

## Conceptual Tools for the Analysis of TV Shows

Similar to film, TV series / shows make offers of meaning on various audio-visual levels. (see also HO Film Analysis) Television, however, has some specific characteristics of form and function.

### Units

- A *TV series / show* consist of a number of *seasons* which comprise a number of *episodes*.
- Depending on the plot structure, TV series / shows can be defined as:
  - *Series*: Contains the same characters but each episode has a different, complete story, mostly unrelated to the previous and subsequent ones (e.g. Sitcoms).
  - *Serial*: A single story is broken into different episodes (e.g. *Mad Men*).

Note: Most TV shows, though, show elements of both the series and the serial format (e.g. a complete story in an episode but also plotlines that evolve through several episodes or the entire season).

### Genre

- How is the TV show labeled by the production company, broadcasting channel, TV guide, DVD rental, online movie/TV platform...?
- How would you describe the relations between genre expectations / conventions and the plot and technical realization of the TV show (cf. Conceptual Tools for the Analysis of Film: Five formal axis of film, Levels of meaning)?

### Specific Devices of the Serial Format

- “*Previously on...*”: A brief recapitulation of important elements of the previous episode(s) during the initial seconds of the current episode.
- *Cliffhanger*: An important / central plotline remains unresolved at the end of an episode or a season.

### Medium

- *Television*
  - Each episode is embedded in a larger thematic / genre context chosen by the broadcasting TV network (e.g. Crime, Drama, Sitcom, Cartoon,...).
  - Episodes are interrupted by and adjusted for commercial breaks.
  - The episodes usually are only broadcasted once, on a particular day and time. This context makes a TV show a fleeting experience in a prescribed time-slot.
- *DVD / BluRay*
  - DVD Box (Object), collectors' item.
  - The medium often provides additional material and / or alternative plotlines (e.g. deleted scenes, making of, audio commentary,...).
  - Sometimes, the material is improved for the DVD / BluRay release (e.g. rewriting of certain plot lines).
  - Episodes are structured into chapters, accessible via the DVD menu.
  - The medium allows for a free, self-paced-reception.
- *Online Streams*
  - The medium allows for a free, self-paced-reception.
  - Shows are usually ordered by (genre) categories.
  - Episodes might be interrupted by and adjusted for commercial breaks.

### Further Reading

Jason Mittell. “Previously on: Prime Time Serials and the Mechanics of Memory.” *Intermediality and Storytelling*. eds. Marina Grishakova and Marie-Laure Ryan. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010. Print. Narratologia 24. 76-98.