

THE VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE ANTI-HERO IN
QUALITY TV
CASE STUDIES: BREAKING BAD, MAD MEN AND SONS OF
ANARCHY

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Abstract

In this thesis, I investigate the visual style of *Breaking Bad*, *Mad Men* and *Sons of Anarchy*, particularly in regards to each show's protagonist. Walter White, Don Draper and Jax Teller fall into the same category, the anti-hero, and present the same complex personality, internal struggle and moral ambiguity. In addition, they belong to the same subgenre of Quality TV, whose characteristic is a visual style that strives towards the cinematic. Thus, despite all the traits they have in common, each show employs different visual techniques that set it apart from the others. While addressing the struggle that define each character into analysis, I discuss specific tools the showrunners used to depict and portray their anti-hero and their journey. Specifically, in the case of *Breaking Bad* I discuss the color symbolism used to depict Walter White and his evolution from family man to drug lord. In regards to *Mad Men*, I investigate the way space can be used to create an anti-hero in certain physical environments rather than others, and lastly, in regards to *Sons of Anarchy*, I examine how the concept of Utopia is at the core of the show and this specific anti-hero as a way to maintain the internal conflict typical of this type of character. Ultimately, my research has helped reveal three different way in which the anti-hero can be portrayed, and three different facets in which the cinematic aesthetic belonging to Quality TV can be used to support the narrative.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---|------|
| INTRODUCTION..... | 4 |
| CHAPTER 1: An Examination of the Use of Color Symbolism in <i>Breaking Bad</i> | 14 |
| CHAPTER 2: An Examination of the Use of Cinematic Space in <i>Mad Men</i> | 35 |
| CHAPTER 3: An Examination of the Employment of Utopia in <i>Sons of Anarchy</i> .. | 53 |
| CONCLUSION..... | 76 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY..... | 82 |

Introduction

In this paper the visual style of the anti-hero will be examined with regards to *Breaking Bad's*, *Mad Men's*, *Sons of Anarchy's* protagonists. The concept of “anti-hero” has been around a long time; it is usually referred to protagonists making questionable choices or committing crimes, while simultaneously clinging to their last shreds of humanity in order to save themselves or their loved ones. The anti-hero can be found in literature as well as in cinema, but in the last two decades the presence of this character has seen such a significant rise on television that, that of the anti-hero has become a subgenre in its own right, now known as Quality TV. This trope has become so common and popular that nowadays it is almost surprising to see a show that does not have an anti-hero as a protagonist (Joustra and Wilkinson 2016, 78). However, with the amount of anti-heroes present in the television landscape nowadays, plenty has already been said on the topic. Studies on the subject matter have focused mainly on: masculinity, as in *Cable Guys: Television and Masculinities in the 21st Century* (2014) by Lotz or *Masculinity in Contemporary Quality Television* by Albrecht; the reason behind the popularity of this trope and its power on the public, as in *Renegade Hero or Faux Rogue: The Secret Traditionalism of Television Bad Boys* (2014) by Donnelly or *Contemporary Television Series: Narrative Structure and Audience Perception* (2014) by Marinescu et al., or on examining the moral psychology behind this character as in *The Antihero in American Television* (2015) by Vaage. Therefore, by exploring the reasons why this type of character or its moral are so appealing, scholars' attention has been directed mainly at examining this trope from a narrative perspective. I, however, will be focusing on the visual depiction of these characters as expressed by three different techniques; thus striving to contribute to the discussion on this figure by investigating the phenomenon from a different angle. Indeed, although the formula used for the anti-hero is mostly the same, that is, that of morally flawed protagonists committing serious crimes, with murder being the one they usually have in common (Vaage 2015, 1), not every anti-hero is portrayed in the same way and every show employs its own visual style. Therefore, my aim is to illustrate the different visual strategies that are employed to create the figure of the male anti-hero in Quality TV. By doing so, my goal is, instead of providing final answers to put an end to the debate, to open it up by generating new questions on the subject matter. Throughout the paper, I will analyze various facets of the same spectrum of three different anti-heroic personalities, that is, the “domestic one”, as seen in *Breaking Bad* with Walter White,

the family man and chemistry teacher that after being diagnosed with cancer starts cooking methamphetamine; the “corporate one”, as seen in *Mad Men* with Don Draper, a self-made man working in a New York advertising agency during the 1960s; and the “outlaw” as seen in *Sons of Anarchy* with Jax Teller, member of a motorcycle club involved in illegal businesses. These particular shows were chosen for their huge success among viewers and also critics. They also were chosen because some of the series’ showrunners admitted to have used techniques belonging to the new visual aesthetic (specifically Gilligan in relation to color and Sutter in relation to symbolism), thus reinforcing some points expressed in my paper. Finally, because the three shows display different aspects of the anti-hero formula, my research has the chance to examine in detail various types and features of this character.

However, before going into details about the nature of this project, it is first necessary to delineate the term ‘anti-hero’. In order to do that, it is important to begin by defining the characteristics of the traditional hero. The hero was a character who behaved “in an extraordinary fashion, acting outside, above, or in disregard to normal patterns of behavior, especially in putting his or her life at risk”. (Miller, 2000: 1) The traditional hero was, therefore, synonymous of moral value and generally speaking, had the law on his side. The anti-hero, instead, cannot exactly be considered a virtuous figure, but not even as completely opposed to the hero. Indeed, as Cristopher Vogler states in *"The Writer's Journey, Mythic Structure for Writers."*:

"Anti-hero is a slippery term that can cause a lot of confusion. Simply stated, an Anti-hero is not the opposite of a Hero, but a specialized kind of Hero, one who may be an outlaw or a villain from the point of view of society, but with whom the audience is basically in sympathy." (Vogler 1998, 34)

Therefore, the anti-hero is not, as often mistakenly assumed, the same as a villain; but rather a darker, more conflicted version of the traditional hero. The conflict raging inside him is exactly what keeps his humanity intact and makes him redeemable to the audience; for his flaws and many facets allow the viewer to relate to his personality. The anti-hero has some recurring motifs, attitude or emotions which stand out:

generally his life is empty and unstimulated, smothered by various demands and constraints and socially detached and isolated; the character is often pervaded by the feelings of unfulfillment and low-esteem and tormented by guilt and self-loathing (Asong 2012, 42). Obviously, not every anti-hero is capable of embodying each one of these traits, but any character fitting the anti-hero paradigm usually possesses a good range of them. Furthermore, a polarity emerges from these qualities, both positive, such as guilt that keeps his moral compass intact; and negative, such as the feeling of emptiness and self-doubt driving him to take drastic decisions. This opposition provides the anti-hero with the struggle and drama able to entertain the audience (Landau 2013, 61).

In cinema, the anti-hero first appeared in the Western genre in film such as *"Man with No Name"* with Clint Eastwood as the protagonist, in which the classical plot usually "revolves around a lone gunfighter hero, who saves the town, or the farmers from the gamblers, or the ranchers". (Fridlund, 2006: 15) However, the Western anti-hero differs from the traditional hero because of his representation as a flawed hero, for he acts out necessity in a lawless frontier and not driven by the typical qualities of a traditional hero, such as fortitude and sacrifice. In this case, the anti-hero "arrives, destabilizes society, kills the bad guy, and having achieved his goal, goes away, assuming that it will be someone else's job to eventually reestablish law and order" (Brizio-Skov 2011, 88). In this way, the anti-hero, by implicitly declaring his contempt for society, perform an act of rebellion and claims that, in a system that does not work, the only possible response is violence. Indeed, when a character's system of values is private and arbitrary, and usually in conflict with that of his society, he is labelled as anti-hero (Rampal 2003, 13). Here in the Western genre, the first polarity typical of this figure is created, between "two ethical codes, one public or social and the other personal or anti-public" (Ibid., 13). Since the Western films of the 1960s, the cinematic anti-hero has become a recurring figure.

From here, a new trend in Hollywood has emerged, a cinema that responds to the social and political changes in society, born by significant events, such as the Civil Rights Movement, the assassinations of Kennedy and Martin Luther King, and the student protests against the Vietnam War (Gazetas 2008, 248). The war veterans' feelings of

inadequacy when it was time to reintegrate back into the community gave birth to a new anti-hero narrative (Marshall 2003, 42). Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* in 1976 sketched the anti-hero persona for the first time in 1976 (Santas 2008, 166). The film tells the story of cab driver, Travis Bickle, a Vietnam veteran, who becomes obsessed with his frustrations, loneliness and his demons and directs his anger towards the street dwellers of New York. While the anti-hero of the Fifties were victims of an unfair and corrupt system and therefore only loyal to their own moral code, this type of anti-hero is different, his disappointment in society so strong, that he often considers pointless to change it and find a meaningful life in it (Hehr 2012, 97). The film belongs to the neo-noir genre, which has its origins in 1940s and 1950s film noir, defined as "moody, pessimistic style of filming with downbeat plots, unscrupulous protagonists, and dark, atmospheric cinematography that reflected the social malaise and unease of postwar American society" (Dixon, 2008: 104). Obviously, the two genres have a lot in common, that is conflicted and complex characters as protagonists. Indeed, one of the archetypes of the neo-noir genre was typically the morally conflicted "anti-hero doomed to be a victim of his own demise" (Castillo and Gibson 2014, 80). Already at the time of *Taxi Driver* the noir genre started spreading to other kind of films, thus creating new and hybrid genres; such as noir western, noir science fiction, noir gangster sagas etc, eventually influencing television as well. *The Sopranos* (1999-2007), whose protagonist Tony Soprano is considered one of the most important TV anti-hero of all times, is a gangster drama, which from the postwar American film noir, drew psychotherapy as a plot device to showcase human conflicts and struggles (Yacowar 2003, 16). Also *Dexter* (2006-2013) portrays an anti-hero working in a crime lab by day but killer by night, was influenced by the noir genre (Keesey 2010).

After the Italian-American mobster Tony Soprano and the criminologist by day and killer by night Dexter, television has seen a proliferation of anti-heroes with other characters such as a crooked cop in *The Shield* (2002-2008), a sociopath doctor addicted to drugs in *House M.D.* (2004-2012), or a homosexual gangster operating with a personal moral code in *The Wire* (2002-2008). This type of anti-hero, nearly always male, pushes himself further than its previous cinematic representations. These are characters "unhappy, morally compromised, complicated and deeply human" (Brett 2013, 16) who are usually hard-core criminals (most of the time they commit

serious crimes) or men leading a double-life. Their questionable moral judgements and ambiguous personalities goes beyond the usual dichotomy between good and bad, and thus play with the viewer by daring him to root for them, and even love them. Indeed, the complexity of the anti-hero makes the spectator feel conflicted towards this figure, for sympathy and consequently questions about this positive orientation arise in the audience contrasting and opposing feelings (Vaage 2015, 16). Therefore, as I mentioned, the origins of the anti-hero can be traced back to literature and cinema, but it would seem that, today, the home of the anti-hero is on television.

Nowadays, more than referring to a trend or an evaluative label, we can talk about Quality TV as an actual genre. As Robert Thompson explains in his discussion of the trend:

“the “quality” in “quality TV” has come to refer more to a generic style than to an aesthetic judgment.” (Thompson 1997, 13)

And:

“What emerges by the time we get to the 1990s is that “quality TV” has become a genre in itself, complete with its own set of formulaic characteristic. [...] By 1992, you could recognize a “quality show” long before you could tell it was any good.” (Ibid.,16)

Quality TV was born as a way to attract a new target of audience: highly educated, urban viewers and those normally not attracted to ‘regular TV’. In this case, we cannot talk about Quality TV without mentioning also cable TV. That is because the television industry increasingly sets its eyes on specific segments of the audience; specifically segments that were particularly attractive to advertisers, or, segments of the audience who were willing to pay monthly subscriptions rates (Vaage, 2015). HBO seems to be the trailblazer in this regards. Indeed, the anti-hero first made its appearance on the cable TV with shows like *The Sopranos* (1999), transmitted by HBO. Tony Soprano was

a ruthless killer, but the audience could not help but love him. When the show became a surprise hit, the industry decided to ride on its success and moved its focus on morally questionable characters, with shows such as the already mentioned *The Shield*, about a group of corrupt police officers, and *Dexter*. Therefore, it would seem that the anti-hero found its home in cable television, where it had the chance to flourish and develop, not surprisingly then, the TV series chosen for this thesis belong to cable channels (Breaking Bad and Mad Men - AMC, Sons of Anarchy - FX).

Quality TV changed the structure and the execution of TV shows. First, they have shorter seasons, usually thirteen episodes, as opposed to the twenty-two broadcasted on traditional network television. This means that each episode is written and executed with more care and attention, which also means less financial risk for the network and more possibility to be creative on-screen, with every episode almost rather independent but at the same time still part of the story arc. This creative freedom had, as a result, a new form of television, closer to cinema than ever before. However, while cinema has a restriction in terms of time, in this case the format in episodes allows the showrunners to develop characters properly and gradually. Furthermore, this evolution changed also the way in which the shows were being produced and created. Indeed, the creative freedom extended also to directors and cinematographers, who suddenly had the chance to explore new visual techniques (Brett 2013, 19): the technical quality of the product has improved, with a visual aesthetic enhanced by sharper editing and complex *mise-en-scene* (McCabe and Akass 2007, 43). Thus, as the visual style is so significant when it comes to Quality TV, in this paper I will examine the different ways in which this visual aesthetic can be employed and developed also in order to characterize and enhance the facets of the anti-hero.

Theoretical Framework

The concept of text reading leads directly to the discipline of semiotics. Semiotics is the science of meanings, which refers to a 'sign systems' aimed at both communication and the construction and maintenance of reality; and that is the reason why I will be using one of its main notion, the Opposition Theory as a theoretical framework for analyzing the case studies. The French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss states that "binary oppositions (night vs. day, white vs. black) are part of all texts and social systems,

which are constructed through the combination, recombination, interweaving, and intermingling of the oppositional system". (Danesi, 2012: 52) Moreover, as Danesi states in his book *Popular Culture: Introductory Perspectives* (2012):

The notion of opposition as proven itself to be a highly productive one in the study of pop culture, because it allows us to discern the hidden meanings built into characters, plots, performances, and so forth through a simple oppositional technique that fleshes out implicit meanings in texts and performances.

(Danesi 2012, 52)

Specifically, in the case of anti-heroes, the theory appears to be particularly relevant for the opposition that seems to characterize this figure. Indeed, as already mentioned, the basic struggle between good and bad is the main polarity typical of this character, and what provides the show with the drama necessary to sustain various seasons (Landau 2013, 61). However, this struggle is triggered by different forces in the anti-heroes chosen for my research, and thus the Opposition Theory will allow me to investigate the three case studies by focusing on the specific binary opposition that characterizes each type of anti-hero. The three different oppositions I will be examining are common to all three TV shows taken into analysis but particularly relevant to a specific one.

In the case of Walter White I will focus on the dichotomy between Black vs. White. Throughout the series, Vince Gilligan, creator and executive producer of *Breaking Bad*, admitted to have been using colors as a way to express moods and meanings. In *Mad Men* colors are also important narrative makers; and the color orange has been used throughout the series as an omen of something bad happening. However, it is particularly in *Breaking Bad* that the colors are fundamental in understanding Walter's journey, and it is mainly through the shades of color that his anti-heroic featured changes as the story unfolds. Temporality is the main factor that shapes and makes of Walter White an anti-hero. In fact, his main characteristics as an anti-hero lay in his character development and in the way Walter evolves over time. Therefore, by observing the employment of color it is possible to understand the way in which Walter's evolution as an anti-hero takes place, for colors are used in the show to

highlight and emphasize this temporality by following a pattern and making their appearance according to what is happening or is about to.

In regards of *Mad Men* I will focus on the dichotomy between Infidelity vs. Faithfulness. Infidelity is a constant issue present in the show. Don Draper is a character who often acts out of passion and lust, disregarding morals and faithfulness. This opposition between faithful and unfaithful is also very present in the other two shows, but when it comes to Draper it is fundamental in understanding his essence as an anti-hero, which, instead, lays in spatiality. In fact, the two main spaces Don inhabits are the offices at the ad agency he works for, Sterling Cooper, and his family home that he initially shares with his first wife Betty and his three children. These two environments are extremely significant in understanding Don's essence as a character, for the manifestation of his anti-heroic persona makes its appearance mainly in his interaction with his family in the form of him being a unfaithful husband and an absent father, whereas at work his complex personality is often interpreted as creativity and genius. Thus, by observing Don's behavior in the two physical spaces he occupies, it is possible to understand the way in which his character is developed as an anti-hero.

Lastly, in the case of Jax Teller, I will focus on the dichotomy originated between Son, referring to his place in the biker gang called Sons of Anarchy, vs. Father, that is his representation as a family man. The name of the biker gang allows the authors of the show to play often with the terms Son/Father and it proves to be a significant part of Jax's journey as an anti-hero. In order to explore this opposition, I will be focusing on the concept of "Utopia" in the show, used in my research slightly differently than it is traditionally used; not as a political concept aimed at the happiness of the community, but as a personal concept employed to describe the struggle between good and bad that characterize this figure. Jax's peculiarity as anti-hero lays in his desire to chase the dream for a better life, in which he can be a member of the biker gang while still keeping his family alive. Without this ideal vision, Jax Teller would be just another villain. Thus, by observing the constant conflict between dream and reality this opposition will allow me to understand in which way this character is developed as an anti-hero.

Methodology

In order to extract meaning through interpretation of one or more texts, the primary research methodology will be a close visual analysis on various sequences, with the goal of extracting different strategies the TV shows use to depict and develop these anti-heroes. I have established how Quality TV strives towards a visual aesthetic closer to cinema than television, and how this goal is reached through different visual techniques, such as a complex *mise-en-scene* and a sharper *editing*. Indeed, the most evident feature of Quality TV, especially for what concerns the character of the anti-hero, is its visual style, that does not refer to a single style but rather to a general and primary focus on the visual through the employment of various techniques (McCabe and Akass 2007, 48). This emphasis on the visual has created a new way of doing television, that is a visual aesthetic strategy that previously was only used in cinema. Thus, in my analysis I will be focusing on the *mise-en-scene* and *editing* of these shows, for these techniques will allow me to reveal in which way this cinematic aesthetic is used to build the drama along with the plot and develop this particular characters.

Specifically, with regard to of *Breaking Bad* I will analyze the *mise-en-scene* aspect of *color* and its effect on plot and characterization, focusing on costumes and settings as they represent the categories in which the use of color highlights Walter's anti-heroic features. This visual analysis will allow me to investigate the way in which color help intensifying decisive and important moment in Walter White's journey. With regard to *Mad Men*, I will examine the *editing* style of a specific episode of the show in order to extract the way in which space is used to create the character of Don Draper. The choice of focusing on *editing* was dictated, once again, by the fact that the genre of Quality TV strives towards the cinematic. Furthermore, by analyzing editing I will have the chance to understand how this technique manipulate space in such a way to make Don appear in a certain way in specific physical spaces and also to make it seem to reflect his emotions. Thus, by analyzing the technique of *editing* I will have the chance to investigate this anti-hero's *spatiality*, that is the differences between Don at work and Don at home. Finally, for *Sons of Anarchy* I will investigate *mise-en-scene* aspect of *actor and performance*. As Gibbs said: "[...] *mise-en-scene* is concerned with the action and the significance it might have" (Gibbs, 2012: 12). Kurt Sutter, the creator of the show often used symbolisms to depict Jax's struggle in dealing with both the Sons,

the other members of the biker gang and his family. As I mentioned, I will focus on this duality to examine his characterization and on his desire for a personal Utopia, by aiming my attention at this technique I will have the chance to analyze in what way this struggle is characterized in Jax and how his gestures and facial expressions also recall this internal conflict. Thus, by analyzing *mise-en-scene* aspect of *actor and performance* I will have the chance to investigate the symbolism in the show and therefore the specific opposition and peculiarity that seems to characterize this specific anti-hero.

To sum it up, having determined the reasons why the three shows were chosen, having outlined what an anti-hero is and its features, having illustrated what aspect and which character will be specifically analyzed in the paper, I will now start examining in detail each one of the shows in relation to a specific tools of visual aesthetic as stated before. The conclusions provided in this paper have no presumption of putting an end to the debate by making definite claims. On the contrary, the aspects I have chosen to examine here have been highlighted in order to be given more prominence, thus further fueling the arguments within the debate.

Chapter 1: An Examination of the Use of Color Symbolism in *Breaking Bad*

Introduction

This chapter examines the color symbolism used in AMC TV Series *Breaking Bad*, in order to investigate Walter White's personality as an anti-hero. Since the first episode of the series, creator Vince Gilligan made a deliberate use of color in *Breaking Bad*; this color symbolism, especially employed in *costume*, is a direct reflection of Walter's journey from family man to anti-hero, and its employment represents stages of Walter's evolution and transformation. His being an anti-hero is expressed in iconic features characteristic of this figure, both negative and positive, such as that polarity already mentioned in relation to Landau, that the character showcases by trying to always hold his family together, while at the same time becoming more and more dangerous, placing his own wife and children in danger (Landau 2013, 61). These light and dark impulses stand at the core of the struggle typical of the anti-hero and at the base of the opposition used for this research between White vs. Black. Furthermore, this dichotomy proves to be particular relevant for my focus on color and its uses in the show. By starting from there and building on the visual analysis and color strategies employed, I will have the chance to reveal the essence of Walter White as an anti-hero.

The scholarly studies on *Breaking Bad* have mainly focused on the issue of masculinity, seen as one of the main themes of the series, as in "*Masculinity in Breaking Bad: Critical Perspectives*" (2015) by Cowlshaw; on philosophical dilemmas born from the crimes committed by Walter throughout the series, as in "*Breaking Bad and Philosophy: Bedder Living Through Chemistry*" (2013) by Koepsell and Art; or on the figure of the anti-hero and the reason behind its success among the audience, as in "*Crime Uncovered: Anti-Hero*" (2015) by Peters and Steward or "*Exploring How We Enjoy Anti-Hero Narrative*" (2012) by Raney and Shafer. Therefore, most of the focus has been directed to the analysis of its narrative and at the rise of this phenomenon that has increasingly gained success over the past 20 years. Although my research will focus partly on the subject of anti-heroes, little or no focus has been given to the prevalence of color symbolism that Gilligan employs in the TV series. Therefore, this chapter will attempt to provide a focus on color symbolism that has not been explored in other academic reviews. By analyzing this aspect of the series, I will have the chance to investigate what sets Walter apart from other similar characters, that is temporality.

Indeed, his main characteristic as an anti-hero lays in his character development and in the way Walter evolves over time, his humble personality becoming increasingly darker during the course of the five seasons. Indeed, the series' goal was to show how a character's beliefs and identity can change over time in a convincing manner (Peacock and Jacobs 2013).

In the Pilot of *Breaking Bad* we are introduced to the character of Walter White, a middle class, high school chemistry teacher living in Albuquerque (New Mexico), who is suddenly diagnosed with inoperable lung cancer. He lives with his pregnant wife, Skyler, and his disabled firstborn son, Walter Jr., who has a cerebral palsy. With no money to pay treatment, Walt decides to form an unlikely partnership with his former student Jesse Pinkman, who is now a drug dealer, and use his scientific knowledge to manufacture crystal meth, in order to produce and sell the illegal product. The shows starts by portraying Walt as a tragic figure. A man with a minimum salary, who works a second job at a car wash to make ends meet and is now destined to a hopeless death. Throughout the first season, we see him struggle with the cost of treatment, both in terms of high medical bills and his possible loss of dignity due to chemotherapy. However, the situation changes over the course of the five seasons and Walt goes from a man victim of circumstances to a drug lord driven by ambition and desire for power.

Taking my cue on online discussions about the use of color in *Breaking Bad*, I will develop and investigate Walter White's path towards his demise through this visual technique in an academic way. Therefore, in order to explore this anti-hero, as Quality TV uses cinematic technique to give a particular aesthetic to its shows and to develop its characters, I will analyze different strategies in which the show employs color symbolism, by focusing on the *mise-en-scene* aspect of *color* and its effects of plot and characterization. As Gibbs states:

Color is an important expressive elements for film-makers, and it is often mobilized by means of costume, which has the advantage of a direct association with a particular character (Gibbs 2012, 8-9).

Specifically, I will be making a close visual analysis of specific scenes, chosen for their relevance in depicting Walter's evolution as anti-hero, and the way in which they help intensifying decisive moments in his journey. My investigation will focus on aspects of *mise-en-scene*, for setting and costume constitute the categories in which this technique is more visible and evident.

By making the association between color and certain characters or specific events, our reception might differ and our emotions and feeling being affected. Yet, the employment of color can go beyond its emphasis on certain narrative choices. Its complexity is explored by Mary Beth Haralovich in her essay "*All That Heaven Allows: Color, Narrative Space and Melodrama*" (1990), in which she discusses the connection between color and cinema, by examining the visibility of narrative structures in the movie "*All That Heaven Allows*" through details of color in the *mise-en-scene*, but also by analyzing the way in which color can help subvert the realism of the narrative space. According to Haralovich, the heavy use of color in the film and its intensity cannot be explained narratively, and leads her to argue that "color should be emphasized only when it carries specific meaning" (Haralovich 1990, 63). Therefore, this tool has to be used with subtlety and creatively, but always remaining in the realm between realism and spectacle. Thus, in this chapter, after initially investigating further the relation between color and its usage in cinema/TV, I will specifically examine the different ways in which the series employs color to display Walter's transformation.

Color Symbolism

As mentioned, most of the academic studies on *Breaking Bad* aimed their attention at different topics other than color. Despite that, it does not make me the first person discussing color in relation to the show, but on the contrary, since its beginning, many viewers looked into the connection between the two. However, most of the theories and speculations have not come from scholars but were born on the internet within the fan community. By analyzing the way in which color is useful in depicting and understanding Walter White, I will be able to look at the topic in an academic way and thus contributing to the debate on anti-heroes that seems to have gained particular

relevance in the last few years, thanks to the proliferation of this type of character on TV. By analyzing Walter White from a visual perspective and thus by focusing on another facet of his persona as an anti-hero, I can enrich the debate on this figure and expose another layer of his complex personality.

Therefore, once the internet community started examining colors and speculate on their association with specific characters or events, the showrunner himself explained how colors were indeed connected directly to moods, clear trends were visible as different situations happened in the series, and specific events, plot twists and turning points were highlighted clearly. During an interview for *Vulture*, Vince Gilligan discussed the topic and he stated:

“Color is important in *Breaking Bad*: we always try to think in terms of it. We always try to think of the color that a character is dressed in, in the sense that it represents on some level their state of mind.” (Flaherty 2011)

In another interview for *GQ* he talked about how much work and details went into deciding the colors for every characters:

“At the beginning of every series we would have a meeting in which I would discuss the production designer and the costume designer about the specific palettes we should use for any given character throughout the course of the year.” (Franklin-Wallis 2013)

Clearly, color is essential in order to really understand events and situations happening in the series. By following Walter’s change of color, we are front and center in his decay and downfall. However, even though this particular device is one of those characteristics that make *Breaking Bad* a unique series, it is certainly not the first time that we see the use of color in cinema.

Color is everywhere and is one of the most important visual tools we have at our disposal. However, “study of its contribution to film has so far been very fragmented”, because people usually “tend to focus on individual aspects of colors” (Misek 2010, 1). Richard Misek, in his book *Chromatic Cinema: A History of Screen Color*, explained how Aristotle was the first to address the question of how black, white and color can be conceptualized in relation to each other (Misek 2010, 9). Aristotle claimed that black and white are two primary colors, and he backed this affirmation up by stating that, in all physical elements, it is possible to detect a presence that he called “the transparent”. According to Aristotle's definition, the transparent is ‘some sort of constitution and potency which they have in common, and which, not being an independent reality, finds its existence in these bodies..’. (Misek 2010, 9) As Misek explains, this means:

In air, the absence of the transparent cause shadow and its presence causes light; in solids, its absence causes blackness and its presence causes whiteness, the presence of color in solids results from the interaction of black and white (Ibid.,, 9).

I find this theory to be particular relevant for my research, because of the opposition between black and white, that stands at the core of my research on this particular figure. Despite the constant use of color in *Breaking Bad*, all the series revolves around the dichotomy between these two colors: Walt starts off as a decent and morally honest guy and ends up as a criminal drug lord, addicted to power. This is apparent also from some of the names in the show: Walter himself is called White, and that is no coincidence, because “white is the color of vanilla, of blandness” (Flaherty 2011); and the street where the White family lives is called Negro Arroyo Lane, which in Spanish can be translated with “black stream” and seems to forecast the dark path Walt will lead his family down. Moreover, the range of colors used over the course of the five seasons shows Walter's evolution from man to anti-hero: at the beginning we see him wearing mostly light colors, such as green or beige, he “blends in with the wall, no color in his skin. [However], as he changes, color palette will change, his attitude, everything.” (Mittell 2015, 153) And we can see him upgrade to darker colors, such as red or blue, and then eventually also black.

Therefore, we know that the show uses a wide visual palette and a flashy style (Peacock and Jacobs 2007), and that there are recurrent colors used throughout the series. However, even after Gilligan admission about the use of color in the show, we do not know if the meanings connected to every color are accurate. We can only make assumptions. Indeed, as Wendy Everett states in her book *“Questions of Colour in Cinema: from Paintbrush to Pixel”* (2007), “color is, in reality, both a physical characteristic of light and pigment and a psychological and physical sensation, both an objective and a subjective phenomenon” (10). The debate between the objectiveness and subjectiveness of colors is an old one and can be traced back to Newton and its theory on lights and colors (1666), and shows that color is a matter of perception and interpretation. There are different elements to take into consideration when dealing with colors. As Everett illustrates:

“Much of the emotional impact of color results from its multiple and rich associations, but since such associations vary according to historical period, cultural context, and individual experiences.” (Everett 2007, 13)

Therefore, the cultural and geographic context definitely plays a role in our interpretation of colors. Not every culture has the same number or type of colors, and languages can also influence its perception, since some of them do not make the distinction between blue and black, or others collapse blue into green (Everett 2007). The book *Breaking Blue: The Themes, Thesis, and Colors of Breaking Bad* by Pearson Moore, is a clear example of how, since Gilligan only confirmed his use of colors without going into details about the meaning, the actual color symbolism can be open to interpretation. Moore claims that is the viewer’ responsibility to make sense of the symbolism within the series, and he supports this statement by boldly adding that “his understanding of the meaning of white in *Breaking Bad* differ from Vince Gilligan’s.” (Moore 2014, 10)

However, although it is true that colors are used in films and TV series to convey one meaning rather than another, not everyone believes that colors should be defined by the audience. According to Patti Bellantoni, color consultant and expert on the influence of color on behavior, there are certain colors usually associated with certain feelings and that evoke determined emotional responses:

“There are times when I hear a filmmaker say, ‘Color can be whatever you want it to be.’ My experience tells me this is a dangerous misconception. [...] I am convinced, whether we want it to or not, that it is *color* that can determine how we think and what we feel. (Bellantoni 2012, 28)”

As she explains in “*If It’s Purple, Someone’s Gonna Die: The Power of Color in Visual Storytelling*”, the book was born after she conducted a series of experiment on colors with her students, after realizing that many of them were using colors arbitrary in their work. The experiment consisted in bringing to class what they thought was associated to a certain color. The results were, to say the least, interesting. When it came to Red:

The students compulsively gulped down salsa, talked louder, and turned the volume up on the rock music. The males in particular became sweaty and agitated. (One year later on Red Day, I had to break up a screaming match between two young men who normally were great friends.) (Bellantoni 2012, 22)

Blue Day was completely different:

There were big pale blue pillows, cooling mints, and new age music. [...] A sense of calm permeated the room. [...] they didn’t want to move. (Bellantoni 2012, 23)

Therefore, according to this theory, colors are not objective at all and have the power to influence our emotional state. They follow their own rules and have their own languages, which, in cinema, “can visually help define a character arc or layer a story” (Bellantoni 2012, 26). Gillian follows the same pattern by using colors such as yellow, commonly associated to warning, to inform us and give us notice on what is happening. In the same way color affects our reception of events seen on screen, this visual tool is also responsible for influencing the way in which Walter behaves and acts, thus shaping his personality and its evolution.

Color Strategies and Visual Analysis

In this chapter I will be making a close visual analysis on how color is used differently throughout the show. The sequences selected are not coincidental but the choice was dictated by the importance of said scenes in depicting Walter’s evolution as an anti-hero. Furthermore, these decisive moments in the show expose the various strategies the series use to highlight Walter’s journey. Indeed, *Breaking Bad* attempts to bring out the theme of the story by intensifying events, which allows the audience to perceive changes and pivotal moments. The goal is attained through the technique of *mise-en-scene*, by using colors in relation to certain characters or significant episodes. In this way, the series creates a detailed portrait of Walter’s transformation, which provokes a strong emotional resonance in the audience.

Strategy 1 – Costume and Setting

The first strategy *Breaking Bad* uses in its manifestation of colors is accomplished through *mise-en-scene*, specifically by focusing on costume and setting. A scene that show this technique is from Season 1, Episode 3 called “...and the Bag’s in the River” and it portrays Walter’s first murder. Here Walter is still an average high school chemistry teacher who has just found out about his illness and does not really know what he is getting himself into. His physical appearance is completely different from the last seasons of the show and obviously also his attire. Indeed, as Vince Gilligan claims:

“[...] for instance in the pilot, it was intentional that Walt starts off very beige and khaki-ish, very milquetoast, and he would progress through that one hour of television to green and thus show his process of evolution as a character.” (Franklin-Wallis 2013)

Indeed, in this sequence, Walt is wearing some khaki trousers and a yellow dress shirt, with a white shirt underneath. However, what particularly jumps to the eye is especially the color yellow. Among its many meanings, as Bellantoni claims:

“It’s the color of both jonquils and yellow jackets. That’s your first clue, or warning. One of the reasons yellow is the color used for caution signs is that it’s visually aggressive. It appears to come toward you. We’ve built it into our consciousness as a cautionary color.” (Bellantoni 2012, 76)

And, indeed, in the series, yellow is used from the beginning as a symbol of warning, of life-changing events about to happen, but later on, also as an indication of caution.

The first time yellow is used as a way of showing a big change is in Episode 2 of the first season, that sees Walter and Jesse execute their first enemy (Emilio Koyama) and trying to get rid of the body, by placing it in a bathtub in Jesse’s house and consequently by pouring acid on it. In this occasion, Jesse is wearing big yellow gloves and the tiles of his bathroom are also yellow. At this point, it is still not clear what the show is trying to accomplish with the usage of color; but the sequence I am about to analyze leaves no doubt of the choice of the show to give emphasis to certain actions and characters through colors. After this sequence, which marks an important moment in Walter’s life, the usage of yellow will appear more and more frequently. However, yellow will become a constant presence in the show only once Walter and Jesse starts cooperating with Gus Fring, a distinguished methamphetamine distributor, and therefore once Walter begins going deeper and deeper into the drug business.

From this moment on, yellow, always connected to the criminal world, will become also a sign a caution, and indeed often associated with the meth cooking and the selling and laundering operation. This is evident from the yellow, protective jumpsuits Walter and Jesse wear in Gus' underground super lab, proving the meticulousness to details that all characters involved take when it comes to business. Gus himself, one of the major drug dealer and extremely attentive and precautionous in not getting involved directly with drug dealers and criminals, wear often a yellow shirt.

Afterwards, yellow seems to accompany every killings and turning points in the show. Krazy-8 dies wearing yellow, as well as Gale Boetticher, chemist hired by Gus Fring to help Walter and Jesse in the meth cooking. Jane, Jesse's girlfriend, who Walter let die while watching her overdose, die in a yellow bed. A kid accidentally assisting to Walter and his partners robbing a train with the purpose of obtaining methylamine to produce meth is killed wearing a yellow shirt and a black helmet with two yellow stripes. Brock, the son of Jesse's girlfriend Andrea, is poisoned in Season 4 by Walter with the berries of a plant called Lily of the Valley, and wears a yellow shirt right before the fact. And finally, Marie, Walter's sister in law, wears a yellow shirt as well, right before her husband Hank finds out Walter is the drug dealer he is been looking for.

The scene taken into analysis definitely represents a big change in Walt's life, and that is because here we witness Walt first direct killing, Krazy-8, a meth distributor previously in business with Jesse Pinkman. Krazy-8 is being held captive in Jesse's basement out of fear of a retaliation for having killed his cousin Emilio. At this stage, Walt still shows some redeeming qualities and when he is assigned the job of getting rid of the drug dealer he seems to suffer genuine emotional turmoil and he even makes a list of pros and cons. It is clear Walt does not want to kill Krazy-8, especially after confiding in him and talking about his cancer diagnosis, and he actually starts believing his promise of not harming Walt or his family after been released. He prepares to free him but he realizes that Krazy-8's plan is to stab him with a piece of a broken ceramic plate as soon as he gets close enough. Upon finding out about Krazy-8's plan, Walt's only choice is to kill him, but it is evident the distress that this decision causes him. He keeps repeating "No no no, don't do this, why are you doing this, why are you doing

this?” and in the actual moment of the murder we see him crying. After this episode, Walt’s path towards becoming an anti-hero officially begins.

Analysis

The sequence starts in the moment Walter is going through the trash and realizes Krazy-8 is planning on killing him. Although the first shot is an extreme close-up of Walter’s hands looking for the broken plate, followed by a close-up of Walter face, the presence of the color yellow is apparent immediately: Walter is wearing a light yellow shirt, the floor is yellow, as well as the dresser in the background and the broken plate. Among all the yellow elements in the shot, the plate is the one with the most intense color; not surprisingly, since its missing piece is the weapon Krazy-8 will use in his attempt to murder Walter. In the following shots we have the chance to see the rest of the setting. Walter’s is in Jesse’s kitchen, which is decorated almost entirely in yellow. Besides the floor, also the walls are of the same color, as well as the lower part of the counter standing in the middle of the room.



Image 1: Walter in Jesse's kitchen.

Once Walter moves to it and tries to put all the plate's missing pieces together, we can notice how the surface is black, as a way to highlight the yellow of the plate and ask us to pay attention. Furthermore, in a extreme close-up of the plate on the counter, in contrast with the black of the tiles, the color of the object seems even more intense, putting emphasis on the intensity of it and on what it is about to happen. This is the moment Walter realizes that the plate is missing one piece and that Krazy-8 is planning on killing him. Once the counter is visible again, we can notice also other elements in shades of yellow, such as a plastic cup, various tablecloths, and amber alcohol in a glass.

Discovered Krazy-8 plan, Walter moves to the basement. And although the environment is for the most part dark, yellow here seems even more present and intensified. Once he has descended the stairs, a wide shot shows the setting more clearly. The first thing that jumps to the eye is the unclear yellow object on the left, particularly visible because in contrast with the dull colors of the rest of the setting. Also, Krazy-8 is wearing a yellow vest. The basement has a small light coming down from the ceiling, while the rest of the space is bathed in sunlight streaming through the window, which makes appear the whole basement yellow, and makes it hard to distinguish what is truly yellow and what it is not. Elements that tend towards other colors, such as the grey floor and the walls and the grey pole, appear yellow as well.



Image 2: Walter in the basement before killing Krazy-8.

Once Walter is face to face with Krazy-8, under false pretenses, he makes him turn around. A medium close-up of Walter shows a frame in which the elements are arranged in the center of it in an escalation of yellow: in the foreground we have Krazy-8 and his yellow vest (his yellow being the most powerful since he is about to die), then Walter and his light yellow shirt, ending with the pale yellow of the walls shed in sunlight. The gradual regression of the color is made even more visible by the dark sides of the frame; half of Krazy-8's face in darkness, almost as to communicate how the importance of this shot lays in the yellow vest. Krazy-8 is not significant but just another criminal; what is relevant is Walter and how this action will affect him and lead him to a different path. Just before Krazy-8 is killed, there is a close-up of Walter, in which everything is yellow. His ever-present yellow shirt, the walls in the background and even half of his face is blinded by light. The color is getting more aggressive and intense. Almost as a sensory overload, there is an explosion of yellow; it demands to be noticed and it is warning us that we are getting close to the climax.

Afterward, with Krazy-8 dead on the ground, a wide shot allows us to look at the setting again. The yellow seems to be slowly dissipating with the appearance of other colors. Even those elements that were appearing yellow, such as the walls or the pole, now are clearly not. Among the new colors visible in the frames, the most evident is the red of the luggage on the left. Those objects have always been there, but only now we are able to notice their presence. Not surprisingly, red can symbolize death and violence. In the series it is mainly associated with the Heisenberg persona, and it will be analyzed further later on in the chapter. Now, with elements recovering their original color and the dark almost swallowing Krazy-8, the only one standing out in yellow is Walter, almost to communicate that he is the one we should be warned about.



Image 3: The basement after Walter killed Krazy-8.

Strategy 2 – Catalysts and Contrasts

Another strategy in which *Breaking Bad* uses color to highlight Walter's journey, is by contrasting light and dark colors, in order to show Walter's increasingly darker personality. A sequence that demonstrate this technique is from Season 4, Episode 6 called "*Cornered*", and it is probably one of the most powerful and meaningful scenes of the entire series. So much so that it has been renamed by fans, after one of Walter's sentences, as the "I Am the Danger" scene. Specifically, the scene takes place in his bedroom, where his wife Skyler, now aware of his illegal activities, decides to confront Walter about the business and his safety. At this time, Skyler does not know what her husband is capable of and she tries to persuade him to go to the police, believing that is the only way to keep him safe. Another reason why this scene is significant is because it occurs between Walt and his wife Skyler, and that is relevant because up until that moment what drove him to make terrible decisions was the need to provide for his family and to protect it.

The main color used here to communicate the change in Walter is red. Red is a powerful color and it can assume different meanings and provoke different emotion. According to Bellantoni:

“[Red] can activate your libido, or make you aggressive, anxious, or compulsive. [...] Red is power. But red does not come with a moral imperative. Depending on the story’s needs, red can give power to a good guy or a bad guy. (Bellantoni 2012, 2)

Therefore, red can function as a positive color or a negative one. In the show, red is used mainly to express violence and aggression. Not surprisingly, Jesse wears a lot of red at the beginning of the series, indicative of his hostile nature. Despite the importance of this color, the show does not make an excessive use of it. In relation to Walter, red seems to make an appearance only in extremely important situation, making us realize that what is happening is particularly significant. Indeed, red makes its debut as a color to pay attention to, only once Walter and Jesse start working with Gus Fring, once again connecting this effective color to the meth business. The underground lab in which they cook meth is red, and during the confrontation between Walter and Hank, now privy to his drug lord persona, the latter is wearing a red shirt. Furthermore, the more Walter gets closer to his alter ego Heisenberg, the more red seems to sneak into the show, in the form of little details scattered throughout the episodes. In the last season, the one leading directly to Walter’s downfall, red is more visible than ever: in Episode 8 of the final season, the journalist giving the news of the killings of 9 inmates in Albuquerque prison is wearing red, crime of which Walter was the instigator, trying to get rid of all of Gus’ employees. Later on, in the same episode, Skyler, now part of the drug operation, shows her husband the amount of money she managed to launder. In the grey storage unit, the pile of money is on a bright red tarp, which, because of the surrounding dull colors, stands out clearly. Walter and Hank, now privy to his drug lord persona, the latter is wearing a red shirt. Furthermore, the more Walter gets closer to his alter ego Heisenberg, the more red seems to sneak into the show, in the form of little details scattered throughout the episodes. In the last season, the one leading directly to Walter’s downfall, red is more visible than ever: in Episode 8 of the final season, the journalist giving the news of the killings of 9 inmates

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Analysis

In this scene, we find a different Walt, changed not only in personality, but also in physical appearance. Gone are the glasses or his hair, his head is clean shaven, he has a beard and even his facial expression is different. We see him wearing a dark red shirt, while in contrast, Skyler is wearing a white sweater and a purple shirt underneath also with white details. White is universally the color of pureness and innocence. Even though now Skyler is privy to Walter's profession and therefore not so innocent anymore, the scene and dialogue shows how delusional and naïve she is about Walter's position in the drug trafficking and the way he conducts business. She is actually trying to protect him, without realizing that he is the one people should be kept safe from. In this case, their attires is visible right away, thanks to the dull colors of the setting. Indeed, the room is decorated entirely in plain colors: the walls are white, as well as the curtains; the floor is carpeted in brown, also the furniture is brown, and the bed is grey with some white and light yellow items.

The way in which the red and white are put in contrast constitutes a technique often used in *Breaking Bad*. In the series, colors often work in direct opposition from each other, and that is because color combinations reveal conflicting emotions. In this case, since we cannot consider Skyler pure, her white shirt is put in contrast to Walter's dark attire. The way in which red and white are put in contrast, is a technique often used in cinema.

Most if not all color films evince a color scheme that can embrace alternatively dramatic contrast, or at the other extreme, an extremely limited palette emphasizing one tone. (Lewis 2013, 112)

But, as Lewis states, this technique can go even further. Indeed, many films or TV shows make use of color for either balance or discordance, which means that after setting up a color palette, a powerful way to draw attention to a particular color, is to break said palette. The use of this ploy is evident in *Breaking Bad* with the character of Marie, Walter's sister in law. Over the course of the entire series we see Marie constantly wearing purple, but her obsession with purple goes beyond clothes and when we are allowed a glimpse into the house she shares with her husband Hank, we can notice that almost everything is purple; bed linens, pillows, carpet and so on. However, in Season 4, Episode 6, called "*Cornered*", we see her wearing yellow and this is a way of telling us that something is about to happen, something is changing, and indeed right after, Hank realizes that Walter is the drug dealer he has been looking for all this time. Moreover, while the sequence analyzed earlier has almost no dialogue, here the words exchanged, as well as the movements and facial expressions are very telling. All those elements work together to punctuate Walter's transformation and show the aggressive being that is becoming.

At the beginning of the scene, Skyler is talking and trying to convince Walter to do the right thing. Skyler is the one being aggressive, and by trying to express her concern, she is pressuring Walter, who is seated on the bed, hunched over and submissive, barely talking, and just shaking his head; while his expression is distraught and anguished.



Image 4: An anguish Walter at the beginning of his conversation with Skyler.

Suddenly, he gets up and starts undressing, while Skyler is still talking. Mention of the police does not upset him, but as soon as his pride is threatened something in him changes. At this point, Walter is with his back turned and we cannot see his face anymore, but his undressing coincides with the moment in which Skyler says:

“Let’s both of us stop trying to justify the whole thing and admit you’re in danger.”

Just before turning around, we see that underneath that first dark red shirt, he is wearing another red one underneath, this one brighter, which in the series has always been associated with violence and aggression. In a way, this action helped Walter shed his skin and turn into Heisenberg. The bright red seems to function as a catalyst for Walter’s transformation, and makes the scene appear divided into two different parts.



Image 5: Walter takes off his red shirt and reveals a darker one underneath.

Indeed, when he turns around, we find a completely different Walter, an angry and darker one. If in the first part of the scene, both him and Skyler were seated on the bed and therefore on the same level, now Walter keeps standing and, while delivering his famous speech, he gets closer to Skyler, looming over her. The roles are reversed, now Walter is the aggressive now, and Skyler is getting scared by his reaction. He cannot stand to be considered just an ordinary chemistry high school teacher and he states:

“Who are you talking to right now? Who is it you think you see? Do you know how much I make a year? [...] Even if I told you, you wouldn’t believe it. Do you know what would happen if I suddenly decided to stop going to work? [...] It ceases to exist without me. No. You clearly don’t know who you’re talking to, so let me clue you in. I’m not in danger, Skyler. I am the danger. A guy opens his door and gets shot, and you think that of me? No. I am the one who knocks.”

While talking, we notice how his movements and his facial appearance have completely changed from mere seconds before. His expression is hard, his eyes narrowed, which indicates discomfort and anger; his movements are curt and jerky. Skyler’s expression is different too, not pleading anymore but frightened. Her face seems to communicate

the surprise in seeing Walter's reaction, a man who she does not recognize anymore. And that is because in front of her, now there is Heisenberg.



Image 6: Walter has turned into Heisenberg.

After his argument with Skyler, Walter heads to the shower and shaves his head. Now Walter is cancer-free (it will return later on in Season 5), thus there would be no need to shave his head, but nonetheless, he keeps going through, I dare say, ritual. A clean-shaved head belongs to Heisenberg persona and, by keep doing it, we understand that Walter has fully embraced and accepted it. But even without these details, the dialogue leaves no doubt. By now, Walter is addicted to power and his ego is the one in charge. He is not doing all of this for his family anymore, but he is doing it for himself.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the use of color employed in *Breaking Bad*, in order to depict the development and evolution of Walter White as an anti-hero. While the showrunner admitted to using color to highlights significant facts and events, he has never revealed exactly in which way he employed it; thus leading the fans community to make their own assumptions and suppositions. Although most of the scholars studies on *Breaking Bad* focused on other themes, such as masculinity or morality; authors such as Moore,

gave his own interpretations of the employment of color in the show, by also going against Gilligan explanations and stating that color should be defined by the audience and their reaction to it. However, color is a tool often used both in cinema and TV, and through different theories it was possible to trace the way in which various filmmakers think of it. Specifically, Bellantoni, expert on the influence of color on behavior, in “*If It’s Purple Someone’s Gonna Die*’, demonstrates how color can be a broad objective concept, able to have an impact on emotions, influence the viewer or express particular meanings.

Furthermore, in order to extract the different ways in which the series uses color, I analyzed two different strategies and consequently specific sequences illustrating them. In my investigation of the scenes I used a visual analysis, by focusing on the technique of *mise-en-scene*, specifically its aspect of costume and setting. My choice was dictated by the complexity of these techniques in the new cinematic visual style typical of the genre, being the main features of Quality TV. Visual style strives towards a cinematic aesthetic that drives the showrunner to focus on the visual as much as on the narrative. In *Breaking Bad*, these elements come together in the *mise-en-scene* and are expressed through colors. Indeed, in this chapter, I argued how this technique is often used in cinema. However, not often do we see the same in television, a medium that tends to favor the narrative over the visual, thus making us realize that this visual complexity is characteristic of the Quality TV genre, home of the anti-hero. Therefore, the first method in which color is used was to apply it to the entire environment. Both Walter’s attire and Jesse’s kitchen decoration, where the scene partially takes place, are yellow. At times, the color becomes so blinding it overwhelms the viewer and make him realize that something important is about to happen. Whereas, the second strategy consists in using the red of Walter’s shirt as a catalyst for his transformation into Heisenberg, and to put dark and light color (in this case red and white) in contrast, in order to make these colors stand out and request attention. Finally, through the investigation of the strategies and the analysis of its colors and costumes, I had the chance to go deeper into the characterization of this particular anti-hero and gain more insight into the character.

Chapter 2: An Examination of the Use of Cinematic Space in *Mad Men*

Introduction

This chapter will attempt to show that the elements of cinematic space, comprised of location and human interactions, is a central element in AMC TV Series *Mad Men* and one of the aspects of Don Draper's characterization as an anti-hero. The show tells the story of a self-made man working in an advertising agency in New York during the 1960s. His extremely complex and layered personality places him into that grey area typical of many protagonists nowadays: the anti-hero. However, what sets him apart from other similar characters is that the manifestation of his anti-hero persona is more visible in certain physical spaces rather than others: at work his bosses and colleagues tolerate his difficult personality because of his creative genius and his significant role in the agency, and thus grant him free rein on every actions and decisions; whereas at home he is a cheating husband and absent father, making it challenging to justify any of his actions. Therefore, his particularity is spatiality. Indeed, although Don is the least extreme of the characters taken into analysis, he is still an anti-hero in the way he struggles with light and dark impulses, and in the polarity that manifest itself in different physical spaces. Furthermore, the choice of analysis space was dictated by the way in which the show builds, as many theory already proved to be possible, physical spaces also as mental and social spaces (Garcoa 2016, 111).

First of all, in my research, I will explore the concept of Cinematic Space; notion that, as the words themselves suggest, refer to films rather than television. However, with the rise of Quality TV, of which *Mad Men* is part of, the medium was developed in new and refined ways. Particularly in the case of this genre, television began to inspire towards the cinematic. (Connelly 2012, 46) This is true specifically in the case of *Mad Men*, which "has a somewhat mannered, classic visual style that is influenced more by cinema than TV" (Feld, Oppenheimer, and Stasukevich 2008). Consequently, I will focus on the two main spaces in which most of Don interactions take place: the work environment and the familiar one. As for the latter, I will take into consideration the house that Don shares with his first wife Betty, since I feel that his relationship with his first wife (and his children) has more relevance in his journey. For the first three seasons, Don's marriage with Betty is the primary focus of the show; and even after their divorce, their relationship remains complicated. However, despite the hurt and resentment still tainting it, she is the mother of his children and there has always been

affection between them. Therefore, by analyzing the opposition and contrasts between the two spaces mentioned, I will have the chance to investigate the differences in Don's personality as well.

In addition, in order to explore this anti-hero, I will analyze different strategies in which the series uses space to create the character of Don Draper, by focusing on the *editing* of a specific episode. This technique was chosen because one of the ways in which the show is able to reach a cinematic aesthetic is through editing. As Sprengler claims:

“[The] classical visual style is achieved in part through a preference for fixed cameras and the periodic but markedly noticeable uses of slow tracking shots, fades, and dissolves. It is also accomplished eschewing certain staples of television in favour of cinematic devices.” (Sprengler 2011, 238)

By emphasizing the *editing* of said episode, I will have the chance to highlight the contradiction between Don at work and Don at home. According to Bordwell and Thompson, editing is “the coordination of one shot with the next” (Bordwell and Thompson 2001, 249), and it comprises of four different dimensions: Graphic, Rhythmic, Spatial and Temporal, which are used with different purposes. Specifically, the Graphic relationship of editing occurs when Shot A and Shot B are very similar visually; and thus the comparison between the two refers to “purely pictorial qualities” (Ibid., 252). It is mostly used to achieve smooth continuity or abrupt contrast. The Rhythmic relationship of editing controls the rhythm, by adjusting the length of the shots in relation to one another. It is used to control the amount of time the audience has to reflect on what is happening on the screen. The Spatial relationship between shots serves to construct film space; and thanks to spatial manipulation the filmmaker is able to “relate any two points in space through similarity, difference, or development.” (Ibid., 258) Lastly, the Temporal relationship controls the time of the action depicted in the film, and it refers to the lengthening or shortening of time between two shots. It is used to strengthen the importance of a given scene, or change the mood altogether.

Cinematic Space

Space is one of the most powerful tools cinema has at its disposal, and that is because it can have an impact on the plot and on the characters themselves. But because cinematic space is often marginal or relegated to the setting or locations, its use in the cinema has often been neglected. Cinematic space in relation to cinema was first defined by Stephen Heath in "*Questions of Cinema*", published in 1976. In the chapter "Narrative Space", Heath finally gives central role to cinematic representations of space. According to his theory, "by watching movies, the spectators actively engage with the spaces perceived on screen by connecting them to their mental images or physical spaces". (Smicek 2014, 14) In addition, Heath divided the examination of space in films into two different categories: space 'in frame', that is the space determined by the frame and its limits; and space 'out of frame', which is the space beyond the limits of the frame.

"Frame space, in other words, is constructed as narrative space. It is narrative significance that at any moment sets the space of the frame to be followed and 'read'." (Heath 1981, 36)

That means that it is up to the viewer to read the narrative within the space provided, and consequently to interpret the images. Cinematic space induces the audience to seek spatio-temporal connections into the text and generate, as a consequence, the development and the structure of the Plot. Therefore, it is the 'space in frame' that imposes coherence and continuity. Heath's structure of cinematic space opened the way to more theories about the topic, and after him many scholars attempted to classify cinematic space in films. Hence, came the realization that space was more than location or set design, or even landscapes and sceneries used as backgrounds for filming. Especially because this space does not have to be necessarily physical, but can be emotional or psychological.

However, Heath's theory, besides encouraging other scholars to investigate cinematic space, it also generated criticism. In his essay "*Narrative Space*", Mark Cooper draws from Heath's theory to further the investigation on space in cinema. He claims:

“The essay’s virtue [...] lies in its refusal to define either ‘narrative’ or ‘space’ apart from cinema’s conventional manner of relating the two. Crucial as this argument is, Heath does not allow it finally to displace the shot, and thus falls short of specifying an alternative conception of film form. To do so, we need only to pick up where Heath leaves off.” (Cooper 2002, 144)

According to Cooper, Heath’s theory is incomplete because his argument revolves around “the formal rules of Renaissance perspective as the defining model of modern space.” (Ibid., 145). By using different theorists investigating narrative perspective, such as Carroll, Bordwell, Lacan, Lefebvre, and so on, Cooper is affirming that space ‘out of frame’ is as much valuable as space ‘in frame’. Despite Heath’s theory being a valid starting point, he merely discusses “the importance of camera placement relative to characters, [and] it fails to consider what such placement has to do with the kinds of narrative Hollywood likes to tell”. (Ibid., 148) Specifically, Cooper refers to Heath’s statement according to which “looks characters exchange with one another provide both narrative and spatial information’. (Ibid., 144) According to Cooper, what Heath fails to mention is that “the separation of looks animates Hollywood cinema’s most common narrative pattern: the love story”. (Ibid, 144) By analyzing the way love is represented in cinema, he comes to the conclusion that a romantic relationship between two characters is depicted on screen by distinguishing the spaces the lovers inhabit, and by also taking into consideration the time they spend apart. Therefore, the independent journey of the lovers until they are finally reunited is just as significant, in the representation of love, as the scenes in which the viewer see them together. Thus, both space ‘in frame’ and space ‘out of frame’ are fundamental for the characterization of the protagonists, and also to create certain tones and moods. In the same way the audience has to keep into consideration the time a romantic couple spends apart, when watching Don inhabiting a specific environment we cannot forget that there is still another world waiting for him at the end of the day. Although the editing of the Pilot (but not only) almost deceives us by showing Don's family only at the end of the episode, and besides *Mad Men* wanting to portray both Don's work and home life, the series shows us glimpses of Betty and his days spent at home with their children. Indeed, if initially his flawed personality makes the audience admire him for the way he handles businesses and projects by staying true to himself and by not compromising,

the same traits bring the viewer to resent him when finding out about the family he neglects. However, in the following episode, now that the audience has all the information, the editing seems to draw attention to Don's extramarital life. A scene in which Betty is having a panic attack while driving cuts to a Don's laughing and having sex with his mistress. The distance between the two – Don and Betty - is clear: while one is showing her first symptoms of depression, the other one is having fun with another women. Thus, we cannot evaluate Don's behavior at home with his family without being aware of the many times in which he finds solace in some other women; and thus we cannot discern the two different realities. Therefore, space 'out of frame' is significant in supporting the continuity of space by helping create the illusion that life carries on for all the characters we see on screen. In other words, in the same way Don's life continues beyond his workday at the office or his affairs at the of it, space 'out of frame' intensify the sense that the space 'in frame' continues beyond what we see on screen in that moment (Butler 2012, 351).

The representation of space, conventionally considered dependent on the plot, is a tool used to discern the complexity of a character or a physical structure in which the spectator can follow the unfolding of the narrative, therefore molding itself around the individuals and their storylines. Therefore, cinematic space is usually a background component to all the other elements of a cinematic representation, such as the development of the drama, the action or the main characters. However, I argue, space can also be responsible for creating characters. In the same way space affects human behavior in everyday life, the perception of the environments from the character's point of view requires him to pay attention and take in every element present. Also, the experience of a person and his past can determine different reception of the same space: according to his personal history, his sex, his age, his preferences and so on, a character can experience a space in different ways. Finally, also the aesthetic of the environment can influence his perception, as I will explain later on in the chapter. Therefore, as various relevant theorists such as Henri Lefebvre have claimed, after investigating space and its repercussions, space produces significance. The theory of the French philosopher, although not related to cinema, is the most considered and valued when discussing space. Indeed, Lefebvre was one of the first to focus his work on the definition of social space. In his book, *The Production of Space*, published in French in 1974, but translated into English only in 1991, he claims that

space itself creates meaning. According to the theorist, space is a social practice, comprised by a series of relations in which lie also the individual: the physical formation of space, the mental world and the social construction of space. Through this categorization, Lefebvre's goal was to prove that "space is never produced in the sense that a kilogram of sugar or a yard of clothes is produced" (Lefebvre 1991, 85); and despite them being different notions, these concepts are inevitably interconnected, because each one has implications for the others. It would be impossible for us to discuss mental space without being influenced by physical perceptions and social relations; in the same way, a physical space cannot be produced without keeping mental and social spaces in mind. All three difference spaces, in Lefebvre formula, have the potential and capacity to affect the person engaged in it. Furthermore, Lefebvre also defines three different but once again interwoven dimensions of space: *conceived space*, *'lived' space* and *perceived space*. Whereas conceived space refers to the way dominant groups in society define it, such as "planners, engineers, developers, architects, urbanists, geographers" (Merrifield 1993, 523), etc., and 'lived space' is the space of everyday life and thus experienced by his users, it is the concept of *perceived space* that holds more relevance for my argument. When Lefebvre discusses social practices in relation to space, he is talking about *perceived space*, seen as the way one uses space according to his choices and practices. This category marks the actual process of the production of space by stating that spaces are subjectively produced and reproduced. Space is not fixed, but it is originated by the actions of human beings, which in turn are affected by their experiences and use those environments differently. Don's past and childhood are responsible for shaping the person he is today and lead him to experience physical spaces uniquely and differently from the way we would understand the same environments.

After Heath and Lefebvre, different theories developed, and in recent years a proliferation of discussions about space and cinema has been taking place. However, most of these studies see as their focus landscapes, cityscapes and urban spaces in general. In this case, the two settings I am going to analyse in order to conduct my research, will be interior spaces: the work environment and the familiar environment. Indeed, save for a few exceptions *Mad Men* relies on interior spaces to develop its characters and their storylines. Especially if we consider *Mad Men* as a show not plot-driven, but characters-driven, that is, in which what matters is the lives of the

protagonists, their characterization, their journey and development. That means that the ordinary lives of these same characters matter, as does the space they inhabit and in which conduct their lives. Moreover, it is necessary to consider that we are talking about a show that takes place in 1960s and therefore, details such as costumes and sets are important to help support events and episodes.

The main spaces in which Don narration takes place in *Mad Men* are the different offices he occupies at Sterling Cooper throughout the series, the house he shares first with Betty, and later on the apartment he shares with his second wife Megan. Between these two main locations, there are other 'leisure spaces' making an appearance in the show, such as the bars in which Don's business meetings often are held, or 'transitory spaces', such as the train and car that allow him to commute to work. The 'transitory spaces' in particular seems to emphasize the distance between the familiar and the work environment; they are the means through which Don leave his private life behind and enter his professional one. Therefore, although these temporary spaces mentioned above play a relevant role in the narratives, I will focus my attention on the fixed ones: the office and Don and Betty's house. Taken individually these settings do not tell us much, but by considering the other elements of the series, such as the plot, the characters, etc., we have the chance to see exactly where Don 'antiheroness' lies: in spatiality.

The Family Environment

The first space I am going to investigate is Don's family environment. Although Don changes houses different times over the course of the show, the house that will play a central role for most of Don's journey is the suburban house he shares with his first wife Betty and his children. The Sterling Cooper's offices are in New York, as the characters of the show are never tired of repeating, Madison Avenue to be exact; but it is not strange for Don to have a home in the suburbs, Ossining, upstate New York. "As living in the suburbs is standard for most US citizens" (Smicek 2014, 16), we still find this environment in contemporary American films and TV-shows. However, to have a house in the suburbs was particularly important for the times our mad men live in, creating a clear demarcation between city/work and home/family. This idea of the

house in the suburbia was a result of the post-war suburbanization of the USA, a consequence of the aftermath of the Second World War II.

“the actual suburban experience was significantly affected by the images of the utopian representation of suburban communities on the television screen already in the 1950s, the time when the idealized concept of suburbia emerged [...]”. (Smicek 2014, 15)

The functionality of the suburban lies exactly here: in the utopian myth of suburban perfection, where different themes run through it, “including tradition and nostalgia, family, community, gender identity, and the American Dream” (Coon 2013, 23) , and its ideology based on shared values, such as “the celebration of the traditional nuclear family and clearly defined gender roles.” (Ibid., 28) This idealization of the suburban houses coincide with the values and the time in which we find the Draper family, and with the idea of presenting a nuclear family and a perfect neighbourhood as the norm. Examples of these values can be Betty’s beliefs(?) and her need to be the perfect housewife leading the perfect life. Being the owner of such houses allowed you to reinforce this seemingly perfect façade and gain access to the white, middle-class identity. Also the aesthetic of the house, as mentioned before, holds a relevant role in the way the characters perceive spaces: the peaceful, rural and wealthy neighborhood in which the Draper family lives; combined with the elegant exterior of the house, which communicate prosperity, respectability and a white upper-class identity, help add to that aura of perfection that the Drapers seem so adamant to achieve.

But what about the interior? We know that behind an image of perfection, more often than not, hides a completely different reality. Indeed, in most of the representations of the suburban myth both on the big and small screen, “the breaking through the facade has become a central preoccupation of suburban narratives” (Coon 2013, 19). As in the case of Don and Betty’s house, the exterior does not match the interior of the house. Even in the privacy of their home it is possible to find a faithful representation of Don’s life and his relationship with Betty.

“[...] the rooms of the Draper home are traditionally configured and [...] shot to appear small, cramped, confining, and claustrophobic. In contrast to the brightly lit, spacious, open office, the Draper house seems always to be cast in twilight; the dark, knotty pine panelling of the kitchen dims the morning sunlight and makes the walls appear closer than they actually are, and the heavy draperies in the living room and kitchen cast a necessary gloaming, if not a gloom, over their domestic lives.” (Harris 2013, 69)

The suburban house, as well as its exterior and interior, are a direct representation of Don's familiar life. United by the desire for perfection, Don and Betty married while she was still a young model in New York. With her beauty and elegance, Betty is everything Don is not (son of a prostitute grown up in a whorehouse, with an authoritarian father and emotionally abusive stepmother). Despite the affection that always joined them, Betty completed the image that Don was working hard to reach: a successful self-made businessman and his beautiful, suburban wife. However, from the very first episode of the series, we can see the situation is not ideal as they want us to think, and their relationship has the exact look as their house: exteriorly perfect, anything but perfect on the inside. The perfect marriage, and the ideal house in the right neighbourhood drive Don to keep up the charade and pretend everything is how it looks. However, as soon as he crosses the threshold of their house, with its gloominess and that sense of suffocation that rises from its small and cramped walls, all pretences drop and Don cannot keep playing the role of the doting husband anymore.

Furthermore, the conventional way in which his house and his marriage is presented could not be any further from the true essence of the man hiding behind the mask, with his fascination for the Greenwich Village and the bohemian lifestyle. Not surprisingly, the first mistress of Don we meet, Midge Daniels, is the complete opposite of Betty: a bohemian artist living a life without rules and restrictions, and more importantly, who “rejects feminine roles of marriage and domesticity” (Dunn et al. 2015, 106).

The Work Environment

The second environment I'm going to analyse is the work space, that is the Sterling Cooper offices, that later on will change name various times. The agency is in Manhattan, Madison Avenue. The name describes not only the geographical location, but also the reputation of the business. At the time, it was enough to mention the location to be looked at with admiration and envy.

“In the 1950s and 1960s, Madison Avenue in New York was the headquarters of several leading advertising agency and other communication companies, such as magazine publishers and television and radio networks that sold advertising space. Madison Avenue came to symbolize the creative energy and intellectual fervour of the advertising industry.” (Villamora and Basch 2003, 2)

The offices are located in an International Style building and surrounded by many other similar ones. The International Style was developed in Europe and the US in the 1920s and 1930s. The term was first used in 1932 by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and p. Johnson in their essay “*The International Style: Architecture since 1922*”. (Merriam-Webster 2000, 813) The same building is portrayed in the opening credits, which picture a black, silhouetted figure free falling from it, or displayed through the windows of the characters' office. Don himself is depicted in front of one those windows in the poster for Season 4. Indeed, most of the posters for the entire series show a man (Don?) in the office, in order to validate the importance of the workplace in *Mad Men* as devices employed in the narration, in the evolution of the plot and in the formation of the cinematic experience.

The interior of the workplace has not changed much since the 1960s and reflects many offices today. However, while the private office with a door is the same and keeps symbolizing hierarchy within the workplaces dynamics, the open plan comprised of secretaries and their desks has been replaced by cubicles. Sterling Cooper workplace is modern and spacious. Therefore, the contrast between Don and Betty's house and the workplace is clear right away:

“[...] a visual freedom that creates an antithesis to the intense claustrophobia of the domestic Draper spaces. The Drapers' home would not seem nearly so confining, dark, and oppressive without the sweeping spaces of the “bull pen” (as the AMC website labels the secretarial space), with its high-wattage lighting, its seemingly endless rows of uniformly distributed workstations, and its spaces that seem to open out from the edges into unknown parts of the agency's physical world.” (Harris 2013, 59)

Therefore, while the Draper's residence represents an ideal house only in appearance, the openness and the arrangement of the office at Sterling Cooper seems to give a completely different idea: the one of a successful man with everything under control. And that is exactly what Don Draper is at first. The office is where he can really be himself. He does not have to pretend to be something he is not in front his wife, he does not have to be reminded of Dick Whitman, his real identity. He is a self-made man, who started from nothing and now holds a position of power.

In conclusion, the family and work environments are not only physical spaces, but in the same way Lefebvre has explained, they function as mental and social spaces as well. The office in New York, with its hectic lifestyle comprised of project, business meetings and challenges, could not be more different than the suburban house in Ossining, consisted of domestic issues, maintaining relationships with the neighbors or going to social clubs. This distance between the two spaces drives Don to behave differently and to develop his personality according to the environment (Garcao 2016, 111). Furthermore, they never intersect and show two very distinctive lifestyle. The series often shows the distance between the two spaces, by showing Don travelling by train or driving to work by car. However, other times the series employs unharmonious cuts. Once again, in the second episode of the first season, after we witness Betty having a panic attack while Don is having fun with his mistress in a series of back and forth cuts that have the function of relating the two different spaces; at one point we see Don making his appearance in the kitchen while his family is having dinner. The editing technique of cutting back and forth between events happening simultaneously is called

‘crosscutting’ and is usually used to create tension (Wohl 2002, 108). Also, Don's arrival at home, after what we have just watched, is so abrupt and sudden that the audience experiences almost a moment of confusion and wonder what Don is doing there. Separation is strengthened also by the people occupying the singular spaces: rarely do we see Betty at Sterling Cooper, and vice versa. Finally, distance is also highlighted in the physical distance between the two.

Editing Strategies and Visual Analysis

In this chapter I will be making an editing analysis of the very first episode of *Mad Men*, called “*Smoke Gets in Your Eyes*”, by focusing on the way the show uses Space to create the character of Don Draper, according to the environment he is occupying. Indeed, the series makes use of many different elements of editing to emphasize open spaces and make them look even bigger, as well as creating a sense of claustrophobia when it comes to small spaces. This allows me to investigate the strategies employed to present differently the Sterling Cooper offices and the suburban house in Ossining. Furthermore, by analysing these two spaces I will have the chance to understand in which way the physical spaces and the way in which Don perceives himself (or the way in which Don is perceived by the public?!) them are interconnected to each other and affect his engagement with them, thus helping me answer the research question.

Strategy 1 – The Agency

The episode introduces us first to the city of New York and the agency, Sterling Cooper. Right from the start the pacing is fast and frenetic, matching the rhythm of the city itself. In a bird's eye shot Madison Avenue is shown directly from above, with the International Style building in which the agency is located, occupying the low part of the frame. This shot, usually used to swallow up the subjects in it and make them look smaller, depicts taxis driving by and people scurrying around; but, more importantly, makes the building look towering and imposing. Thus, it establishes the place and highlights the subject. Inside the agency and Don's office, two big windows, with natural light streaming through it, already expand the look of the space. Don is almost entirely shown in mid-shots or wide-shots, leaving always space for the setting.



Image 7: Don in his office.

Furthermore, the camera is often positioned at the corner of the space, giving an ever more powerful sense of openness, and showing almost the entire office. The environment demands to be seen, making it almost difficult to follow Don's movements inside it. In a two-way conversation with Roger, the scene is composed by alternating two-shots. In this technique, the shot is usually framed as to display the face of one of the characters on one side of the frame and the shoulder of the interlocutor on the other. However, while Roger is depicted in a low-angle medium-close up shot, when the camera cuts to Don the angle has changed. Almost Roger's entire back is framed in the left angle of the shot, and Don is occupying only half of the frame, the windows all around and above him filling the rest. In this way, Don seems almost consumed by the space surrounding him, and the office overwhelming; at first glance, the windows and the open space catches us off guard, blinding us and making us look for Don in the frame.

While still in the office, we assist to different conversations between Don and his colleagues or his employees. In all of these sequences the office and Don seems to work together to express power and authority. Wide shots that zoom in on Don keep the

setting always present and visible, and once Don is shown in medium close-up shots, the camera is often positioned in the corner and at a low-angle, showing those big windows and the view outside and therefore giving a sense of vastness, and depicting Don as a dominant and intimidating figure. Also, in this way the ceiling and its tiles are visible, giving the impression of a long corridor. When it comes to the other characters, they are often framed decentered with respect to the setting, thus making the latter appear the real protagonist of the scene.

During a meeting aimed at landing the cigarette brand Lucky Strike, three quarter shots with Don, Roger and Peter positioned in gradation, help enhance depth creating a feeling of three dimensions. We also get to witness Don's brilliance. In the moment when the clients are leaving and everything seems lost, Don is hit by a struck of genius. The other men in the room are talking among themselves, but the camera is on Don in a medium close-up. There is a flicker of inspiration in his eyes, the camera begins to close in on him, we can almost see the gears turning in his head, until the moment he realizes what it is that the client wants and the camera stops in a close-up shot. Moreover, if at the beginning the rhythm was frenetic and characterized by business meetings and the sound of office activities in the background, with the progression of the episode the pace seems to slow down.

In conclusion, the way in which editing is employed in this episode, in the work environment, contributes to create a specific image of Don: the creative genius and successful businessman. The episode is predominated by low-angle wide shots, which combined to the décor of the office, with its big windows and adequate interior design, transmit the idea of an authoritative and dominating man that women desire and men want to emulate. Finally, the way in which the camera seems to move around the setting, and the way in which the latter and Don seems to coordinate each other, strengthens this collaboration even more. Thus, the vastness and openness of the space reflects the way in which this anti-hero engages with the environment, that is as Don Draper and not as Dick Whitman, his real identity. The *conceived* and *'lived'* spaces discussed by Lefebvre come together to create a *perceived* space that reflects and produce the rich and self-made New York businessman that he is today, a person that, thanks to the multiple flashbacks scattered throughout the episodes, we know

could not be any further from his old self and consequently drives him to use that same space in a dominant and authoritative way. The same thing cannot be said for his family home.

Strategy 2 – The Suburban House

In the episode, once Don reached his home in Ossining the difference is visible right away. The first shot that introduced us to the interior of the house is a high angle shot. Firstly, it is relevant to notice that in depicting the work environment most of the shots used were high low. Here is exactly the opposite. The first frame shows a dark and narrow corridor, made even smaller by the angle of the camera and the dark. Indeed, there is almost not light in the room. Also for the rest of the sequence, light will remain low. Even with the presence of lamps, the house and the rooms are barely visible. Don himself is hidden by the shadows, almost being consumed by it. Furthermore, the angle allows us to notice the presence of a second floor. However, the way in which the front door and a French window on the right framed the floor below, combined with the way in which the stairs and its shoe rail enclosed the second floor, help create a confined and claustrophobic space. Thus, already from the very first shot the sensation the space creates is completely different, is not opposite, than the feelings that Sterling Cooper expresses.



Afterwards, a hard cut brings us to the bedroom, where Don says 'hi' to a sleeping Betty. The camera, positioned in the bed's corner, cuts to a mid-shot. However, once again, the frame is enclosed by the bed frame and therefore communicates a feeling of a limited space. Moreover, while climbing the stairs, Don is framed by the balusters in the foreground, giving the idea of a prison. A pan shot, which is the way in which the camera moves from left to right, follows Don's movements, ending in an extreme close-up of his feet. If during Don's time at the office, the techniques more used were wide-shots or medium close-ups, here is the opposite with close-ups and extreme close-ups. In this way, we only get a glimpse of the furniture and décor of the house, as opposed to the way in which the work environment was always at the forefront, together with the characters. Also, while at Sterling Cooper the ceiling is often shown in a way to make the space look wider and vast, here only the floor makes its appearance. In the last frame of Don, he is saying goodbye to his children while the camera moves further and further away, until getting enclosed by the window.

Furthermore, as during the episode the pacing gets increasingly slower, the shots become smaller. The close-ups and the medium close-ups make the surrounding spaces disappear, moving the focus on the characters rather than on the setting. However, the camera keeps zooming in on details, such as Don's feet while climbing the stairs or his hands while saying goodbye to his kids, making also Don disappear. The dark, the shots and the angle used, portray a man completely different from the one we have met before: not more dominant and imposing, but small and submissive. Moreover, if at the beginning the rhythm was frenetic and characterized by business meetings and the sound of office activities in the background, with the progression of the episode the pace seems to slow down with longer shots and a more dragging rhythm. In this way, by switching from a fast-paced rhythm to a slow one the tension builds, both for the characters and the audience that perceives the difference. In addition, with the employment of close-ups and shots that often linger on Don's or Betty's faces before cutting away, the editing establishes the anxious nature of the

relationships between the two and of the discomfort surrounding the situation (Wojl 2002, 111).

In conclusion, the techniques used to depict Don in the work environment and in the family one are opposite; and our perception has changed along with the editing and the way in which the spaces were depicted. While at Sterling Cooper the space was almost too overwhelming and our attention contented by Don and the agency, in the Ossining house we are almost blinded by the lack of light, the claustrophobia created by the framing and the impossibility of seeing any details of the interior. Finally, the huge differences in editing, camera angle and camera movements, along the depiction of the two environments create an even more powerful and effective contrast. Thus, in the same way Lefebvre's three dimensions of space worked together in the work environment to create a specific Don, here the small and cramped rooms combined with Don's mental conceptions create a completely different version of the same person. Because the only house Don knew while growing up was a brothel shared with prostitutes and two distant and cruel parents, he lacks that sense of family connections that would make him *perceive* this specific space in a different way. He does not know how to be a good husband and a good father, and while at Sterling Cooper he does not have to pretend to be someone he is not, in his family home he cannot live up to that perfect life he was adamant to live and he cannot distance himself from those elements by engaging with this environment in any other way.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the use of space employed in *Mad Men*, in order to depict the personality of Don Draper as an anti-hero. The notion of Space is a broad concept studied and developed by many different scholars, as a way to understand the importance and the relevance it holds. Theorists such as Heath, Cooper and Lefebvre were the main investigators of the influence Space can have on cinema, and also the way in which it can affect characters and situations. Indeed, while thinking about Space in relation to cinema or television, we usually image locations and settings, the importance of it goes beyond that: besides affecting the audience and their reception of the narratives, the same thing can be said for the actual characters. The way in which a space is portrayed, combined with the experiences and events that shaped the

personality of the character, can have the potential of influence people engaged in it. Therefore in my chapter I have argued that Space can be responsible for the creation and development of characters and the rise of certain traits of their personality.

Mad Men is a TV-show that relies mostly on interior spaces and the two environment taken into consideration for my research are the agency and the offices where Don spends most of his days, and the house he shares with his first wife Betty in the first three seasons. The way in which the spaces are arranged is very different and seems to express and provoke both in the audience and in the protagonist opposite feelings. For Sterling Cooper the open space and the bright and spacious environment bring out the dominant and authoritative figure that he is Don at work, while the narrow, cramped and dark spaces of the suburban house in Ossining transmit a sense of claustrophobia that matches Don's behavior towards his family. Furthermore, by analyzing the editing of the first episode of the series, I had the chance to observe how editing complements the portrayal of the spaces by using opposite techniques, and therefore depicting Don himself in two different ways.

MA Chapter 3: An Examination of the Employment of Utopia in *Sons of Anarchy*

Introduction

This chapter examines the employment of the notion of Utopia in FX TV Series *Sons of Anarchy*, in order to investigate Jax Teller's personality as an anti-hero. The show focuses on the MC (motorcycle club) "Sons of Anarchy", its members and their families, as well as the small city of Charming, a fictional town, and the gang wars fighting for its territories. In particular, it revolves around the figure of gang member Jax Teller and his need to change the direction the club has been taking. The club is no longer just an MC, but it deals in illegal business, such as gun trafficking, prostitution and drugs; and Jax is not just a member, but his ties with the club run deep. His father, now deceased, was one of the Nine who had founded it, and his stepfather is currently running it.

The trait that makes Jax an anti-hero is his will to turn the situation around for the club and redeem it by legitimizing it, and the consequent opposition that this ensues, typical of the anti-hero. Jax, as an outlaw involved in illegal businesses and not afraid of getting his hands dirty by killing whoever gets in his way, could never be considered a good guy. His utopia is exactly what preserve his humanity and make him, and also the audience, cling to this dream to get a chance at salvation. This struggle between reality and utopia that translates into the opposition between Father vs Son, as in his desire to preserve his patch in the MC, but also protect his family, are at the core of the character of Jax as anti-hero. What helps to realize this utopia comes in the form of an old journal that his father wrote right before dying: the manuscript contains his father's doubts and concerns about the direction the club was taking at the time and his vision for it. Thus, the opposition between Father vs. Son is made more complex by the ghost of the father, who emphasizes the figure of the Son even more; now Jax's will is not only to being a Son in the Sons of Anarchy, but also being a good son to his own father. However, there are forces fighting against Jax, and throughout the entire series, he will need to be careful not to lose his club, and more importantly himself along the way. In addition, what drives him to follow this impossible dream is his family; he is aware of the danger he brings to his own doorstep and he wants to protect his wife and his two children more than anything. Therefore, Jax Teller, without a vision and a dream for a

better future, would be just another villain. But the need to ensure another kind of life for his family is what sets him apart from other characters and what defines him as an anti-hero.

In order to analyze this anti-hero, I will investigate the concept of Utopia. Although the notion of Utopia is usually employed as a political concept, I will operationalize it as a personal idea, in a different context, intimate and personal. Without his personal dream of a legitimate club and a life without dangers, Jax would be nothing more than a criminal. However, his individual Utopia drives him to perform certain actions with the goal to achieve this ideal place, and has the potential of affecting those engaged with it. I will now trace the concept of Utopia historically, and then from a psychological point of view, for its focus on the individual. Then, I will analyze two different strategies the series employs Utopia to depict Jax as an anti-hero. Specifically, I will examine *mise-en-scene* aspect of *actor and performance*. My choice was dictated by the symbolisms that the showrunner Kurt Sutter scattered throughout the seven seasons. Symbols suggest there is another meaning beyond what we see on screen. One of the most elaborate way to use symbols is through gestures and movements. A particular gesture performed by a certain character can be repeated later on in a different context, under different circumstances and have a different meaning. A gesture can be a powerful tool, and therefore my analysis will focus on this aspect.

The Concept of Utopia

The concept of Utopia and the dream of a perfect world have belonged to mankind for quite some time. According to Ruth Levitas, known internationally for her work on the topic, the definition of Utopia is:

“[It] is about how we would live and what kind of a world we would live in if we could do just that.” (Levitas 2010, 1)

The term comes from the Greek and is composed by *ou* and *tópos*, which literally translates to “no place”. However, it is ambiguous because it is not clear if the term

refers to *eu-tópos*, a perfect place, or *ou-tópos*, no place at all. Is Utopia an impossible dream destined to be a philosophical concept more than an actual reality, or a place that can actually be reached? Thus, does Utopia even exist? The term was officially coined from the Greek language by Thomas More in his novel “Utopia”, published in Latin in 1516; in which the author, unsatisfied by the reality he was living in, described a perfect society. More’s Utopia is depicted as an ideal island in the Atlantic Ocean, where the political regime’s main characteristic is the community of property and, thus, the society is based on justice and prosperity. However, as mentioned earlier, More was not the first one writing about and one of the works that inspired the author was Plato’s *The Republic*, in which Plato explicitly talks about an ideal society, wherein the main goal is to eliminate poverty and to organize resource gathering.

The first Utopians theorists, emerged in the 17th century, and were called Pansophists. They were a group of thinkers from various social, political and religious backgrounds. The Pansophists’ goal was the complete control of the physical environment, thanks to the establishment of a new system of knowledge. Later, during the Enlightenment, pansophic influenced the political sphere and the concept of Utopia became less an ideal one, but rather an idealistic. In addition, another paradigm that provided a different interpretation of the concept made its appearance: Eupsychia. As Barclay claims, “Eupsychia began to emerge out of utopian ideology as both a method and a goal”. (Barclay 1993, 176) If until that moment scholars thought of Utopia as a new world implying a change in society; theorists such as Giordano Bruno and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, developed this formula by realizing that changing the world was strongly interconnected with the idea of changing the man himself (Ayers et al. 2015, 455). The fulfillment of a model society was conceptualized as a transformation that saw as its starting point the individual and his ideal state of consciousness, defined as Eupsychia; for reinventing reality might have its basis on a social or political level, but living in it demanded a change on a psychological one (Ibid., 455). Thus, after political Utopia, Psychological Utopia emerged. Consequently, since Utopia had a meaningful role in human cultures, the concept influenced different disciplines and expanded to different fields; and therefore “can be looked at from different perspectives, such as history, literature, theology, cultural anthropology, sociology, political theory, etc.”

(Levitas 2010, 1). For the purpose of this research, I will consider Utopia from a psychological point of view.

Despite the fact that most of Utopian Studies focus on the idea of a perfect society, the desire for a better world is not only aimed at the collective but it is also extremely personal and can include the desire for an ideal world in subjective terms. After all, each person is different. One of the first theorists to acknowledge the existence of a different Utopia in every single person was the American philosopher Robert Nozick. In his novel *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, published in 1974 and which gained an incredible success, Nozick proposed a new framework. First of all, he recognized the main problem of the concept of Utopia, which is the knowledge that people are different and their choices for a perfect community differ as well:

“The first route begins with the fact the people are different. They differ in temperament, interests, intellectual ability, aspirations, natural bent, spiritual quests, and the kind of life they wish to lead. They diverge in the values they have and have different weightings for the values their share.” (Nozick 2013, 309-10)

And:

“The best of all possible worlds for me will not be that for you. The world, of all those I can imagine, which I would most prefer to live in, will not be precisely the one you would choose. Utopia, though, must be, in some restricted sense, the best for all of us; the best world imaginable, for each of us.” (Nozick 2013, 298)

Therefore, according to Nozick, Utopia is not a single society, but a collection of many different societies. In this way, anyone can attempt to create their own version of the perfect society or choose and join the one they find most appealing:

“The idea that there is one best composite answer to all of these questions, one best society for everyone to live in, seems to me to be an incredible one. [...] There will not be one kind of community existing, and one kind of life led in utopia. Utopia will consists of Utopias, of many different and divergent communities in which people lead different kinds of life under different institutions.” (Nozick 2013, 311-12)

What the philosopher suggests is a framework for Utopia, a way to pursuit one's personal idea of a perfect world, and the freedom to attempt and realize their own versions without anyone imposing their own Utopia upon others. This framework is better developed in the final part of the novel, in which Nozick proceed to explain how the foundation of this new way of thinking of Utopia is structured into three different principles. According to the first one, people are free to move between different worlds. The second one claims that, if those same people do not enjoy any of the Utopias available, they have the possibility to create a new one from scratch, thanks to the power of imagination. And three, if both previous conditions arise, each world can take its own form, without any intervention from the outside.

However, although this framework would allow people to explore their goals and dreams, and to live the life they would prefer, the ultimate goal is still an ideal community, in which *everyone* can live happily. The opposition between personal and universal is constant in the discussions about Utopias. In the novel, *The Individual and Utopia: Multidisciplinary Study of Humanity and Perfection*, published in 2016, various authors question themselves about the connection between the concept of Utopia and the individual. By bringing together authors from all over the world, the novel strives to move away from the central idea of a perfect society where different communities are bound together by shared ideologies. The various approaches employed in the novel reveal the importance of the individual as a citizen on the basis of a Utopian society and challenge the ways in which the same individual has been considered up until now. That is because, recalling Nozick's framework, people are different and, so far, at the core of Utopian theory there has always been the

community. In the second chapter, called *Fundamental Oppositions: Utopia and the Individual*, author Mark Jendrysik, question himself about the relationship between the two:

“Is Utopia fundamentally at odds with the needs, desires, and liberty of the individual? For most of the history of Utopian theory and practice, the answer has been a resounding yes. [...] Utopian thinkers see the abandonment of selfish personal desires as necessary for the good of the whole.” (Jendrysik 2016, 27)

Therefore, there is this idea that, in order to create a Utopia, the individual is devalued in favor of the community, having to give up to his personal goals and desires.

One of the fields that deals with Utopia in relation to the individual is, as I mentioned earlier, psychology. Its appearance in Utopian literature is quite recent but relevant. Psychologists' interest in Utopia lies in the fact that people, put in front of the hardships of life, often dream of better days. This fantasy can take different forms; preoccupation such as self-actualization or obviously the construction of a society in which people would be able to live idyllic lives. In regards to self-actualization, the psychologist Abraham Maslow argued that this notion provides a vision of the fulfilled person. To be specific, Maslow studied happy people in order to understand what it was that made them feel in a certain way. In 1954, in his novel *Motivation and Personality*, Maslow proposed a model that depicted the human behavior according to a “hierarchy of needs”, that is a series of hierarchically organized needs, on which depends the fulfillment of the human being. The realization of the lower needs is an essential condition in order to achieve the higher needs. At the base of the pyramid, divided into 5 levels, there are the most basic needs, such as Physiological and Safety, followed by Belongingness and Esteem, which are immaterial needs. At the top, the last level: self-actualization. But how to define the term?

“What a man can be, he must be. This need we may call self-actualization. It refers to the desire for self-fulfillment, namely, to the tendency for him to

become actualized in what he is potentially. This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming.” (Maslow 1987, 93)

This theory constitutes the basis of Maslow’s concept of Psychological Utopia, the same theorist that came up with the concept of Eupsychia, who states:

“[at the base of this ideal society there] would be *anarchistic*, meaning there would be no governmental imposition on individual liberty. Basic and meta-needs would be respected, much more than usual. There would be more free choice as well as less control, violence, and contempt.” (Crowne 2009, 235)

In conclusion, despite all our good intentions and efforts in accomplishing an ideal and especially collective world, at the core of this dream there is the individual and his personal *needs*, which will never be the same for everyone. This variety of visions means that no rules or impositions can be made, for the impossibility to govern all of them, and thus leading to a state of anarchism. Therefore, I argue, in the same way Jax's dream is living peacefully with his family, while remaining within the club and sharing everything that goes with it (including the power of killing without any repercussions), his concept of Utopia is personal and, I dare say, of an egoistic nature.

Utopia in *Sons of Anarchy*

These diverse theoretical approaches present certain characteristics relevant for the case study of Jax in *Sons of Anarchy*. However, is the concept of Utopia applicable outside the idea of a model collective society? Whilst the notion of Eupsychia was mostly employed by scholars such as Rousseau and Bruno to conceptualize the psychological state of mind of the individual as a starting and pivotal point to transform society, Maslow’s “hierarchy of needs” conceives the achievement of happiness as the fulfillment of personal needs and desires, and what every human being strives for in their life. By analyzing all the levels that comprised Maslow’s pyramid, it is clear that, at the core of this theory, self-interest and self-centeredness play the most important

roles. After all, even if our idea of a perfect world included a society where *everyone* could live life happily and peacefully, our brain would not allow us to care for the entire humanity. As anthropologist and psychologist Robert Dunbar claimed in the 1990s, we are limited to feel affection for only 150 people at a time. His theory, called “Dunbar’s number”, was developed after studying the brain and discovering that the size of our neocortex, that part of the brain used for conscious thought and language, limits the number of people we can care for and feel interest in. Outside this number, we are not able to conceptualize people as people anymore; they are one-dimensional, they do not exist (Poppendiek and Poppendiek 2013, 29). The evolution and development of psychological theories on the human being allow me to argue against the notion of Utopia as seen exclusively as a collective concept, shifting the focus from the communities to approaches that conceptualized self-interest and self-fulfillment as necessary in the pursuit of happiness. It is through the application of these frameworks that I can delve deeper into Jax’s personality, for self-interest and self-absorption drives him to keep following his personal vision of happiness, which, as Dunbar had predicted, includes only a number of people, regardless of the rest of the world. This vision is at the core of the show and it represents the essence of Jax Teller as an anti-hero.

Indeed, the show revolves around the “malevolent” club of the city of Charming that Clay and Gemma (respectively Jax’s stepfather and mother) wanted, versus “the impossible dream” that Jax and his father did. The path is the same from every anti-hero: at the beginning of the series Jax commits morally questionable acts, but it is usually for a greater good. However, as the story unfolds, the ethically challenged protagonist, changes and evolves into a bad guy. The sins become more atrocious and brutal, harder to excuse, until eventually culminating with Jax’s transformation in villain. In Jax Teller’s case, we cannot ever consider him a good guy. Initially, he sells guns illegally, while also managing a legal pornography studio that helps the club financially. In the following seasons, then, Jax does everything in his power to move the club away from the gun business, but the situation drastically changes when his family is threatened.

The impossible dream that Jax's father tried to achieve during his time in the club holds a significant position in the show. John Teller was one of the first nine members founding the *Sons of Anarchy Motorcycle Club*. In the beginning, the club stood for fatherhood, harmony and unity, but as time passed the club began to forget what the club's principles were and what the members truly stood for. After John Teller passed away (we will find out later in the show that he was murdered), another president assumed his role as a leader and decided to take the club in a completely different direction that the one it was born for. John Teller died because his vision of the club did not mesh with the one the other members had. Before his death, John realized there were forces going against him, trying to prevent the club to represent what it was always supposed to, and therefore left a journal behind, called "*Life and Death of Sam Crow: How The Sons of Anarchy Lost Their Way*", to help guide his son Jax through the club redemption. Here are some of the entries that show us a glimpse of John's struggle:

"I found myself lost in my own club. I trusted few, feared most. Nomad offered escape and exile. I didn't know if leaving would cure or kill this thing we created. I didn't know if it was an act of strength or cowardice. I didn't know so I stayed because, in the end, the only way I could hold this up was to suffer under the weight of it."

("Balm" So2E10)

And

"I never made a conscious decision to have the club become one thing or another. It just happened before my eyes. Each savage event was a catalyst for the next. And by the time the violence reached epic proportion, I couldn't see it. Blood was every color."

("Hell Followed" So1E09)

We never get to see John Teller in the series, but his presence is constant. Jax finds the manuscript in a storage in the first episode of the first season, and from that moment on he is determined to redeem the club and bring it back on the “right” path. Throughout the seven seasons the manuscript is often mentioned and it acts as a sort of anchor for Jax, and is what pushes him throughout the entire story. Whenever it seems he is losing his way, his first instinct is either to go read it again or to take his emotions out on it by trying to destroying it multiple times. What it is interesting is that, in reading the journal, we find out John Teller’s desires for the club and the future he fears, while we watch that same future unfold right before our eyes, episode after episode. Also, at the beginning of the series we often see Jax reading the manuscript, but as he struggles with the direction the club is taking and he starts to give into his dark side, the manuscript is almost forgotten.

The constant references to the manuscript brings other elements into the characterization and development of Jax Teller, such as Nostalgia. The term “comes from the Greek *nostos*, meaning “return home”, and *algia*, meaning pain or longing” (Wilson 2005, 21), therefore evoking the yearning for a time already passed or a time that never existed in the first place. By following his father’s vision, Jax molds his Utopia around the one his father had. Not surprisingly, Utopia and Nostalgia are often interconnected concepts:

“Nostalgia joins utopia in several ways: it struggles against time’s irreversibility, but, at the same time, it tries to reach an intangible and blurred time. [...] Furthermore, etymology brings utopia and nostalgia closer. The place (*topos*) that does not exist in *u-topia* echoes the journey to our home place (*nostos*) that makes us suffer in *nost-algia*.” (Fantin 2014 101)

Nostalgia plays an important role in the way Jax shapes his vision for a better future and it triggers this desire to reach that (im)possible place in which he can be part of his club, while at the same time have a family, and consequently guides every actions and decisions. As Wilson claims:

“Nostalgia connotes emotions [...] and in some sense behavior. Nostalgia extends beyond sentimentality. While the latter more likely indicates a fleeting feeling, the experience of nostalgia effects one’s emotional state in a profound manner. Expressing and experiencing nostalgia requires active reconstruction of the past.” (Wilson 2005, 25)

Therefore, by inspiring Jax to follow his dream, Nostalgia, taking the form of John’s manuscript, functions as a means to reinforce narrative progress and character development, by evoking in Jax the need to take action and actualize his father’s desires. This journal his father left him is the starting point of the show and also the beginning of the end for Jax. By pursuing this impossible dream of making the club legitimate, so as to secure a better future for his sons and his wife, Jax is victim of the same fate as John’s. He needs to go against most of his brothers and the club in order to do that and, while trying to end all illegal businesses, such as guns trafficking, drugs and prostitution, he is forced to keep being involved in atrocious acts, and losing a little bit of his soul along the way. Jax is constantly torn between these two important “figures” in his life: the club, which is ruled by a deep sense of loyalty and brotherhood, and his family, with two little sons and a wife who really needs him.

Utopia Strategies and Visual Analysis

In my research I will be making a close analysis of *mise-en-scene* aspect of *actor and performance* of two different strategies the series employs to portray the figure of the anti-hero. Kurt Sutter, the creator of the show, often used symbolism to depict Jax’s struggle in dealing with both the SONS and his family. This symbolism means that a specific gestures performed by a specific character can be repeated later on in the show. This technique belongs to the improved and more sophisticated visual style typical of Quality TV. As already mentioned, the new formal structure, namely the formula of thirteen episodes instead of twenty-two, allows the showrunners more creative freedom. This new-found chance of experimenting more with visual styles led to a type of storytelling that Brett Martin, in his book *Difficult Men*, sees as a colonnade:

"Each episode is a brick with its own solid, satisfying shape, but also part of a season-long arc that, in turn, would stand linked to other seasons to form a coherent, freestanding work of art." (Ibid. 2013, 19)

Therefore, with the arrival of Quality TV, we no longer had only franchises such as CSI (2000-2015) that featured stand-alone episodes that could easily be rearranged, but more complex products in which actions take on determined meanings. *Sons of Anarchy*, abundant of symbolisms throughout the series, is an example of this new way of doing television, in which details, such as a specific expression or a specific gesture matter. Also, the name of the biker gang allows to play with the two terms Son-Father. As Gibbs states:

"A very great deal of significance can be bound up in the way in which a line is delivered, or where an actor is looking at one particular moment." (Gibbs 2012, 12)

The performance of an actor is fundamental to understand the narrative of the film or in this case TV show. The way in which a line or a speech is delivered can change everything. The actor, through different elements, has the power to express different emotions and feelings, and therefore, the potential of steering the narration towards a path rather than another. The performances of characters are divided into two different categories: figure expression, which refers to facial expressions and postures; and figure movements, which refers to all actions and gestures. These two elements are as important as setting and costume in the *mise-en-scene*, and are used by the director to develop certain themes or to support the narrative. Also the actor's voice, "which includes the natural sound of an actor's voice along with the various intonations or accents he or she may create for a particular role" (Corrigan and White 2004, 53), holds relevance. In *Sons of Anarchy*, gestures and scenes often repeat themselves as a way of showing progression and evolution in the character development. By investigating the actors and their performance, it is possible to interpret the meaning and significance behind it. Therefore, this analysis will allow me to go deeper into Jax's personality and

pay attention to the way the constant struggle troubling him is expressed through gestures and movements.

Strategy 1 – Confrontation with the Past

The first strategy *Sons of Anarchy* uses in depicting Jax Teller as an anti-hero is through the many confrontation with the past, specifically with his dead father, that Jax has throughout the series. These confrontations are constant and significant in showing the ever present struggle that affects Jax. Since the manuscript plays such an important role in the show, by triggering the nostalgia for the past and the dream of a personal utopia, these conflicts are significant in reminding us that, beyond all the crimes and the killings, Jax is still a torn man wanting to do the right thing, and therefore essentially an anti-hero. By analyzing the *mise-en-scene* of specific sequences, particularly by focusing on aspects of *actor and performance*, this technique will allow me to investigate the symbolism that characterizes this series. A scene that shows this strategy is from Season 3, Episode 13 called “NS”, and depict Jax’s hesitation in carrying out his father plan.

In the third season i Jax struggles trying to mesh his father’s desire with his duties as a gang member and as a father himself. The title of the episode is significant because the first episode of the same season is called “SO” and refers to the two rings Jax is wearing constantly, and that spell the word SONS, symbol to his allegation to the biker club. The two episodes, the first and the last of this season, shows a parallelism not only in the title but also in its execution. Indeed, besides alluding to the rings, the two titles represent the meaning behind the entire season: Jax searching for his son, and also searching for his role as a *son*; he wants to belong to the motorcycle club, as well as to be his father’s son by keeping his legacy alive. This is the season in which, due to Jax trying to get the club out of the gun trafficking business, his son Abel is kidnapped and Jax spends most of his time looking for him.

The sequence taken into analysis here shows Jax walking to his father’s grave and leaving his ring NS on his tombstone. This scene recalls a similar one that took place in the premiere, in which a crying Jax visits the same grave and leaves his other ring

SO. This parallelism, in the scenes and in the titles, is a way of closing the circle. However, the meaning behind the two gesture is completely different. In the first episode, Jax is desperate and leaves the ring as a way to apologize to his father for trying to change the situation inside the club, but failing. All of his actions brought him only a heartache in the form of his son being taken away from him. After an entire season in which he committed every crime possible with the intentions of finding Abel and bring him home, his state of mind has changed.

Analysis

The scene is very short and it has no dialogue, which makes it even more poignant and meaningful. It starts with Jax walking to his father's grave. The initial wide shot does not allow us to see his face, but his walk is slow and unsure. At the same time, his gaze is directed at the tombstone and it never wavers. The dramatic way he swings his arms is another sign of his resolve to have a confrontation with his father. When people walk they usually swing their arms, regarding of the mood they are in; however the way in which Jax keeps doing it even while slowing his pace helps create an impression of masculine strength, and he is identified as being goal-oriented and on a definite mission (Lewis 2012, 178). This contrast between his facial expression and his movements are a sign of the eternal conflict that characterizes this character. His resolute and determined gaze, combined with the tentative way he walks, but at the same time swings his arms in an attempt to communicate determination and self-confidence, clashes with one another and proves the internal battle he is fighting. He is angry at himself for following his father's wishes, as well as upset with John for leading him to question the club and putting his family in danger; but there is still something else keeping him hesitant about what he is about to do.

Once he reaches the tombstone, his attitude changes and his resolve vacillates. His first gesture is hooking one thumb in his pocket while staring at the grave. Hiding thumbs in pockets is a gesture associated with negative feelings, specifically insecurity (Glass 2012, 49). Furthermore, without any words backing up what he is feeling, a medium close-up demands us to pay attention to his face and the emotions passing through it. He keeps looking away, lacking the courage to stare directly at the tombstone and what it symbolizes, while also tilting his head to the side. This gesture is a way of expressing

vulnerability, because of the way he exposes his neck by doing so (Reiman 2007, 95); whereas his eyes keeps breaking contact by looking away and down. His limited eye contact is a way of showing, once again, uncertainty. An expression of sadness passes through his face, he opens his mouth, lips parting, with the intent of saying something, but then, lacking courage, he stops and choses to stay quite. The entire sequence has no dialogue, which makes his gestures and movements even more powerful. He slightly sways his head, while his expression is one of vulnerability and sorrow, suggesting he is considering and 'weighing up' something; but then he seems to come to terms with himself and that self-confidence he was trying to transmit earlier, comes back in full force when he keeps shaking his head from side to side more vigorously, expressing disdain and disapproval (Wainwright and Thompson 2011, 48), while also raising his eyebrows. Brow-raising adds intensity to a facial expression; it can strengthen a dominant stare, that, combined with a wrinkled forehead indicates sadness (Thompson 2003, 100).

Afterwards, his attitude shifts and his confidence returns. The shot changes from a medium close-up to a shot that shows Jax looking at the ring on his left hand, and right after, taking him off and laying it on John's tombstone, right next to the other one. While doing this, his posture and body language evolve once again: he repeats the gesture of putting one of his hand in his pocket. However, this time, instead of hooking only the thumb, he does the opposite: the hand is inside while the thumb is sticking out. The meaning in this case is not expressing insecurity and uncertainty, but exactly the opposite. (Lewis 2012, 140) He suggests a confident person that has everything under control. At the same time, he angles his body away from the tombstone, conveying rejection and discomfort and a desire to escape the situation (Ribbens and Thompson 2001, 19); while also raising his chin, face hard and direct gaze, in a show of dominance and once again symbol of someone in control (Reiman 2008, 86). Once he places the ring on the grave, the camera closes in on them in a close-up shot, emphasizing the importance of the gesture, which seals his decision to stop trying to understand and execute John's plans. He is becoming closer to his stepfather Clay, the very man from whom he was trying to distance himself from, and also walking away from his father's ideals. And the parallelism with the sequence from the first episode intensifies even more: the first ring was left behind after losing Abel, although

involuntary; whereas the second one, after losing John, this time consciously. Moreover, also the way in which he positions the rings holds meaning: he puts them backwards, so as the rings now spell NS SO. The meaning behind the action has never been explained; however, one of the worst ways of disrespecting a motorcycle club is to sew their patch, symbol of everything they represent, upside down. The way in which he positions the rings seems to hint to his newly gained contempt towards his father's line of thinking; and now, he is not only his father's son, but Clay's son more than ever.



Image 9: Jax positions the rings backwards on his father's grave.

When the camera moves from the rings to Jax's face, you cannot find any more sign of uncertainty or remorse in his expression: narrowed eyes, clenched jaw, nostrils flaring and compressed lips, all signs of intense emotions such as tension, anger and stress (Kuhnke 2015, 130); while also nodding his head, as if agreeing with what he has just done. Afterwards, he starts walking away, looking back at the tombstone one last time, that same expression of contempt still on his face. His walk is different from the one we have observed at the beginning of the scene, more resolute and determined. However, while he is moving away, we see him repeating the gesture of hooking only his thumb in his pocket, meaning uncertainty, and keeping his head and eyes down, indicating shame and guilt (Lewis 2012, 40).

In conclusion, we can almost consider the sequence divided in two parts, the gesture of leaving the rings on the tombstone functioning as separation between the two. In the first part, we find a conflicted and shameful Jax, but with signs of confidence making its appearance; whereas in the second part, leaving the rings behind seems to have burst his confidence in what he is doing, and his attitude changes, going from remorseful to angry. At the same time, his hesitation does not leave him completely, and every gestures seems to contradict itself, his emotion alternating between regret and perseverance. This analysis revealed a Jax struggling with the path he wants to take: he does not know how to be a SON for the club, a son for his father, and a father for his children. He has seen that, by fighting the direction the club is taking, only heartache and repercussions towards his family is waiting for him, and therefore, he is starting to waver in his conviction to change the situation. Thus here, we find the essence of Jax Teller's personality, and the interior conflict directed at the two great forces of his life, Furthermore, in this sequence is clear how Jax's Utopia is not collective. On the contrary it includes his personal desires and needs and no one else's, and seems to follow Marlow's formula based on self-interest. His anger and resentment is directed at his father and at the failure in fulfilling his vision, without any regard for the crimes he had to commit and the people he had to kill in order to get his son back, thus once again hinting at his egoistical nature. the club and his family; turmoil that characterizes him throughout the entire series.

Strategy 2 – Resolution of the Future

The second strategy *Sons of Anarchy* uses to depict Jax Teller as an anti-hero, is by looking towards the future, in an attempt to realize the Utopia that guides him for the entire story arc. Future and past intertwine in the series as a means to keep Jax's humanity alive. Indeed, Jax is the most extreme and drastic anti-hero among the ones taken into consideration for the sake of my research. The show starts off with a Jax already in the role of the anti-hero, and what keeps him from turning completely into a villain is, thanks to the manuscript, the triggering of nostalgia for a past that never was, and the hope for the future he dreams of. In the course of the seven seasons, various forces fight against him and his dreams, and we see him vacillating more than once on the right path to choose. However, after his wife is brutally murdered, in the

final season that he comes unhinged. After that, his brutal actions and ruthless atrocities cannot be considered justifications for a greater good anymore; as now these crimes are simply guided by revenge, hatred and rage. Then, after all the crimes committed, what stops us from calling him simply a villain? The anti-hero is a character tormented by conflicting emotions, and expected to redeem himself in a way or another at the end of his journey. The scene taken into analysis here, represents Jax's chance at redemption, and what saves him from becoming the villain. . Awareness of his mistakes and his last decision of sacrificing himself for his children is exactly what makes him a flawed hero, thus an anti-hero.

Indeed, despite the fact that, since the beginning, the club was involved in shady and illegal businesses, at his core, Jax is a guy that, although not exactly honest and moral, tries to make happy the people he cares about. During most of his journey and his time in the club, he tries to do the right thing: getting his club out of the gun business, avoiding more bloodsheds and getting his sons out of that toxic environment and to safety. After finding his father's manuscript, he is determined to live that life John had envisioned for the club, and start writing his own journal. Pages and pages of notes for his sons. But along the way, this continuous struggle takes its toll on his soul and poisons him, by turning him into a full-on villain. His father could not reform the club, and thus pins his hopes on his son, always destined to follow his path in the MC. Eventually, Jax realizes that, after failing to redeem the club and to keep it in line with his father's vision, this is not the future that he wants for his children. In the series finale, Jax evaluates his life and decides to burn the manuscript and his own journals. By destroying his legacy, he hopes his sons to get as far away as possible from the club and everything that comes with it, including the consequences of his actions.

The sequence is from Season 7, Episode 13 (series finale), called "Papa's Goods". If at first, Jax's intention was to revive and redeem the club, by following his father's wishes, after he becomes the President of the MC, things do not go as planned. He tries his best to transform the club into a legitimate business, but along the way, Jax makes choices that lead him towards a path of destruction and darkness, until it is too late. Over time, he becomes more like his stepfather Clay than his biological father, and eventually also suffers the same fate. He loses the club and himself. He performs such atrocious acts

that he extinguishes all hope for a better future, and he is aware that after all the killings and the bloodsheds, there is no going back for him. However, in one last attempt to save the club, but especially his children, he decides to follow his father's footstep and sacrifice himself. Indeed, although Clay had a hand in John's murder, it was John himself that made the choice of sacrificing his life for the club's sake and consciously crashed his bike into a truck. Now Jax is about to do the same, but unlike his father, he does not want to pass on the same legacy to his sons, and he sends them as far away as possible from Charming.

Analysis

The sequence starts with a close-up of the inscriptions engraved on a rocky mountain, located next to the highway where Jax's father lost his life. The words, John's initials, the date of his death and an anarchy symbol, were placed there by the club members to honor him. In the scene, Jax is seated on his bike in front of the mountain, the camera is behind him and for the first few second, with our focus on the rocks as well, we do not see his face. He starts talking to his father, in what it will be his last conversation; and besides the gesture and movements that accompany the scene, also the dialogue is significant in understanding Jax's state of mind in that moment, and in showing how the struggle that afflicted him throughout the series has finally come to an end:

“I think the struggle I understand best, even more than all the things you wanted for SAMCRO and all we eventually became, the one I feel the most is the war of the mind. Happens when you try to get right with both family and patch. That fear and guilt crippled me. I realized, as I think you did, a good father and a good outlaw can't settle inside the same man. I'm sorry, JT. It was too late for me. I was already inside it.”

His words and his emotional state are not what we would expect from a man that is about to die; for Jax has never appeared so calm as in this moment, conscious of his past choices and on what he is supposed to do now. As the camera rotates and we finally

have a visual on his face, the difference with the scene analyzed earlier is clear. Despite the repetition of some of the gestures analyzed before, his face is calm and relaxed.



Image 10: a peaceful Jax talking to his father one last time.

While talking about the constant struggle raging inside of him between the club and the family, he casts his eyes down while shaking his head, and raises his eyebrow in an expression of annoyance and exasperation towards himself. Also, by shaking his head while raising his eyebrows he is communicating submission and shame, once again aimed at himself for not having followed his father's wishes earlier (Lewis 2012, 63). If before, these gestures were a way of expressing shame for turning his back on his father and his vision, and uncertainly on that choice; here his body language, even if still expressing the same emotions, is made in an attempt to apologize. Now everything is clear: what he is father wanted and what he was supposed to do; but it is too late and the last thing left to do is trying to make amends with his father for letting him down. However, even while experiencing negative emotions, the main feeling his body is expressing is one of calm and peace. While he is speaking, a police car passes by and spots him parked on the roadside; but Jax does not look alarmed and the only thing he does is turning around to see who has pulled over. While returning his gaze on the mountain, he keeps his head cocked with a smirk on his face. These gestures convey sarcasm (Pegues 2009, 97), and they seem to communicate Jax's amusement at seeing

the police officer, there to probably arrest him. But he will not be able to, for his fate has already be decided.

When the camera comes back to Jax in a wide shot, we have the chance to observe also his posture: slouched back in his bike, with his arms and legs spread wide open, while smoking a cigarette. The way is seated and the way he is unconsciously keeping his arms and legs opened, displays an open stand, revealing comfort with himself and acceptance for what is still to come. Moreover, an open position projects authenticity and genuineness in what he is saying (Fast 2002, 110). The position allows us to get a glimpse of a side of Jax we have not had the chance to see often, vulnerable and baring his soul in front of the only person that wanted the best for him. When he keeps talking, his expression changes. Sadness, conveyed by a bowed head, slumped shoulders, staring into space and a forlorn expression (Ford 2010, 100), overtakes him, and he fidgets with the handle of the bike with one hand, while doing the same to the cigarette he is smoking with the other. Fidgeting with objects is a sign of nervousness and a way of keeping our hands busy in an attempt to release our energy (Kumar 2016, 20). The topic discussed, his wife's murder at the hand of his mother, is indeed a delicate one:

“And Gemma, she had plans. It is not too late for my boys. I promise, they will never know this life of chaos. I know who you are now and what you did. I love you, Dad.”

Afterwards, with one last smile at his father, he gets on his bike, ready to leave, when the police officer orders him to stop and get off the bike. His back his turned so the officer is not able to see his face, but we get a glimpse of his profile: with a resigned expression we see him stay still for a couple of seconds. He knows that this is the time to make a choice. He can let the cop arrest him, or he can stick to his plan and sacrifice himself for the sake of his children and the club. In that moment, his facial expression changes, and from resigned it becomes determined, set jaw and hard eyes; he turns around and fired a couple of shots towards the cop, gets on his bike and finally leaves.

This sequence, despite that many emotions that Jax transmits through his movements and gestures, is a positive one. Shame and hurt play a part in it, but the main feeling is one of peace. He had one thing to do before carrying on with his plan: apologize to his father for not living up to his expectations, and acknowledging the same internal battle that afflicted him. Even while talking about this eternal struggle, he remains calm and serene; his tone of voice soft and low-pitched, suggesting a genuine, non-aggressive and non-hostile pose (Lewis 2012, 9). He accepts all his crimes and his imminent sacrifice. There was never a way to merge the two different part of himself: outlaw and father. Now he knows and he accepts it. Therefore, this sequence represents the peak of Jax's journey. Although brief, his monologue and his expression convey the message clearly. After all the terrible things that happened with the club, that was his fate all along. He could not have been any other way. As he says, he was already in. The struggle between being a SON and a father was a fight that he was never going to win. Therefore, the only action he can take is trying to save his children's lives the same way his father did.

In conclusion, the analysis of both scenes show a Jax struggling with coming to terms with being a club member and a family man. This internal turmoil is what keeps him from transforming completely into a villain. While the first sequence hints at Jax's personal vision and its egoistical nature; the secondo one, him being the most drastic and extreme among the anti-hero taken into consideration for my research, is significant for he allows him to close his journey still as an anti-hero. The line between anti-hero and villain is a fine one in Jax and without that last sacrifice, the crimes and actions committed in the last seasons would be too sever to make us think of him as redeemable. Thus, by taking the last decision to save his children rather than himself his journey is complete.

Conclusion

This chapter focuses on the use of the concept of Utopia in TV Series *Sons of Anarchy*, in order to depict the development and evolution of Jax Teller as an anti-hero. By tracing back the origin of the concept of Utopia, we saw how old the notion is and how at first it focused mainly on the change of societies. Its importance in our culture made the concept open to investigation from all kinds of discipline, such as history, politics and psychology. This last field is the one I analyzed the most, because of its different

approach towards the individual. Through Maslow and Nozick's theory, we saw that Utopia can mean working on the changes by starting from the individual, more than on the idea of an ideal world in which everyone lives happily. Then, by also investigating the concept of Nostalgia, triggered in the series by the presence of Jax's father's manuscript, I had the chance to gain a deeper insight in the way the show shaped Jax and his dream. The two concepts combined Utopia and Nostalgia, allowed the showrunner to reinforce the character development, as well as the narratives.

Furthermore, through the investigation of two different strategies in which the show uses these notions to portray Jax as anti-hero, and the analysis of their symbolism through gestures and movement, I had the chance to go deeper into the characterization of this particular figure and gain more insight into the character. Indeed, besides depicting important moments and events in the journey of Jax Teller, the scenes hide more significance. They show the evolution of this anti-hero, from good person to full-on villain; the pursuit of a better world that accompanied throughout of this journey, made him waver in his intentions, and ultimately was the one thing that led him completely to darkness. By refusing to choose between his club and his family, and while trying relentlessly to follow his dream, he involved himself in more crimes, until it was too late for him. Ultimately, Utopia was what brought him to his downfall. And although at the end he realized that and he makes peace with himself, all the good intention in the world cannot restore hope and save the situation. There is no salvation for him.

Conclusion: anti-heroes' visual depiction in Quality TV

In this thesis, I reflected on how different TV series – *Breaking Bad*, *Mad Men* and *Sons of Anarchy* - belonging to the genre of Quality TV, employ a different visual tool to depict the anti-hero and its development towards either destruction or salvation. Before going into details about the nature of this project, I mapped the emergence and evolution of the anti-hero, who was originally born in literature but had the chance to spread in cinema in different versions. Initially, the anti-hero appeared in the Western genre as a hero with no respect for the law, acting out of necessity and not following the qualities typical of a hero, such as sacrifice or fortitude. Despite his flawed essence, this kind of anti-hero is still close to the traditional hero, acting illegally but, at the end, still saving the day and killing the bad guy. However, after political changes occurring in America, the anti-hero becomes increasingly darker. *Taxi Driver* by Martin Scorsese, reflects these significant events occurring in the 1960s, and portrays a War veteran that does not know how to deal with his reintegration in society. The film was inspired by the noir genre, that started spreading to other kinds of films and generating new hybrid genre. Eventually the noir genre influenced also television, by developing a new type of TV shows. *The Sopranos* and *Dexter*, two of the greater TV shows on anti-heroes were precisely inspired by noir genre. Afterwards, the anti-hero seemed to thrive in television and in the last two decades we could observe a proliferation of this type of figure.

Before mapping the origin of the anti-hero, I have outlined the notion of Quality TV, for with the rise of the anti-hero, a new way of doing television emerged. This genre, because of his new structure, that is less episodes, and thus giving more creative freedom to the showrunners, started having his own formulaic characteristics. Indeed, this creative freedom translated into a new style defined by an improved attention to details, such as a complex *mise-en-scene* and sharper editing. This aesthetic strived towards the cinema and had the same paradigm; episodes that could no longer be watched singularly but built a long and unique story arc. The cinematic style characteristic of TV shows belonging to Quality TV have allowed to investigate different way in which cinematic tools have being used to portray and develop the figure of the anti-hero. The plot and the characters are not the only elements comprising a good narrative; now also the visual matter and demands to be seen.

Furthermore, the anti-hero, "being a specialized kind of hero" (Vogler 1998, 34) has at its core an opposition that does not make him either a traditional hero or a villain. Indeed, this constant conflict between light and dark impulses stands at the core of the anti-hero. Therefore, through the Opposition Theory, I carried out an investigation on how the TV series taken into analysis make use of this struggle to explicate their flawed essence. The formula is usually the same, that is, a morally flawed protagonist with both positive and negative qualities that make them commit serious crimes, while at the same time clinging to their last shred of humanity. Despite using the same paradigm, the opposition that characterizes them differs, and thus I chose three different polarity for every anti-hero taken into investigation. This polarity led me to choose a specific methodology according to the TV series analyzed.

Chapter 1 – Breaking Bad

In the first chapter, I investigated the dichotomy between Black vs. White because of the use that showrunner Vince Gilligan made of colors. Indeed, in various interviews, after within the fan community many theories were born on the way color was used in the show, he states that, indeed, color was employed as a way to express moods and meanings, and highlight significant phases in Walter White's evolution as anti-hero. The dichotomy and the analysis on color symbolism have also allowed me to investigate Walter's specific feature as anti-hero, that is temporality, for he starts as a good man and evolved into a criminal over time. Thus, by paying attention to colors was possible to follow his journey from family man to full-on drug lord. As a tool often used in cinema and part of a debate that sees color both as a subjective and an objective notion, I drew mostly from Bellantoni's theory demonstrating how color is an objective concept able to have an impact on emotions and express particular meanings. For example, yellow is used in *Breaking Bad* as a symbol of warning, of life-changing events about to happen, while red is used to express violence and aggression; thus following Bellantoni's theory on the two specific colors. The employment of a tool of a cinematic aesthetic refers to that new style typical of Quality TV, in which the *mise-en-scene* is made more complex by these details.

Indeed, in my visual analysis of color I have chosen to investigate *mise-en-scene* aspect of *color*, specifically on costume and settings, where this technique is more visible. In order to explore the specific ways in which the series uses color, I have analyzed two different sequences, drawing from them two different strategies. The first strategy consisted in applying color, yellow in this case, to the whole settings and to Walter's attire as well. Because of the abundance of yellow, the color becomes overwhelming at times, triggering specific feelings in the viewer and making him realize that something important is about to happen. The second strategy consisted of using the red of the shirt Walter is wearing during the sequence, as a catalyst for his transformation into Heisenberg, his drug lord persona. Furthermore, light and dark colors are put in contrast as a way to put attention on Walter and make the audience realize the extent of his evolution as an anti-hero. Therefore, through the investigation of these strategies I had the chance to investigate the way in which visual style and characterization come together to develop the figure of the anti-hero.

Chapter 2 – Mad Men

In the second chapter, I have investigated the dichotomy between Infidelity vs. Faithfulness, for Don Draper's personality as an anti-hero, him being the mildest of the anti-heroes taken into analysis, lays precisely in the way he behaves towards his wife and his children. This polarity has allowed me to focus on his essence and his peculiarity as a character, which is spatiality; for the manifestation of his anti-heroic persona makes his appearance at home with his family, while at work is difficult personality is often interpreted for creativity and genius. Thus, Don's development as an anti-hero is represented through the environments he inhabits. Consequently, in order to understand how Don's behavior is influenced by space, and therefore, how space is able to create a character and affect his personality, I drew from different theory about cinematic space. Theories that see space not only as a physical space, but also as a mental and social one. Lefebvre was one of the first to claim that space creates meaning and stating that every person's mental space is influenced by physical perceptions and social relations; in the same way a physical space cannot be produced without keeping mental and social spaces in mind. Thus, every space has the ability to affect the person engaged in it. In regards to Don, his past and present intertwine and affect each other in a way that do not allow him to live the family environment in the

same way he lives the working one. If at work, the fact of being a self-made man and of having a talent that no one else has pushes forward; at home the memory of his childhood house, that is a whorehouse, and the incapability of loving someone unconditionally affects his personality and reveal his 'antiheroness'.

In my visual analysis, I have chosen to investigate the *editing* of the first episode of the show, because by investigating the way in which the shots are combined help disclose the polarity typical of the anti-hero and specifically of Don Draper. The analysis has allowed me to draw to different strategies in which the series uses space to show Don's different behavior according to the space he is occupying at the moment. The first strategy, that refers to the work environment, is to depict the space itself and Don in a dominant and authoritative way, thanks to an elegant and well distributed rooms with a modern interior. Also, wide shots, mid-shots and the way in which the camera is often positioned at a high angle, gives the environment an imposing feeling, the one of a open and sometimes intimidating space. Thus, environment and character seems to work together to create a specific side of Don's personality. The second strategy consists in depicting the family environment in a completely different way. The suburban house he inhabits with his wife and children is often dark and scattered of object, giving the idea of a suffocating and claustrophobic environment. This, in turn, seems to represent Don's feelings towards his family. Here Don appear almost small and submissive and seems to give origins to the frustrated and careless man that constantly cheats on his wife and he is never present for his children. Also, close-up shots limits our vision of Don, and are in stark contrast with the way he was depicted at Sterling Cooper, and reinforce the different emotions that Don experience in the two different spaces. Emotions, that thanks to the editing, are able to reach also the audience.

Chapter 3 – Sons of Anarchy

In the third chapter, I have investigated the dichotomy between Son, referring to Jax Teller's place in the biker gang called Sons of Anarchy, vs. Father, that is his representation as a family man but also as his father's son. This opposition proves to be a significant part of Jax's essence as an anti-hero, for his needs to protect his family from the businesses in which the MC is involved, and that driving him to follow his dead father's dream for a better future, is what characterizes his struggle and creates

his anti-hero persona. Because this polarity plays such an important role in the series, I carried on an investigation on the concept of Utopia and in the way is used to depict Jax's flawed personality. Although the notion of Utopia is usually employed as a political concept aimed at the happiness of the community, here I have considered it as a personal idea, because, Jax, being the most drastic and extreme of the anti-heroes taken into consideration in my research, without this dream would be considered only a criminal. However, his utopia is of egoistical nature and involved only the people close to him. Furthermore, this personal utopia drives him to take drastic decisions regardless of other people, in order to achieve his goals. Because of the individuality of his utopia, I have drawn from psychological theories on the concept, for his focus on the individual.

In my visual analysis, I have chosen to investigate *mise-en-scene* aspect of *actor and performance*, because of the symbolisms that the showrunner scattered throughout the series. Once again, this attention for a detailed *mise-en-scene* is what characterizes the series belonging to Quality TV and its typical cinematic style. The performance of an actor, that is the way in which a line is delivered or the expression and gesture he makes, had the power to express different meanings and emotions. Therefore, facial expression and movements play an important role in the *mise-en-scene* and are used by the showrunner to develop Jax as anti-hero and support the narrative. Specifically, in *Sons of Anarchy*, action often repeat themselves as a way of showing progression and evolution in the character development, thus acquiring significant meanings. In order to explore the specific ways in which the series uses the notion of Utopia, I have analyzed two different sequences, drawing from them two different strategies. The first strategy the series employs is where Jax is facing his past, specifically his dead father. By observing Jax's movements and gestures, his struggle in dealing with both dark and light impulses typical of his personality is evident. Uncertainty and change of moods are dominant in these sequences. The discovery of his father's manuscript triggers the notion of nostalgia, that translates in the way Jax looks back to the past while also dreaming of a better future. This polarity represents his essence as an anti-hero. The second strategy is the resolution for the future that culminates Jax's journey as an anti-hero. The way in which he accepts his past, shown by his serene and resigned expression and posture, and choice to sacrifice himself in order to guarantee his

children a better future, represents his flawed personality and his last chance of ending his path still as an anti-hero and not as a villain, for without this last decision, Jax's crimes would have been too severe to accept.

Findings

Summarizing the argument of this research, it seems that despite TV series with anti-heroes as protagonist usually use the same formula, the narrative of this type of character is not linear; but on the contrary the same paradigm does not preclude the showrunners to play with different visual tools and techniques to develop and evolve their characters differently. My research has helped reveal three different ways in which an anti-hero can be portrayed, and three different aspects in which this new visual and cinematic aesthetic belonging to Quality TV can be used to complement the narrative. My findings are not enough to determine all the way in which an anti-hero can be depicted; in fact, my research wants to open up a debate about anti-heroes that until now has focused mostly on the narrative of this type of characters. By giving more prominence to the visual I hope to fuel the argument and inspire new research on the subject matter.

This thesis has suggested an approach that might contribute first, to the new aesthetic of Quality TV and how the visual tools at our disposal, usually employed in cinema, can be used in television to help the narrative develop characters and create TV shows that have almost the feelings of a film; that is with episodes building upon each other to create a unique story arc. Secondly, this research might also contribute to the debate on anti-hero and their different portrayal. In this sense, I think it is important to investigate the different ways in which an anti-hero, that, as already mentioned, usually possess the same features and characteristics, can possess peculiarities as a character that sets him apart from other similar ones. Finally, these two aspects combined, narrative and visual style, are significant in the depiction of the anti-hero, for they are expression of the uniqueness of every single character.

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