the predominant philosophical systems or cultural traditions from certain periods and cultures).

Regardless, the analysis of the works must be capable of strongly problematizing the concept of authorship, showing how its existence depends on a set of definitions created in the social and cultural ambience of its production and creation. By such a delimitation, the analyst is required the correct understanding of how, during the creation process of the works, such authorship position is identified, i.e., the power to make decisions and choose how it will be designed. This point is emphasized equally by Bourdieu (1996) and Baxandall (2006): identifying those who are responsible for the stylistic choices implies the careful analysis of what composes the craft of this subject or social agent – craft which helps the analyst to focus on the materials and techniques he/she chooses to understand, on the work, which solutions the author finally found for the problems faced during the execution, from the original approach.

The more complex the production line and the creative and production teams of a work, the more necessary it is to understand this chain of decisions and the ways in which problems arise for the authors responsible for the products, when located in the social system of cultural production. The problems we choose from the adoption of the heuristic key of *style* can arise from at least two sources: the management model of serial fiction products (which determines the schedule, audience, possible expectations from the presumed reception) must be translated by screenwriters-authors and the other individuals responsible for the series; or from the way the creators-authors assigned their own artistic approaches, considering their interests in the development of certain themes, characters, plots, approaches.

In television serial fictions products, the screenwriters responsible for conducting its plot – regardless of having coordinating teams for this purpose – exert the actual style of the series, thus, the way they act must be understood. We must question ourselves on how the screenwriter-author interacts with the other professionals within the productive chain of these works – especially with those responsible for production phase (from the direction to the responsible for the score); likewise, discussing the powers of authorship in the choice of these professionals is essential, as well as the ways in which the latter collaborate

in shaping the problems and creative solutions that arise from this interaction between the approach instances and the actual artistic execution.

Therefore, when conceptually discussing the style, we discuss different strategies of the agents recognized as *authors*, as those with the power to decide in creative processes that concern stylistic choices, i.e., how *authorship* (individual, shared, negotiated) prints its mark on the stylistic architecture of audiovisual media serial formats. Finally, we emphasize that it is through the heuristic use of the concept of *style* that we propose a shift of the center from which the *poetics* of television serial fictions can be claimed, moving it from the author's subjective scope to the functioning of the *work* – the latter defined as a textual device and programming of effects (Gomes, 1996).

If the support from the perspective of the sociology of the social fields – through Bourdieu (1996) and Baxandall (2006) – can help us to understand the social dynamics governing the position and the tasks of the agents responsible for the creative creation of its *poesis*, the dimension of textual construction of specific markers of style implies other theoretical traditions, as well as the challenges of a heuristic approach on critical appraisal of these cultural universes. These other variables or dimensions of a specific style of television serial fiction formats will be discussed below.

## THE INFERENTIAL MATRIX OF STYLE IN ART HISTORY

As an interpretive discipline situated within the Humanities, art history offers the best indications of how the problem of *style* is specific within the context of the methodological choices in which works of art (and cultural products in general) can be located, according to their *period*, *artistic movement* and even to more personal circumstances of the artistic career of an individual. This discipline offers an analytical arsenal capable of instigating the examination of cultural and artistic phenomena lacking further information about the specific circumstances of their origin – which are only partially available or even completely lost in the most distant past.

Considering the specific conditions in which the historian of remote cultural series of art works, the heuristic resource of *style* is almost a methodological strategy of a model of recognition which starts, precisely, on the kind of relationship he/she establishes with the works, under the same conditions of limitation: this analytical exercise is more systematic and demands the adoption of a *discipline* of sensitive attentiveness to characteristics or defining *aspects* of historical series built by the analyst (always by inferences in retrospect) for the purposes of his/her evaluation.

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This form of perceptual attention with an aesthetic profile (Schaeffer, 2015) and required as a heuristic resource is a better structured way of recapturing constant characteristics appearing on a particular work – as it allows the analyst to effectuate the work’s cultural constellation from contrasting it with other works coming from the same historical series (whether through resources from a single artist, by comparing this artist with the solutions in his/her contemporaries’ works or by differentiating between artistic traditions and *movements*, in the concurrency of a context or in the succession of a temporal series).

In the epistemological horizon implied by this perspective of the research of style (authorial or individual, of a period, of a movement), some authors stress the idea of a certain model of access to such markers of constancy of the works, which are consecrated or recognizable in the form of an *index*: this means ascribing value to information found in the *detail*, *aspect* or by the partial *trace*, derived from a sensitive attention system towards particular works, but allowing them to be arranged in more complex historical constellations. When resuming certain traditions of cultural history’s epistemology, certain authors highlight the importance and the challenges of using the heuristic concept of *style* (such as in the prime example of the art historian E. H. Gombrich (2007)) to clarify the relationships between the details and the historical and social dynamics that stylistic traits can help us to identify.

Gombrich certainly does not cease to observe [...] that there is a “mental state, an attitude that permeates societies and historical periods”, whose art and artists react inevitably to the transformation of the ‘dominant values’; but by admitting this, in a very generic way, he [Gombrich] goes back to what matters the most to him: “we know that the artistic ‘style’ is actually a rather problematic index of social or cultural transformations”. After everything we compiled up to this point, it is impossible not to recognize the validity of such conclusion. (Ginzburg, 2007: 78)

A certain heuristic attitude (and, why not say, of *aesthetic attention* from the analyst) becomes effective in the use of the *style* as a result of the reenactment of its most visible and constant aspects in particular works. The behavioral regularity of works is not attributed to a particular *intention* (in the biography of the author or in the automatism of the relationship between work and social context) as much as it is to disciplined conditions of sensitive attention of the analyst-historian – therefore, it is an *effect of interpretation* for the most part.

Such heuristically determined condition of historical explanation of relevant works is a result from what Baxandall (2006) defines as social art history’s

“inferential paradigm”. Something that places the analytical practice of the historian not only in the strict correspondence between the description of the works and their effective original state (either in the remote past of its creation or in the verification conferred by documents or authorial testimonies), but also in the consistency through which the materiality of the work constitutes the system of its presentation – by the redundancy that it forms through its aspects with a broader cultural series, composed by the temporal succession of works of a single artist or by the simultaneity of aspects presented equally by different works from a same movement.

The use of these types of concepts, indirect or peripheral, cannot be avoided [...]. And the three major indirect modes of our language – speaking directly about the effect the object provokes in us, drawing comparisons with things that produce a similar effect, making inferences about the process that may have led an object to cause such effect – seem to match the three forms of thinking about a painting. Because a painting represents more than a material object to us: implicitly we believe that it contains not only the story of the painter’s labor process, but also the actual experience of its reception on the viewers. (Ibid.: 38-39)

In the latter case, the ability to discipline our sensitive attention to recurring details of a work in its continuing reception experience and in its possible alignments with the creator agents’ labor process is a fundamental attitude for a historian – something that may also be required from an analyst of coeval cultural formats, like in the case of television serial fiction products. François Jost (2017) considers that such “love to details” is perhaps the most important trait of the management processes of the aesthetic interest for television serial fiction works, given that it implies the necessary interpretative dynamics that occur between the authorial *intention* and the audience’s *attention*.

Although this author does not consider the problem the *detail* as an aspect associated to the style of television serial formats, even then, the result of processes in which the work requires certain attentional skills from the audience is clearly the indicator of an heuristic procedure that uses the iterative schemes from which a question about the *style* of serial works emerges. When exploring the dynamics associated to the perception of *detail*, it is not a coincidence that Jost (2017) discusses the characteristics of a particular television serial fiction.

A piece of art for some, *Breaking Bad* can also be understood as a trend of fiction into entertainment, facilitated by contemporary reception modes: as

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suggests the Easter egg metaphor, watching a series may also be looking for clues that finally lead to the pleasure of tasting this Easter egg, which does not occur without a certain unease. New visualization tools, like the functions of freezing or enhancing the details, allow the viewer to participate in the creative acts a little bit more than before, at the same time he/she enjoys a recreational activity. (Ibid.: 38-39)

<sup>6</sup>We promise another article with a detailed analysis of the specifically *aspectual* dynamics of markers of style in television serial fiction formats: one of the first cases of our preference and that must receive immediate attention is the screenwriter Aaron Sorkin, considering his television serial work, which strongly shows the different solutions of acting and the various directors and producers – whom seek to do justice to the markers of style of Sorkin's recognizable dramaturgical writing, strongly marked by the importance given to dialogue construction.

<sup>7</sup>We must consider the role of critics, fans, journalists and scholars of the television serials formats equally, since our analysis and interpretation of these expressive universes goes through, in a certain way, all these instances of social appreciation. Baxandall's (2006) analysis about Picasso's case is a great form of showing the importance of the activity of all these subjects in the evaluation process of serial works: as in the case of the painting *Portrait of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler* from 1910, the references made by reputed critics to this artwork helped both in the creation of the approach that the artist built for himself and for the analyst to understand the context of creation and the challenges that the painter created for himself – such aesthetic and stylistic challenges fed Picasso's projects and strategies in the art world to garner recognition and distinction among his peers

When we move from the heuristic matrix of the concept of *style* in art history to the study of authorial series in television serial fiction formats, we choose to examine the necessarily *reiterated* aspect of the expressive markers of an acknowledged and renowned authorship – comparing it to the extension of its recurrences in the set of these works. Such system of intercurrent manifestation of markers of style considers the properties of the works as evidence that point to specific preferences or abilities of the artists – which are converted into data that are part of a series of audio-visual works of this corpus.

Reference approaches in this area for television serial fiction formats – among which we highlight only a few cases (Butler, 2013; Esquenazi, 2011; Mittell, 2015; Peacock; Jacobs, 2013) – have brought from fields of observation of the audiovisual style in film contributions that strengthen the analysis of the specific stylistic arrangements of the television medium – and that point towards the essential bonds with configurations of the history of stylistic filmic architecture that emphasize the acting systems<sup>6</sup>.

In the same spirit of incorporating stylistic studies to the analysis of television serial fiction formats, we recommend analyzing the uniqueness of markers of style, from the accumulated sense of a continuous reception experience (especially, but not exclusively, of the analyst)<sup>7</sup>, considering the clues offered about a coherent system of redundancy through which the textual organization of serial works shows the defining aspects of its *style* – especially as reference to socially recognized *authorship* instances.

In this methodological approach, it is fundamental to complement the design of stylistic operators resulting from the careful observation of such specific markers of authorship through the analysis of the audiovisual basis of television serial fiction formats. Among the theoretical and analytical challenges from this other heuristic operation of *style* (which would be added to the heuristic operation of the search for intentional patterns of works from an *inferential matrix* of aesthetic appreciation), we highlight a combination between *dramaturgical writing* profiles (for screenwriters) and *audiovisual staging* resources (for directors/producers), in a set of articulated aspects that the analyst must be aware of. Many interpreters have devoted considerable energy to the conceptual and heuristic

elaboration of these aspects (Pucci Junior, 2014; Rocha, 2016), transposing heuristic models that were originally consolidated in studies about fictional narrative in the cinema (Bordwell, 2008)<sup>8</sup>.

We affirm the double base of our assessment about the relevance of the concept of *style* by considering such expressive resources from dramaturgical and audiovisual writings (the elementary structure of the *poetics of television serial fiction*): on one hand, there is the set of institutions and dynamics of social recognition that guide the constitution of a reference field of the authorial position (Souza, 2014); on the other hand, there are sets of considerations about the pragmatic interactions between artistic solutions (conceived by the authors and materialized in an authorial management of what we understand as the style of these works) and the assumed horizons of expectations from the aesthetic apprehension of these formats – justified by the recurrence of markers of style in the works as the effect of its approval and recognition by several social instances, from a lay audience to specialists.

Before going any further in our discussions about the modes of apprehending markers of style in television serial formats, we must note that at least within the limits of this article, we are going to discuss those who are responsible for the audiovisual staging of serial works. A deeper and more detailed discussion about the role of the writer-screenwriter in this process will be done on another occasion. We must highlight that focusing the attention on the cooperation between dramaturgy and staging is justified by the character of the social process of manufacturing such works, which are set under tension and agreements that legitimize the places of greater decision-making power about the process.

Regarding television serial fiction formats, the most important authorial position is evidently the screenwriter-creator: on the occasions in which this subject performs in the two major fronts (dramaturgical writing and staging), he/she will accumulate greater degrees of autonomy in the process. Regardless, analyzing cinematographic style from the standpoint of the audiovisual staging provides an important lesson of film analysis for studies about television serial formats. As in the case of films, the director is responsible for the choices that will give the markers of style to the works.

Therefore, we will start by the stylistic operators of a “grammar of audiovisual *mise-en-scène*”, using the challenge for the composition of the filmic staging illustrated by David Bordwell (2002), from his classic article on the visual style of “intensified continuity” in American films. For this purpose, we will consider the problem of the duration of dialogue situations between various characters: in these cases, the audiovisual staging is what provides the basis for the discussion

<sup>8</sup> As well put by an anonymous interlocutor of the initial version of this article, there are other references of stylistic approaches to cinematographic staging, especially those with more focus on the binomial *style-authorship*, which reflects a historically given predilection for the ennoblement of an authorial policy – a common characteristic in the critical mindset from a French matrix, from the post-war period in the middle of the last century, from the writings of André Bazin and the influence he exerted over directors-thinkers of cinematic art (like Truffaut, Godard and Rohmer, among others), as well as in the academic mindset of the last part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (having Jacques Aumont on the front line). Our fondness for stylistic approaches that value staging standards/schemes on assignments over more unique authorship attributions does not derive from any elective affinity regarding the film thinking that points in that direction (as in the most prominent case of David Bordwell), but above all, from the fact that the Bordwellian perspective of stylistic analysis report to a source of the concept of *style* in art history, in a lineage from Heinrich Wölfflin (1996) until E. H. Gombrich (2007) and Michael Baxandall (2006), to the extent that all advance this idea of deflation of a management of intentional patterns of art as located only on the individual instance of the creator.

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on style, given that the original dramaturgy does not contain, most of the time, the visual demarcations of each character, but only their textual interventions – as the description of scenarios or the transcription of the lines and dialogues between characters.

According to Bordwell (2008), the stylistic characteristics that separate certain directors in the field of narrative fiction cinema are defined within the staging plane – as we know, in *Figures Traced in Light* (Ibid.) the case explored by the author is the stylistic variation between Woody Allen and Quentin Tarantino. The analysis focuses on the ways each of the filmmakers organizes the attention of the observation guided by the positions of the camera with the characters. As the lines are spoken, two distinct styles are drawn to configure a scene with these distinct characteristics, although not exclusionary (and not unique) – therefore, very different from those involving the sense of actions that are more intense and a part of certain cinema genres, such as chases or physical confrontations.

Two staging options have come to dominate current practice. There's what filmmakers call 'stand and deliver', where the actors settle into fairly fixed positions. Usually this is handled in singles and over-the-shoulder angles, but we may get instead the floating-head treatment, with the characters fixed in place and the camera drifting around them. In either case, if the characters shift to another part of the setting, their movement isn't usually aiming at expressive effect; it's a transition to another passage of stand-and-deliver. The alternative staging option is 'walk-and-talk', with a Steadicam carrying us along as characters spit out exposition on the fly (Bordwell, 2002: 25)

First we will consider how such staging systems, which are constituted by *markers of style*, can help us to comprehend the operations that occur in narrative situations that strongly characterize the work of certain television serials authors. Considering an author like Aaron Sorkin (a great example of the predominance of stylistic dramaturgy over staging), the construction of his narrative worlds are often organized around several characters performing their crafts in a single place – they are teams organized around a specific spatial unit (like the West Wing of the White House, a television studio, a newspaper office), so the significant portion of the interactions that characters must maintain among each other requires a specific type of composition challenge.

In the case of a certain stage of the development of Sorkin's style – which coincides with the period when he worked with a same team of directors and producers –, the solution to this staging challenge became the “walk and talk”



form, which is recognizable in the most classic situations of a renowned series like *The West Wing*.

### FROM THE STYLISTIC APPROACH TO AN AESTHETIC OF TELEVISION

One interesting aspect of Bordwell's approach must be highlighted here, since it strengthens certain points we have pointed throughout the exploration of style in television serial fiction formats, from the coexistence of dramaturgic matrices and audiovisual staging. Within this context, the way the analytical attention correlates to *internal* aspects of the *mise-en-scène* (as markers of stylistic differences) is particularly interesting, as well as the horizons of an *effect* for which such resources are intended, considering certain sensitive structures constitutively assumed as comprehension frameworks of a kind of *implied spectator*.

We use the concept of *implied reader*, as Wolfgang Iser adopts in his *phenomenology of the experience of reading* (1974, 1978), because we recognize a number of purposes of our initial research program about style – applied to television serial fiction formats – characterizing the tradition of *reception aesthetics* in literary studies – with non-negligible results in our field of study, in authors like Umberto Eco (1986), when he outlines the *interpretative cooperation* processes in narrative texts.

In the latter case, the idea of *model reader*, conceived as a presumed horizon of all textual manifestations (particularly narratives), does not imply empirical and sociometrically defined figures through audience research methods or quantifiable levels of their most effective response, being instead focused on the “encyclopedic skills” of interpretation. The matrix of such presumed knowledge about texts is more present in the linear structures of narrative exposition (whatever their means are) than in the empirical plan of concrete assessments of audience success – which is, in most cases, the mere effect of a successful construction of the cooperative dialectics between the work and its reception potentialities.

Ultimately, when we consider the linear surface of serial fictional narratives to find the *stylistic operation* matrices, we must deal with the status of reception as the effect of the textual constructions of these products, since “all texts want someone to make it work” (Eco, 1986: 37).

First, because the text is a lazy (or economical) mechanism that lives from the appreciation of the sense that the recipient introduced in it [...]. Secondly, because, as it moves from a didactic function to an aesthetic one, the text wants to give

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the interpretative initiative to the reader, although it is usually interpreted with a sufficient margin of univocality. (Ibid.: 37)

Considering such articulation, we claim for the idea of a stylistic approach centered (from the point of view of its strictly heuristic operation, thus, as an analytical instrument) on the probabilistic horizon of an *aesthetic response* from the audience – thus, only assumed by the characteristics of the exposition of audiovisual staging. As an example, in the various *en route* dialogue stagings of a television serial work like *The West Wing* (created by Aaron Sorkin), the analysis of style must articulate the *staging* (as an aspect concerning the decisions of the directors) and its presumed *aesthetic effect* – in this case, with additional concentration on the textual matrix source of these *mise-en-scène* creative solutions as derived from Sorkin's dramaturgical writing.

We cannot disregard that part of the aesthetic effect of television serial fiction works can be equally associated to the existence of specialized and professional criticism and to fan communities organized around consumption, appreciation and cultural recognition of these formats – although this group often has fewer critical apparatuses of appreciation. In cases of socially renowned authors who have a stylistic profile that is more or less pronounced, the aesthetic effects programmed by the works reinforce certain creative operations and even more advanced stylistic experimentations, in the face of a public that, in fact, already assumes and even awaits for them with some anticipatory avidity.

Anyhow, these aspects also depend on an analytical discretion that would not be within reach of any ordinary experience of serial fiction formats, because, as Bordwell (2008) reminds us, such staging elements are often built up to go unnoticed – especially when *first order* aesthetic horizons (the programmed sensory and emotional effects) require the attenuation of the general audience's attention systems, at least in what constitutes a conscious aspect of the perception of the spectator for the effects that he/she seeks in this first experience of the works. As we recognize an aesthetic horizon of effect in audiovisual staging, we are not only distinguishing this first *uninterested* or *spontaneous* experience of serial fiction works, but rather trying to reconstitute the history of this effect until we get to the textual, expressive or poetic operators promoting it.

In face of the demands imposed on the *implied spectator* by the sensitive attitudes required from the analyst of markers of style, we cannot neglect the originating spectrum of this heuristics of style in this article, which originated

from an *inferential* or *indexical paradigm* of history of art, something that we mentioned in the previous section of this article (Baxandall, 2006; Ginzburg, 2007). Such perspective of stylistic studies in the audiovisual universe is very recent, although it has been consolidated as a methodological option in history of art. This method is still under a maturation process in our field of study, nevertheless, being our area of interest to explore, particularly in the information it provides about the heuristic uses of *style* for the analysis of television serial fiction works.

When we shift these principles of *style* among different cultural series, we consider the complex relationship of elements from television serial fiction works departing from their *narrative forms* – in what the authorial management of the elements is thus implicated. Within this context, the dramaturgical matrix of its composition – which is associated to what narrative construction imposes on the elements of the screenplay writing (consistency of fictional worlds, functions and actantial values shown by the characters, points of view and forms of narrative focusing, models of episodic structuring and of consistency of serialization) – is itself combined with the dramatic actualization of staging, in variables deriving from the audiovisual grammars used (audiovisual planning and positioning of narrative instances, decoupage forms and the continuity of actions, environmental sound and soundtrack, among others).

At this point, we must clarify the meaning of assigning the concept of *aesthetic* quality to television serial fiction formats – particularly, in relation to our discretion about the work of a specific author. When analyzing television serial fiction formats using *markers of style* (recognizing its materialization in the set of textual elements that form its constancy and possible inflections and disjunctions in the most pronounced extension of television serial works), the aesthetic perspective being unfold here is precisely one which makes the internal operators of works (in short, the combination between dramaturgy and audiovisual *mise-en-scène*) function only in the perspective of their potential actualization through the activities of reception and reading – aspect in which the meaning of *aesthetic* goes back to its Greek matrix of *aisthesis*, as sensitive reception (such as sensible and emotional contents of appreciation).

Therefore, the *work* or *result* of the representation is, necessarily, its form of affecting the receiver or, in another word that can also translate *érgon*, it is the *effects* of representation on a receiver. Thus, if each genre of representation has its own *dynamis*, this means that it intends to cause an effect on its users/receivers. *Therefore, from this perspective, poetics studies the production – in fictional narrative works and in dramatic representation – of the specific effects*

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*of each genre of poetry on its receivers.* (Gomes, 1996: 113, emphasis added by the author himself)

Thus, we still have to characterize in detail what we consider as the *aesthetic horizon* of a stylistic approach of television serial fiction formats, from the adoption of a heuristics of *style* in history of art – and by its specification as the operator of the regularity of its markers in audiovisual works in the theories of cinema. However, we must maintain the line of continuity of our previous arguments when doing this: regarding the theme being developed in this article, for example, it means to provide a priority object of stylistic analysis to the grammatical and textual immanence of audiovisual procedures of narrative construction. Without going back to the immanence of compositional and expository narrative resources of television serial formats, we shall discuss these materials in an undesirably indirect manner – imposing to the immanent matrices of their stylistic system certain characteristics that cannot be obtained through the continuous experience of the works as attentive spectators, but only as collateral considerations about its *themes*, for example.

The lack of close analysis in the field has permitted work that is often derivative [...], and under- or unsubstantiated to dominate. Scholars have strayed from an understanding that the most responsive and persuasive theorising arises from careful observations of the particularities of television texts. One of the objectives of this chapter is to demonstrate (in a necessarily limited fashion) how the methodology of close textual analysis can enhance television studies, by focusing specifically on aesthetic matters. (Cardwell, 2005: 179)

A dialectic between our universes of particular and the development of a sensitive and emotional attention to the machineries of sense is precisely what structures the expressive works, in what we continuously refer as the *aesthetic dimension* of the stylistic examination that we propose to television serial formats. This dialectic involves the probabilistic horizons of addressing towards sensory and emotional response (originated from expressive formats), but also the sedimentation of a critical discipline of analytical sensitivity which is useful for heuristic attitudes that derive from this appreciation – thus serving to describe how the internal operators of the work are programmed to seek this presumed effect on the receptive horizons, being equally instructive to a more experienced analyst in the identification of the crafts of sense implied by the work (to the extent in which they are programmed for such horizon of the response).

The double source of the notion of *aesthetic experience* (with its genesis in the *spontaneous, subjective* and *uninterested* character of personal preference, with its further development as the discursive and argumentative matrix of a better developed cultural criticism, without removing from it scholars, critics and fans) is the last step of the introduction to the concepts of a stylistic approach of television serial fiction formats that we tried to present in this article. We have explored this aspect as the most important trait of the potential *epistemological claim* derived from the increased attention to the concept of *aesthetic experience* in certain contemporary branches of theories of communication (Picado, 2015). Once more, it involves the analytical attention to the elements of a narrative grammar of audiovisual staging in television serial fiction formats, associated to the understanding of its functioning in an *aesthetic system*, as implication of receptive abilities and skills for appreciation and comprehension.

## CONCLUSION

In our discussion about the importance of admitting the use of the heuristic concept of *style* in analytical approaches of television serial fiction formats, we implied a double source for the relations between *style* and *authorship*. Regarding the admission of creative decision processes between the concrete instances of dramaturgical writing and audiovisual staging, we value prospects describing the social scenarios of negotiation between the subjects who are creators in the social context of cultural production; in what comprises, on the other hand, greater attention to markers of style within finished serial fiction works, we thus value the dimension of the aesthetic systems of apprehension of the works.

In short, the first case privileges a sociological understanding of the formation processes of television serial materials, while the second comprises a more poetic and aesthetic description approach. Evidently, these two positions do not require a separate use or being alienated from each other: Bourdieu's (1996) recognition of the epistemological subtleties of an art historian, as well as Baxandall (2006), gives us evidence of the possibility of coexistence between both heuristic paths – at least in the example of how such perspectives coexist in the field of art history, for example.

Therefore, it is important to consider that the authorial place of serial fiction works, as well as those of films (or of any cultural and artistic work), depends on the decision-making systems that operate within their context of production and creation. Therefore, this is precisely why there is the need to

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understand where originating burden of artistic creation is born (from which subjects it stems precisely, from the point of view of its position in a social field of cultural production) and to what degree creators can exercise control in its execution, considering that we know that these subjects perform on individual or collective environments of artistic choices – in addition to the fact that a significant part of this social universe consists of individuals who have interest in this production, even if they are not necessarily the creators of works in this field. This is the tone that we sought to convey to the authorship status in the first part of this article.

When assessing the case of television serial fiction works, the tendency is to assign the creation instance to the screenwriter-author, which is the reason why this position is often recognized as the *creator* of the works. This can be identified by examining the frequency with which such instance is consecrated as the responsible for creating a serial fiction, as in the paradigmatic case of Aaron Sorkin. Such aspect of the social sphere of creation derives from the weight that the narrative construction assumes – including the symbolic costs involved in the construction of narrative coherence and continuity as resources at the base of probable bonding processes with the audience. But we must recognize that such characterization of the division between creative spheres is crossed by circumstances that can change this balance, according to geographical, historical and even institutional/business contexts of the production of television serial fiction works. Certainly, these are topics that deserve greater attention in further stages of our exploration about style in television serial fiction formats.

Although this proposal has an initial and exploratory character, we reaffirm our commitment to advance to a field of analyses and applications that is less embryonic in our discussions, from the reference to specific cases of serial fictional works in the audiovisual universe of television, reinforcing the justification that we want to assign to the heuristic relevance of the concept of *style*. We wish to expand the analysis of the complementary relationship between dramaturgical writing and audiovisual staging as irreducible aspects for the existence of markers of style – assigning to this combination of creative domains (which appoint, equally, spaces of artistic and professional performance of creating works) the different aspects of serial fiction works.

Such approach focuses on the aspects linked to the construction of fictional worlds (and of its serial principles of internal coherence), to iterative systems of serial fiction textuality, to actantial structures (which drive the formation of universes of characters, narration instances and their

relationships/reciprocal values), as well as the dramatic modulations of interactions between agents and worlds of the story. Each of these elements is part of the matrix of creative interactions between agents responsible for the traits of the *poetics of television serial fiction* that exists on the materiality of the examined works. ■

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Article received on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018 and approved on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018.