Pay Attention, This Has Quality

An Analysis of the Relationship Between Netflix and 'Quality Television'

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This thesis aims to gain insight in the new TV landscape that the arrival of Netflix has created. A way to enter this landscape is to analyse the relationship between Netflix and 'quality television'. Therefore, the research focuses on the different ways Netflix employs certain parameters of 'quality television' in their Netflix original series. Three themes are central in this analysis: characters, mise-en-scène and narrative structure. The methods used to analyse how these parameters are employed within each theme are image analysis and narrative analysis. The goal of this research is threefold. First, it creates insight in the practices of the new player in this field, Netflix, by focusing on the stylistic identity that the company has created. Second, it gains insight in the impact Netflix has on the TV landscape regarding the concept of 'quality television'. Third, this research wants to create a base on which further questions concerning Netflix, 'quality television' and the new TV landscape can be asked.

The analysis has shown a distinct relationship between 'quality television' and Netflix. What also became clear is that some elements of the addressed parameters were more foregrounded or present than others. Netflix makes a clear choice to focus in its specific stylistic identity on formal and visual elements of 'quality television', and not so much on the structural elements that function as a foundation of these formal aspects. Netflix chooses to concentrate more on the appearance of 'quality television' than on the attribution of their own products to this concept. The first conclusion is that Netflix employs parameters of 'quality television' mainly to attract attention of the viewer and thereby gaining access to the commitment of the viewer. The second conclusion is that Netflix diverts from the definition of 'quality television' as it is known today. Because Netflix does not focus on ticking all the boxes of 'quality television' but uses to concept in a more coordinating manner, the company is able to deviate from the definition. This deviation becomes visible in the fact that Netflix spreads several parameters of 'quality television' over a larger and more diverse audience than 'quality television' up until now has done.

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Introduction: Pay Attention, This Has Quality: An Analysis of the Relationship Between Netflix and 'Quality Television'

In *The HBO Effect* Dean J. DeFino assesses and explains the impact the television cable network HBO has had and has upon the current field of television and popular culture more broadly. DeFino states that HBO in its original programming has introduced a level of character, thematic sophistication and narrative that has come to known as 'the HBO style'.[1] This style has spread across the channel spectrum because networks like Showtime, Starz, AMC and FX have imitated HBO.[2] 'Try to imagine the Machiavellian sociopath Vic Mackey of FX's *The Shield*, or the self-loathing narcissist Don Draper of AMC's *Mad Men* without Tony Soprano as a template. [...] Each of these owes a direct debt to HBO.'[3] This 'diaspora of HBO' is part of the legacy that HBO has given to contemporary television: the HBO effect. The most significant measure of this effect is how it helped to shape the term 'quality TV'. It is in this that HBO truly distinguished itself, according to DeFino.[4] With certain stylistic markers that are indicated as features of 'quality television' HBO created a style that DeFino refers to as 'the HBO style'. DeFino shows that by creating a specific stylistic identity, built with markers from 'quality television', HBO has impacted the field of television and popular culture.

The position of HBO within the field of television is often discussed by television critics and scholars and now there is a new player in that field: Netflix. Neil Landau in *TV Outside the Box* calls Netflix a gamechanger: 'Without question, Netflix is transforming the entertainment landscape'.[5] Furthermore, scholars and critics connect Netflix to 'quality television' in a similar manner as they have done HBO. For instance, Meike Jenner in *Is this TVIV? On Netflix, TVIII and binge-watching* claims that Netflix follows HBO's example in creating a specific style and is using 'quality television' to construct it.[6] In several media Netflix is often called the new HBO.[7] The two are regularly compared: "[B]oth HBO and Netflix are in the market for high-

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[1] DeFino, D. (2014) *The HBO Effect*. New York, London: Bloomsbury: p. 6.
[2] DeFino, D. (2014): pp. 6 – 7.
[3] DeFino, D. (2014): p. 6.
[4] DeFino, D. (2014): pp. 9 – 10.
[5] Landau, N. (2016b) 'Gamechangers', in: N. Landau, *TV Outside the Box.* New York: Focal Press: p. 10.
[6] Jenner, M. (2014) 'Is this TVIV? On Netflix, TVIII and binge-watching', in: *New Media & Society*. London: SAGE: p. 7.
[7] Jenner, M. (2014): p. 5.

value, original episodic programming."[8], 'the Netflix of the future will look, most likely, like HBO on steroids.'[9] Or 'The quirky little start-up that once printed money by mailing you DVDs is hell-bent on morphing into the HBO of tomorrow.'[10]

The arrival of Netflix created a new TV landscape. The comparisons between Netflix and HBO and the idea of Netflix as a gamechanger and thus having impact on the field of television, are indicators of this new part of land. A way to enter this landscape on an academic level is to assess the possible impact of Netflix on the TV landscape in an analysis that is in line with DeFino's approach. The indicators point towards a possible relationship between Netflix and the phenomenon of 'quality television'. As DeFino has shown in the case of HBO, a deeper understanding of the possible style that is built and the role that certain parameters of 'quality television' play in that style can create insight in the impact of Netflix on the current field of television. It can provide a first understanding of what this *terra incognita* looks like.

Employing Quality

In order to gain insight in the relationship between 'quality television' and Netflix and the possible style that Netflix creates with it, the content that carries that style needs to be addressed since signifiers of 'quality television' are to be found on a thematic, aesthetic and structural level of the content itself. [11] That is why this analysis will focus on 'Netflix original series'. It is probable that in the content produced by Netflix itself the specific style of Netflix will come to the fore the clearest. Furthermore, original content will become more important for Netflix since fewer cable-networks are willing to let their content be shown on Netflix's online platform.[12] It is important to note that Netflix uses a wider conception of 'original' than

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[8] Spangler, T. (July 19, 2013) 'Netflix the 'New HBO'? Get Real', *Variety*. http://variety.com/2013/digital/news/netflix-the-new-hbo-get-real-1200565593/ (November 14, 2015)

[9] McAlone, N. (October 14, 2015) 'Netflix subcribers want it to become HBO on steroids', *Business Insider UK*. http://uk.businessinsider.com/netflix-subscribers-want-original-content-and-movies-2015-10?r=US&IR=T (November 14, 2015).

[10] Hass, N. (January 29, 2013) 'And the Award for the Next HBO Goes to…', *GQ*. http://www.gq.com/story/netflix-founder-reed-hastings-house-of-cards-arrested-development (November 14, 2015).

[11] McCabe, J. & K. Akass (2007) *Quality TV. Contemporary American Television and Beyond*. New York, London: I.B. Tauris: pp. 14, 27, 29.

[12] Nocera, J. (June 15, 2016) 'Can Netflix Survive in the New World it Created?', *The New York Times Magazine*. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/19/magazine/can-netflix-survive-in-the-new-world-it-created.html?_r=4 (July 18, 2016).

the one central to this analysis. 'A Netflix Original' can mean three things: the series is produced by Netflix; in the country one is watching, Netflix is the first to offer the content; or a series was first produced by another company, was cancelled or stopped, and later Netflix produced one or more additional seasons.[13] This research will only look at the first category, since in this content the specific stylistic identity will make the clearest presence. This has lead to the research question: in what ways does Netflix employ parameters of 'quality television' in their original content?

In order to answer this question, the parameters of 'quality television' need to be defined. A first step is focusing on themes in which these parameters find themselves. That is why the research question is subdivided into three questions: in what ways are the parameters of 'quality television' employed in Netflix's original content in terms of characters? In what ways are the parameters of 'quality television' employed in Netflix's original content in terms of mise-en-scène? And last: in what ways are the parameters of 'quality television' employed in Netflix's original content in terms of narrative structure? These themes are chosen because all three show a distinct relationship with 'quality television'. Before elaborating on this relationship, the term 'quality television' itself needs to be addressed.

Quality Television

First of all, the term 'quality television' is highly problematic. In *Problems with quality* Charlotte Brunsdon explained that when trying to define what quality is, discourses of judgement always come into play.[14] To decide whether something has quality, one would have to give a value judgement about it. One would think that these judgements are based on personal preferences and tastes and therefore a term like quality is not suitable to use as a structural or institutional element. Brunsdon argues 'that there are always issues of power at stake in notions such as quality and judgement – Quality for whom?, Judgement by whom?, On whose behalf?'[15] Brunsdon illustrates this power, with the help of Bourdieu, with an example of Reggae and Classical music. In Western culture Classical music is higher up in the hierarchy of the cultural field of music than Reggae is, 'most people know [this] […] whatever

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[13] Landau, N. (2016b): p. 12.
[14] Brunsdon, C. (1990) 'Problems with quality', in: *Screen*, 31, no. 1: p. 67.
[15] Brunsdon, C. (1990): p. 73.

their personal tastes.'[16] People with a deviating taste from the cultural hierarchy find themselves in endless self-justification because it is a non-dominant subjective judgement. Preferring Classical music is also a subjective judgement, but a dominant one.[17] Thus calling a series 'quality television' is giving it a high position within the hierarchy, if one has the power to do so, and implying that other television shows lack quality and the audience who watches it has lesser taste.

The debate around 'quality television' started with Robert J. Thompson's book *Television's Second Golden Age*. He recognized that in the 1980s a new kind of programming emerged: 'better, more sophisticated, and more artistic than the usual network fare.'[18] It was called 'quality television'. Thompson states that no one could explain exactly what it meant but 'people just seemed to know it when they saw it.'[19] Thompson put together a profile consisting out of twelve points to define what 'quality television' is: 1. 'Quality TV' is not regular TV, which is to say that it deviates and goes against conventions of television; 2. 'Quality TV' is made by artists who gained their reputation in 'other more classier media, like film'.[20] This means that 'quality TV' usually has a quality pedigree; 3. 'Quality TV' attracts an upscale and well-educated audience; 4. Nevertheless, 'quality TV' often has to undergo a long struggle with commercial and profit-making aspects of the industry; 5. 'Quality TV' often has a large ensemble cast; 6. 'Quality TV' also has a memory as it often refers back to events and details from previous episodes; 7. 'Quality TV' creates a new genre by mixing old ones; 8. 'Quality TV' is usually literary and writer-based, the writing is often more complex; 9. 'Quality TV' is self-conscious as it often refers to the medium itself; 10. The subject matter of 'quality TV' is often controversial; 11. 'Quality TV' aspires towards 'realism'; 12. 'Quality TV' is often showered with awards and critical acclaim.[21] Furthermore, Thompson explains that 'quality television' is more of a generic style than an aesthetic judgement: a series or TV program can have quality without belonging to 'quality television' and one can recognize a 'quality television' series before knowing if it is any good.[22]

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[16] Brunsdon, C. (1990): p. 75.
[17] Brunsdon, C. (1990): p. 75.
[18] Thompson, R. (1996) *Television's Second Golden Age*. New York: Continuum: p. 12.
[19] Thompson, R. (1996): pp. 12 – 13.
[20] Thompson, R. (1996): pp. 13 – 16.
[21] Thompson, R. (1996): pp. 13 – 16.
[22] Thompson, R. (1996): pp. 13, 16.

Twelve years later Thompson recognizes that this profile is no longer up to date: too much has changed in the television landscape.[23] This profile from 1996 will be treated as a general outline and to this different elements of 'quality television' emphasized by other scholars will be added in order to grasp how the definition has changed over the years. Jane Feuer's definition from 1984 shows a lot of similarities with Thompson's: authorship, artistic freedom and creativity, formal and narrative experimentation, complex characters and sophisticated writing. She particularly emphasizes the specific demographic that was attracted to this kind of television: urban, 18 – 49 years old, liberal, professional and culturally educated. This audience was ambivalent towards the cultural value of television as a medium: [24]

> In […] a quality programme, the quality audience is permitted to enjoy a form of television which is seen as more literate, more stylistically complex, and more psychologically 'deep' than ordinary TV fare. The quality audience gets to separate itself from the mass audience and can watch TV without guilt.[25]

'Quality TV' is therefore also connected to economic profitability: it is not only about the total number of viewers, but also about the type of viewer watching.[26]

John Caldwell emphasizes another element of the changing content of American television during the nineties: he explains that television retheorized its presentational and aesthetic task and therefore the aspects of stylization and spectacle came to the fore.[27] The visual element is prioritized in television, which means that the pleasure of watching TV not only lies in the narrative but also in the imagery on screen.[28] He describes this televisual style as excessive, visually exhibitionist, and cinematic.[29] Robin Nelson agrees by explaining that

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[23] Thompson, R. (2007) 'Preface', in: J. McCabe & K. Akass, *Quality TV. Contemporary American Television and Beyond*. New York, London: I.B. Tauris: p. XX.

[24] Johnson, C. (2005) 'Quality/Cult Television: *The X-Files* and Television History', in: M. Hammond & L. Mazdon (eds), *The Contemporary Television Series*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press: p. 58.

[25] Feuer, J., Kerr P. & T. Vahimagi (1984) *MTM: 'Quality Television'*. London: BFI: p. 56.

[26] Johnson, C. (2005): p. 58.

[27] Caldwell, J. (1995) *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press: p. 5.

[28] Mills, B. (2013) 'What does it mean to call television 'cinematic'?', in: J. Jacobs & S. Peacock (eds), *Television Aesthetics and Style*. New York, London: Bloomsbury: p. 58.

[29] Caldwell, J. (1995): p. 110.

high end drama is television that has an enhanced visual style.[30] By calling TV cinematic you refer to another medium: film. This enhances the split between regular television and 'quality television' that is cinematic: 'quality TV' is something that one would not see on TV but rather at a cinema. Cinematic television exceeds the norms of television, therefore it is extraordinary: calling something 'quality television' is like giving the series a compliment.[31] This also shows the complex and problematic relationship 'quality TV' has with aesthetic judgement: who or what decides when a show is extraordinary? Thompson may have surpassed this complexity by saying it is just a generic style, not a judgement.

Jason Mittell has emphasized yet another element of 'quality television', or complex TV as he prefers to call it, which is narrative complexity. Complex television rejects the television convention and instead foregrounds a shifting balance between serial and episodic forms. It assumes that a series is a cumulative narrative that builds over time and it does not reset after every episode back to a steady static situation.[32] This narrative complexity offers 'a range of creative opportunities and a palette of audience responses':[33] one of the pleasures of complex television for the viewer is to engage in a puzzle-solving analysis. For instance, trying to read the minds of characters that are nuanced and multifaceted.[34] The complexity thus continues into all facets of narrative, among others the characters. It also asks for a more active role of the viewer: you are invited to look at the series as an analyst. [35]

Keeping all the different aspects of different participants within the debate in mind, the following outline of 'quality television' will function as a working definition: 'quality television' is a form of television that sets itself apart and/or is set apart from other forms of television; the directors of these series are often considered 'auteurs'; it is made to attract a well educated and wealthy niche with an interest in culture; within this form of television visual style and complexity are emphasized; it asks active participation of its viewer; besides showing a generic style it is inextricably bound up with aesthetic judgement. This is by no

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[30] Nelson, R. (2007) *State of Play. Contemporary "high-end" TV drama*. Manchester: Manchester University Press: p. 11.
[31] Mills, B. (2013): pp. 59, 62 – 63.
[32] Mittell, J. (2015) *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York, London: New York University Press: p. 11.
[33] Mittell, J. (2006) 'Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television', in: *The Velvet Light Trap*, 58, no. 3: p. 30.
[34] Mittell, J. (2015): p. 132.
[35] Mittell, J. (2015): p. 47.

means an all encompassing definition of this complex phenomenon, but it covers the general aspects of 'quality television' in order to function as a base for this analysis.

Characters, Mise-En-Scène and Narrative Structure

The three sub-themes of this analysis, characters, mise-en-scène and narrative structure, are taken on because of their distinct relationship with the concept of 'quality television'. The themes will be discussed in more detail in the corresponding chapters, therefore highlighting the main elements of their relationships with 'quality television' is suffice for now.

In television series the viewer builds a long-term relationship with the main character; the character hooks viewers in according to Mittell. To maintain that relationship characters have become a consistent and stable foundation in television series.[36] 'Quality television' overthrows this tradition by creating characters that are unstable. For example, a main character can be killed when the viewer least expect it. Another example is a character who is emotionally unavailable; the viewer has to construct the interior states of these characters themselves.[37] By transforming one of television's foundations by going into an opposite direction and turning it around, the strong connection between 'quality television' and character becomes visible. It is because of this distinct relationship and the foundational function of the character that it is discussed in this analysis.

The second theme is mise-en-scène. Caldwell has illustrated the self-conscious performance of style that television has displayed from the nineties onward.[38] The visual is prioritized: visual style is not a vessel for content, it is part of the text.[39] It is 'quality television' that has taken this a step further into 'a rebirth of television style'.[40+41] Mise-en-scène has become prioritized up to a level that series tell their story *in and through* mise-en-scène.[42] The fact that 'quality television' has elevated a self-conscious performance of style up to this level, shows the importance of discussing this theme within this analysis.

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[36] Mittell, J. (2015): p. 127.
[37] Mittell, J. (2015): pp. 123, 126.
[38] Caldwell, J. (1995): p. 5.
[39] Caldwell, J. (1995): p. 5.
[40] DeFino, D. (2014): pp. 9 – 10.
[41] McCabe, J. (2013) 'HBO Aesthetics, quality television and *Boardwalk Empire'*, in: J. Jacobs & S. Peacock (eds), *Television Aesthetics and Style*. New York, London: Bloomsbury: p. 188.
[42] McCabe, J. (2013): p. P. 188.

The third theme, narrative structure is chosen because, as Mittel explains, the narrative structure of 'quality television' is one of the most notable changes that have happened in the last two decades of television. It is notable because it moved away from television as formulaic and convention bound. [43] He calls this new narrative mode complex television. [44] Mittell argues that the hallmark of complex television is a balance between episodic and serial storytelling. [45] Since this is a new mode of narrative structure it started out as exclusive to 'quality television'. Together with the fact that 'quality television' again deviates from the tradition shows the explicit relationship between narrative structure and 'quality television'.

In all three themes 'quality television' has made definite changes in the field of television, thereby they form distinct aspects of 'quality television'. Furthermore, by looking at 'quality television' from three different aspects, the overview on how specific parameters are employed will become wider and more complete. This gives the opportunity to consider the impact of Netflix on the field of television from different perspectives.

The analysis will focus on six Netflix original series: *Orange Is the New Black*, *House of Cards*, *Narcos*, *Lilyhammer*, *Sense8* and *Marco Polo*. Each of them are chosen because they have shown a remarkability either in the relationship of Netflix with 'quality television' or in the possible stylistic identity that Netflix develops. *Lilyhammer* (2012 – 2014) tells the fish out of water tale of New York gangster Frank Tagliano (Steven van Zandt) who goes into the witness protection program and ends up in Lillehammer in Norway. It was the first Netflix original series and therefore had an exemplary function: it gave the viewer an indication of what to expect from Netflix originals on the level of its stylistic identity. It is because of this exemplary role that this series is discussed in this analysis. *House of Cards* and *Orange Is the New Black* are Netflix's longest running shows. Furthermore, Neil Landau explains: 'thanks to Netflix's aggressive marketing, *House of Cards* and *OITNB* are known as Netflix shows as much as *The Sopranos* and *Sex and the City* were HBO shows.'[46] They thus have come to embody a certain identity that is apparently recognisable as Netflix's. *House of Cards* shows Congressman Frank Underwood (Kevin Spacey), his wife Claire (Robin Wright) and their plan to get revenge on

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[43] Mittell, J. (2015): p. 2-3.
[44] Mittell, J. (2015): p. 3.
[45] Mittell, J. (2015): p. 23.
[46] Landau, N. (2016a) 'Comparing the Brands', in: N. Landau, *TV Outside the Box.* New York: Focal Press: p. 132.

anyone who betrayed them. This escalates into an ongoing climbing of the political ladder towards more power. *Orange Is the New Black* tells the story of the upper middle-class Piper Chapman (Taylor Schilling) who goes to a women's prison for a felony she committed ten years ago. *Marco Polo*, a portrayal of the adventures of this 13th century world traveller, has a budget of 90 million dollars making it Netflix's biggest investment yet regarding original content.[47] This was also the first original series that received substantial criticism in reviews. Again, the series plays an important role in the identity of Netflix in both intended and unintended ways. *Sense8* follows a group of eight strangers who are all of a sudden linked to each other telepathically: it turns out they are a cluster of 'Sensates'. Another cluster tries to warn them about doctor Whispers who tries to locate and kill all living Sensates. *Sense8* received considerable criticism on its narrative structure: it was vague and difficult to understand.[48] This evoked a discussion about narrative structure and pacing of Netflix's content in general. Some critics explained that the majority of the Netflix originals show these problems.[49] It is because of this discussion that *Sense8* is admitted to the research. At last, *Narcos* which portrays the fight against drugs and Pablo Escobar (Wagner Moura) during the seventies and eighties from the perspective of Drug Enforcement Agent Steve Murphy (Boyd Holbrook). It did not take long for the series to be compared to *The Sopranos*; it is '*The Wire* and *Goodfellas* combined'; it is more addictive than *Breaking Bad*.[50+51] In a majority of the reviews 'quality television' shows are mentioned to make clear that either *Narcos* is the next

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[47] In November 2016 Netflix will release a Netflix original series with a bigger budget of 100 million dollars: *The Crown*.

[48] Surette, T. (June 5, 2015) 'Sense8 Series Premiere Review: What Did I Just Watch?', *TV.com*. http://www.tv.com/shows/sense8/community/post/sense8-series-premiere-netflix-review-143335272771/ (March 21, 2016).

[49] Barr, M. (June 10, 2015) ''Sense8' Failure In Structure Highlights The Biggest Problem With Netflix Programming', *Forbes*. http://www.forbes.com/sites/merrillbarr/2015/06/10/sense8-failure-netflix/#2affa29961ec (March 20, 2016).

[50] Opam, K. (August 26, 2015) 'Review: Narcos is the next great Netflix show', *The Verge*. http://www.theverge.com/2015/8/26/9211749/narcos-netflix-tv-review (April 8, 2016).

[51] Battersby, M. (July 16, 2015) 'Narcos v Breaking Bad: Netflix original set to be more addictive than Walter White', *Independent*. http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/features/narcos-versus-breaking-bad-the-netflix-original-set-be-more-addictive-than-walter-white-10394212.html (April 8, 2016).

'quality television' show or that it comes very close.[52+53] From the beginning this series was inscribed into or involved with the tradition of 'quality television'. That is why *Narcos* is added to this analysis.

Generalities and Details

Discussing six different series in an analysis of this scope is pushing the limits. A limited research with too broad a scope leaves little content: a disadvantage of a broad research is the risk of generalisations and a lack of depth. On the other hand, Aeron Davis explains that the qualitative research used in cultural studies sometimes have shown 'rather grand claims about material and cultural relations [that] have been deduced from limited and unrepresentative selections of texts.'[54] To be able to gain insight in the impact of Netflix as a whole on the field of television this broad approach in necessary. Analysing a smaller number of series would harm the validity of the outcome of this research. As Jane Stokes made clear: the evidence must be able to carry the weight of the conclusions drawn from it.[55] Furthermore, the arrival of Netflix created a new TV landscape. This landscape has existed for a couple years now and has not often been the subject of research. It is not yet clear what the starting point of this new landscape is, and that is exactly what this research gains insight to. Entering this landscape for the first time, it seems more appropriate to first discover and map out the land before diving into it. If one would decide to dive in immediately, how would be decided what elements need analysing? What would the outcome of such an analysis be when there is no bigger picture to put it in? By approaching the subject in a broad manner the most can be attributed to the academic field of television studies: a first outline of unknown land that indicates topics that need further attention and can serve as a base for upcoming research.

This broad perspective does need a counterweight which can be found in the method and structure of the analysis. The methods used to analyse these six texts will be image and

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[52] Moorman, M. (August 31, 2015) 'Is Narcos de nieuwe 'beste serie ooit'?', *De Volkskrant*. http://www.volkskrant.nl/televisie/is-narcos-de-nieuwe-beste-serie-ooit~a4132721/ (April 8, 2016).

[53] Moylan, B. (August 28, 2015) 'Narcos: history turned Netflix drama traces Pablo Escobar's rise to power', *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2015/aug/28/pablo-escobar-narcos-netflix-drama-rise-to-power (April 8, 2016).

[54] Davis, A. (2008) 'Investigating Cultural Producers', in: M. Pickering (ed), *Research Methods for Cultural Studies*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press: p. 58.

[55] Stokes, J. (2003) *How to do media & cultural studies*. London: Sage: p. 20.

narrative analysis. Both methods involve close reading which raise the opportunity for depth and details to exist within the analysis, which goes against the risk of generalisations and a lack of depth that belong to a broad scope. To ensure that the opportunity for depth and detail can exist, each subtheme within a chapter focuses mainly on one of the six series. The focused analysis on one text creates a deeper insight in which possible ways this particular theme can manifest itself in the Netflix originals. This insight is then applied in the analysis of the other texts to create a broader perspective on how 'quality television' is employed in the original content concerning that particular subtheme. Scope, method and structure work together to create a balance in broadness and specificity, in generalities and details.

Relevance

The goal of this research is getting insight in the impact of Netflix on the new TV landscape. It revolves around the mapping of this landscape and creating understanding of what the effects of Netflix's impact are. With this goal this research becomes relevant for the academic field of television studies in three ways. First of all, the research adds a new point of view to the debate on 'quality television'. This debate was once set out by Thompson and scholars have been disputing over it ever since.[56] See debaters such as Jane Feuer, Charlotte Brunsdon, John Corner, Robin Nelson, Jason Jacobs, Mark Jancovich and James Lyons.[57] Television keeps on developing into new ways that need to be considered within this debate. Netflix is one of these developments: by creating a relationship with 'quality television' the phenomenon is also affected. By getting insight in how Netflix employs 'quality television', it also creates insight into how it can possibly change or add to the concept. Second, a new perspective on the already existing map of the TV landscape is added. Several scholars have worked on mapping the field of television and television studies such as Fiske, Allen, Corner and Harvey and Geraghty and Lusted.[58] Netflix, being a gamechanger, also effects the current map. By analysing the possible stylistic identity of Netflix, the research is able to uncover a part of the map of the TV landscape that has been hidden up until now. Third, this research will form a base on which new questions can be asked: making this part of the map clear will make it

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[56] McCabe, J. & K. Akass (2007): p. 3.
[57] Feuer, J. (1984); Brunsdon, C. (1990): pp. 67 – 91; Corner, J. (1994): pp. 141 – 148; Nelson, R. (1997), (2007); Jacobs, J. (2001): pp. 427 – 447; Jancovich, M. & J. Lyons (2003).
[58] Fiske, J. (1987); Allen, R. (1993); Corner, J. & S. Harvey (1996); Geraghty, C. & D. Lusted (1998).

possible to add on other parts of the map. For instance: what is the role of the digital aspect of Netflix in this development? The same question can be asked for, for example, binge-watching. What happens to the split between 'quality television' and other forms of television? How do other players within the field react to this development?

Before such questions can be answered, an analysis that addresses Netflix and its relationship with 'quality television' needs to take place. The first chapter will focus on characters and more specifically on the subject of masculinity, the antihero and the treatment of ideals within the series. Chapter 2 concentrates on the subject of mise-en-scène and is again divided into three subthemes: glossy television, authorial style and stylistic integrity. At last, Chapter 3 analyses narrative structure and focuses on narrative density, narrative complexity and flexi-narratives.

Chapter 1: Characters

Characters are one of the primary ways that viewer engages with a series: they develop a long-term relationship with them.[59] In order to maintain that relationship television series have put a lot of weight on the stability of their characters: they are the stable foundation of a series throughout its run.[60] 'Quality television' made an end to this stability. Main characters can be killed off; there is no guarantee that they will stay alive throughout the show. They also present characters who are emotionally unavailable; viewers have to construct interior states of the characters themselves by filling in their thoughts.[61] Moreover, characters can be unreliable: the viewer can not count on a character to always make either the right or wrong decision.[62] The fact that 'quality television' took on one of the foundations of television and turned it around, makes it a distinct aspect of 'quality television'. Together with the foundational function that characters have within television, the importance of analysing this parameter of quality becomes clear.

In order to analyse how the Netflix originals employ 'quality television' concerning characters, three parameters are discussed: masculinity, the antihero and the relationship between the ideal and the real. Each parameter has a particular relationship with 'quality television'. First, there is a masculinist bias in the system of values of television: the legitimizing of shows as quality carries with it certain gender implications. The portrayal of male protagonists and treatment of masculinity is a means to identify a series as quality.[63] Therefore, 'quality television' portrays a strong tendency towards the masculine.

A common denominator in 'quality television' according to Mittell, is the presence of unsympathetic, morally questionable, or villainous figures.[64] Several scholars have emphasized the unreliable and paradoxical character as a parameter of 'quality television'. It is through this character that ambivalence towards traditional moral and social virtues is

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[59] Mittell, J. (2015): p. 127.
[60] Mittell, J. (2015): pp. 123, 126.
[61] Mittell, J. (2015): pp 124, 130, 132.
[62] Lotz, A. (2014) *Cable Guys: Television and Masculinities in the Twenty-First Century*. New York, London: New York University Press: pp. 54 – 55.
[63] Albrecht, M. (2015) *Masculinity in Contemporary Quality Television*. New York: Routledge: p. 7.
[64] Mittell, J. (2015): p. 142.

discussed.[65] Again, it is because of the distinct relationship with 'quality television' that this parameter is addressed in this chapter.

The last parameter, the portrayal of a relationship between on the one hand the mythic and ideal and on the other the actualities of everyday, is a unique feature of 'quality television' according to Sarah Cardwell. Protagonists have to reconcile the idealistic idea with the more prosaic experience of it. This can lead to internal conflict as the character perceives a gap between idealistic values of society and their lived experience.[66] This parameter thus focuses on a character that experiences a discrepancy between an idealistic vision and its own lived experience and thus has difficulties reconciling the real with the ideal.

This chapter works with a specific structure: with a detailed analysis of one of the Netflix originals as a starting point it will work towards a broader perspective on how Netflix employs these parameters of 'quality television' in its original series. *Orange Is the New Black* will be central to the analysis of masculinity since this is the only one of the six series that focuses mainly on women. That is why it is the most interesting case study to see whether Netflix follows or deviates from the masculinist bias. With the antihero it is *Narcos* who will play an important role since the negotiation of morality is its main theme. Analysing how the notion of the antihero is used in *Narcos* will make clear what aspects of this ambivalent character can be found in the other series. With the internal struggle of the ideal negotiated by the real *Narcos* again will be a starting point. This series visualizes the negotiation of the main character's idealistic moral boundaries. Therefore, it is a very clear example of how this parameter can be employed within a show and it is able to give insight in what to look for in the other original series of Netflix.

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[65] Gose, M. (2006) *Getting Reel: A Social Science Perspective on Film*. New York: Cambria Press: p. 35.
[66] DeFino, D. (2014): p. 154.

1.1 Masculinity: The Nice Blond Lady in *Orange Is the New Black*

Caetlin Benson-Allott explains that there is a masculinist bias to be found in the system of values of 'quality television'. Besides the fact that 'quality shows' are almost always about men there is a link between on the one hand masculinity, and on the other features of quality such as narrative complexity, intertextual references and unconventional camerawork. To be recognized as quality, television needs to distance itself from female subjects and audiences.[67] The masculinist bias is confirmed by Albrecht in *Masculinity in Contemporary Quality Television*: the legitimizing of shows as quality carries with it certain gender implications. He explains that the fact that 'quality television' is dominated by male protagonists and detailed treatments of masculinity is not a coincidence. Rather, it is a means to identify a series as quality.[68] Furthermore, in *Legitimating Television* Levine and Newman have demonstrated that in television studies cultural hierarchies that distance the aestheticized prime time serials 'from the feminized mass culture space of daytime' are perpetuated.[69] This is not to say there is a binary opposition between quality as masculine and 'regular television' as feminine, nevertheless a strong tendency towards masculinity is presented in 'quality television'. Albrecht shows that some quality series do show awareness of feminist issues. The male protagonists are struggling and one of the causes of this struggle is the complex and changing world that prevents survival through relying on old gender norms. So even though these series step on feminist ground, it is to elaborate on masculinity.[70] *Orange Is the New Black* is the only one of the six Netflix shows that revolves around women. Therefore, it makes an interesting case study to analyse how Netflix deals with this parameter of 'quality television'.

In order to look at what role masculinity plays within the series the analysis will cover two different ways masculinity often comes to the fore in 'quality television'. First, there is male combat: which is emphasizing the exhaustive toll it takes to always having to portray male power.[71] Second, it focuses on the negotiation of the ideal masculinity. 'Quality

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[67] Benson-Allott, C. (2013) 'Made For Quality Television?', in: Film Quarterly, 66, no. 4: pp. 5 – 9.
[68] Albrecht, M. (2015): p. 7.
[69] Newman, N & E. Levine (2012) *Legitimating Television: Media Convergence and Cultural Status*. New York: Routledge: p. 166.
[70] Albrecht, M. (2015): p. 13.
[71] Martin, B. (2013) *Difficult Men. Behind the Scenes of a CreativeRrevolution: From The Sopranos to Mad Men and Breaking Bad*. New York: Penguin: p. 31.

television' does not show a blueprint of masculinity but instead negotiates masculinity.[72] Having attention for both subjects will give insight in the role masculinity plays in *Orange Is the New Black*.

Masculine Code & Male Combat

Already in the first episode of *Orange Is the New Black* an intertextual reference towards *Oz* is made: a series that is often indicated as 'quality television'.[73] *Oz,* a show about male prisoners, introduces prison as a place with a masculine code.[74] This reminds the viewer that the penal system is not a blank slate, but already culturally connected to masculinity through media and television. The prison subculture in *Oz* builds a hierarchy on masculinity: 'super-males' are on top and 'bitches' on the bottom.[75] Who wants to survive needs to participate in the masculine parade.[76] Those who show signs of femininity lose agency and power.

Although *Orange Is the New Black* is not the same as *Oz*, the series chooses to establish a similar masculine code. This code becomes clear when Piper apologises to Red, the prison's chef, for calling her food disgusting in *Tit Punch*: Red lies on top of the washbasin in the bathroom reading while her legs are shaved by another inmate. Above her body hangs the sign 'no sitting'. Piper walks into the bathroom to apologise, but Red leaves her waiting in the margins of the screen until she finishes the page of her book (appendix 1, image 1). When Piper approaches and starts apologising the viewer sees her reflection in the bathroom mirror disfigured and blurry (image 2). Red explains that her apology has no value in this place and tells what the most important rule is here: 'the second you are perceived as weak, you already are.' Red has power: she can break rules, make people wait in the margins or stay in the centre of the screen and she is the one who perceives, the subject. Her behaviour is cold, static, calculated and rational. Piper acts nervous, doubtful and insecure. She is the one who is perceived, the object. This division is emphasized by the editing of the scene: while Red explains this important rule, the camera switches five times to Piper's face. She listens but does not speak, there is only a silent expression of hopelessness. The code that is explained

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[72] Lotz, A. (2014): pp. 79 – 80.
[73] Thompson, R. (2007): p. XVIII.
[74] Jarvis, B. (2006) 'The violence of images: Inside the prison TV drama *Oz*', in: P. Mason (ed), *Captured by the Media*. New York: Routledge: p. 160.
[75] Jarvis, B. (2006): p. 160.
[76] Jarvis, B. (2006): p. 161.

to Piper complies with the essentialist construction of masculinity as the rational, the subject and the active and femininity as the irrational, the object and the passive.[77] In these essentialist constructions women are thought of as naturally weaker and in need of protection as well as being more emotional by nature.[78] This construction is foregrounded by revisiting Piper's silent expression five times in a row. A similar hierarchy is presented here as in *Oz*: an inmate can gain agency through a performance of the rational, the subject and the active. If one is passive or takes on the role of the object, agency is lost.

Piper's blurry reflection can signify the fact that she does not know how to act or how to behave; her role in the group is still unclear, she has yet to learn how to be an inmate. She is figuring out how to be masculine, just as many other leading characters in 'quality television' are. In *Cable Guys* Amanda Lotz explains that 'quality television' not only shows mainly male protagonists but that these men are also in doubt about how to act and what is expected of them, especially when it comes to masculinity:

> Much of the serial narrative of these shows is simply the story of how these men "turn out," of whether they figure out how to be who they are meant to be. […] [M]ost of the men exist in a state of being endlessly bewildered by how to handle situations in their lives in a way never fully or clearly resolved at the conclusion of each episode.[79]

These men are thus figuring out how to fulfil the role that their situation asks of them. Brett Martin affirms this in *Difficult Men* by explaining that most 'quality television' shows are about male combat: they show male power and also the downsides of this power. Men need to be 'decisive, single-minded, unafraid to use force and to dominate'.[80] Men constantly need to battle in order to retain their power and distinction, and this takes it constant and exhausting toll.[81] The characters of 'quality television' are thus struggling with their masculine role. In *Orange Is the New Black* this struggle is brought to the fore again by editing: in the first episodes in which this masculine code is established Piper is presented as speechless and

[77] Tuin, I. Van der (2007) 'Feminisme als strijdtoneel: Simone de Beauvoir en de geschiedenis van het feminisme', in: R. Buikema & I. Van der Tuin (eds), *Gender in media, kunst en cultuur*. Bussum: Coutinho: p. 22.

[78] Baetens, J., J. De Bloois, A. Masschelein, G. Verstraete (2009) *Culturele studies: Theorie in de praktijk*. Nijmegen: Vantilt: p. 73.

[79] Lotz, A. (2014): p. 58.

[80] Martin, B. (2013): p. 31.

[81] Martin, B. (2013): p. 429.

bewildered: she does not know how to handle the situation. The camera acts as if showing a dialogue switching between Piper and other characters. But Piper is silent and in doubt. This is shown multiple times per episode: at least two one-sided dialogues appear in episode two *Tit Punch*, four in the third *Lesbian Request Denied* and again two in the fourth episode *Imaginary Enemies*. This repetition causes a foregrounding of the male combat Piper is facing.

Male combat is also found in other Netflix originals, for instance in *Narcos*, *Sense8* and *Marco Polo*. Steve Murphy in *Narcos* begins with describing the masculinity of his father, who volunteered to fight in World War II because of Pearl Harbor: fearless, duty bound, honourable, ready to fight, protective and patriotic. For the same reasons Steve goes to Colombia: it was his duty to protect his country. These values do not last over there and after a year he neglects this ideal. Instead he gives the doubtful, insecure and pessimistic statement: 'you do what you think is right and hope for the best'.[82] Hereby he shows that it is impossible to maintain this masculinity in the new situation that he is in, although the situation does ask for this unattainable patriotic masculinity.

In *Sense8* there is Lito, a Mexican actor who plays hypermasculine roles. A few episodes after the viewer has met him, it is revealed that he is secretly gay. This makes the internal struggle clear: his sexual inclination and his hypermasculine image are considered to be polar opposites and he is unable to unite both sides of him. There is thus a struggle in dealing with an ideal masculinity.

Marco Polo is shown chasing his goal of being taken seriously as a grown man by his environment. While everybody addresses him with 'boy' Marco tries to be a man and attain an ideal masculinity: he is scared but says he is not, at first he cannot fight but is learning how to, he tries to dominate but fails or does not follow through. He is struggling to achieve the ideal behaviour of a grown man and more specifically the ideal masculinity of the adventurer.

Negotiating the Ideal

As has become clear, male combat already starts with negotiating the ideal masculinity. Lotz argues that the question 'What is it to be a man?' is central to most 'quality television' shows.[83]

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[82] Murphy, S. (2015) 'Descendo', *Narcos*. Series 1, episode 1, Netflix.
[83] Lotz, A. (2014): p. 79.

It focuses more on a meditation on the challenges men face in negotiating their identity than on providing a blueprint for contemporary masculinity.[84] And negotiating is exactly what Piper is doing in *Orange Is the New Black*: sometimes she succeeds and sometimes she fails in applying the masculine code. For instance, when she realises that the money she made with her illegal used panty business is stolen in *Trust No Bitch*. She accuses Flaca of stealing the money and lying to her about her mother being sick. She approaches her with a threatening and angry attitude, applying the masculine code to the situation. The viewer sees Piper looking down on Flaca who is sitting. A moment later this has already changed: Flaca gets immediate backup from another inmate and the viewer sees Piper enclosed between the two of them (image 3). Piper's masculine performance is thus very quickly diminished, nevertheless she keeps the threatening attitude. When she finds out Flaca is actually innocent and that her mother is indeed sick, the expression on her face changes. For a moment she does not know what the appropriate response would be according to the masculine code. Her expression is similar to her expression in the bathroom when she apologized to Red: confused and not sure of herself. A few moments later she snaps back into the masculine role but also quickly expresses her hope that Flaca's mother will get better soon. Piper goes to and fro between empathy and politeness and her masculine performance. The fact that you can switch between them, that it looks like Piper forgot her lines during a performance and that her performance is not always convincing, shows masculinity as a construction and not as a natural given. This representation of masculinity leaves room for negotiation: a performance can be mediated while a given cannot. The fact that masculinity is a performance is even further foregrounded because the series turns Piper's performance into a joke. In *Work That Body For Me* all inmates are running towards a breach in the fence to swim in a nearby lake. Piper however thinks that they are running because they are scared of her masculine attitude. When others tell her about the breach, it turns out that nobody is convinced of Piper's performance of masculinity except for Piper herself. Presenting Piper's performance as implausible and a bit over the top again foregrounds the performance as a construction.

When it comes to masculinity as a parameter of 'quality television', Netflix original series comply with the tradition. Masculinity seems to play a role in the Netflix series, most often as

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[84] Lotz, A. (2014): p. 80.

an ideal that is unattainable by the leading characters. It shows how characters struggle with this ideal and the effort it costs to get to this idealistic image. It does not just show a certain kind of masculinity, like a blueprint: it takes the viewer 'behind the scenes' of masculinity by showing the struggle, the efforts and the negotiating that comes with masculinity. Even a series that focuses on women, *Orange Is the New Black*, still comments on masculinity. First of all, the series chooses to establish a masculine code based on an essentialist construction of masculinity and femininity. Second, the struggle of applying and negotiating that code is emphasized. Both elements of this parameter are foregrounded by for example repetition in editing or the use of humour. Hereby the series asks attention for it portrayal of male combat and negotiation of masculinity. This does not mean however that there is no room for other themes: for instance, motherhood, friendship, family, beauty ideals are also subjects the series comments on. It seems however that first the masculine code needs to be established, and thus the compliance with the tradition of 'quality television', before other themes can be explored. This is done by establishing the masculine code in the beginning of the series and explicitly linking the code to their location. Other themes are then treated and negotiated within the boundaries of the prevailing code.

1.2 Antihero: Who Is the Bad Guy in *Narcos*?

Jason Mittell explains that a common denominator of complex TV is the 'prominence of unsympathetic, morally questionable, or villainous figures'.[85] Lotz sees a similar development of characters that are relatable but at the same time have no potential for redemption.[86] They are complex, unhappy and their morale is loose according to Brett Martin. They are deeply human:[87]

> They played a seductive game with the viewer, daring them to emotionally invest in, even root for, even love, a gamut of criminals whose offenses would come to include everything from adultery and polygamy (*Mad Men* and *Big Love*) to vampirism and serial murder (*True Blood* and *Dexter*).[88]

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[85] Mittell, J. (2015): p. 142.
[86] Lotz, A. (2014): pp. 64 – 65.
[87] Martin, B. (2013): p. 25.
[88] Martin, B. (2013): p. 25.

All three scholars emphasize the antihero as a parameter of 'quality television'. Michael Gose defines the antihero as a principal character of a dramatic work who lacks the attributes a traditional protagonist or hero would have. 'The anti-hero's lack of courage, honesty, or grace, his weakness and confusion, often reflects modern man's ambivalence towards traditional moral and social virtues.'[89] Lotz explains that there has been a long tradition of characters not letting the viewer down: they had a choice between right and wrong and the viewer knew what the outcome would be. With the use of antiheroes 'quality television' moved away from this tradition: there is no safety net, the viewer does not know if it turns out OK.[90] Although 'regular' television experimented with more questionable characters, 'morally ambiguous protagonists remained the exclusive terrain of cable's niche audiences.'[91] Margrethe Bruun Vaage also sees a clear connection between the antihero and 'quality television'.[92] According to her 'quality TV' wants to get and keep the attention of highly educated, urban viewers who have no interest in 'regular TV'. TV started focusing on niches which lead to segmentation, and it is this segmentation that Vaage calls an important backdrop for the rise of the antihero. To reach this niche and to distance itself from 'regular television', 'quality TV' uses techniques that are not familiar to 'regular' television such as complex moral structures.[93]

First, the focus will be on if and, if so, how the presence of moral ambiguity and ambivalence is manifested within the Netflix originals since the antihero reflects the confusion of society about morality.[94] Second, the paradoxical character traits of the antihero will be discussed in a more detailed manner.

An Ambivalent Tone

Narcos treats the theme of the antihero in a very direct manner: the audience meets the main character, Drug Enforcement Agent Steve Murphy, for the first time when he is ordering the killings of several hitmen. Steve asks his colleague colonel Carillo to do the job, a man who hates the Narcos more than anything, and gives him the information that the hitmen will be at a bar later that night. Steve mentions that he would have sent Carillo to ambush these men

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[89] Gose, M. (2006): p. 35.
[90] Lotz, A. (2014): pp. 54 – 55.
[91] Lotz, A. (2014): p. 55.
[92] Bruun Vaage, M. (2016) *The Antihero in American Television*. New York: Routledge: p. 1.
[93] Bruun Vaage, M. (2016): p. 2.
[94] Morrell, J. (2008) *Bullies, Bastards & Bitches*. Cincinnati: Writer's Digest: pp. 68, 77, 88.

even if they would not have killed anyone in their lives, because he feels the same as Carillo. Carillo kills everyone who is present in that bar: hitmen and bystanders alike. Steve, who is also the narrator of the series, talks to the viewer directly: he knows that he is responsible for the killings but asks the viewer to not call him a bad guy yet. The series comments on the complexity of morality and literally asks the viewer to invest their time and attention into a man that is portrayed as a murderer: the viewer needs to postpone his or her judgement of Steve's character until the series has elaborated on its storyline. In the eighth episode, *La Gran Mentira*, the viewer is brought back to the assassination of the hitmen. Steve again addresses the viewer directly:

> You wanna tell me a good guy wouldn't have pushed the buttons on these motherfuckers? You wanna call me a bad guy? Fine. But if you do, it just means that you haven't met enough bad guys yet to know the difference.[95]

The series uses eight episodes to explain why Steve Murphy came to the decision to kill these hitmen. At this point the viewer needs to process seven hours' worth of information in order to come to a conclusion about Steve's moral compass. The question whether one agrees with Steve's moral boundaries thus becomes more complex to answer.

Narcos uses these seven hours to create an ambivalent and paradoxical image around the character of Steve Murphy as well as on other characters and groups. The antihero reflects the confusion and ambivalence of society about morality. Therefore, they show paradoxical traits and qualities.[96] Already in the opening scene a paradoxical atmosphere is created by visualizing ambivalence in the mise-en-scène: visually the series opposes conventional morality by presenting policemen as entrapped while connecting the assassins to spaciousness. When Murphy receives the information of the whereabouts of the hitmen, he is shown in front of a window. The window frames form a grid creating a division between Steve and the outside world. The scene then moves to Carillo and Steve's partner Peña in a bar. They are sitting by the window and the shadows of the window's bars fall on their faces and bodies. As Carillo leaves and goes downstairs, he is shown behind the bars of the stairs' bannister. The *sicarios* are also sitting in a bar at a window but there is no sign of entrapment.

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[95] Murphy, S. (2015) 'La Gran Mentira, *Narcos*. Series 1, episode 8, Netflix.
[96] Morrell, J. (2008): pp. 68, 77, 88.

There is no actual glass inside the window, therefore it is used as an entrance and to interact with women on the sidewalk. Under fire, it is used as an escape route. On the contrary, the bodies of the policemen who are firing at the assassins are again entrapped. In the background each policeman is portrayed in a separate window frame (image 4). Already from the beginning questions are raised about traditional moral and social values, creating an ambivalent atmosphere. It shows that *Narcos* does not display characters the viewer can count on to make either the right or wrong decision: it instead offers morally questionable characters.

This technique of creating an ambivalent and paradoxical atmosphere right from the start can also be found in the Netflix original *House of Cards*. In the opening scene the audience sees the protagonist Frank Underwood walking outside of his house after the sound of a car breaking and hitting something which turns out to be the neighbour's dog. Without hesitation Frank decides to choke the dog with his own collar, because he will not survive the accident. He puts the dog out of its misery, but choking him seems an odd way to do the animal a favour. The whole situation does not affect him in any emotional way. He tells the viewer he does not have the patience for useless pain; does he then act out of sympathy or self-interest? This leaves the viewer confused, and it being the opening scene that sets the tone of the series that feeling sticks with the viewer during the episode and beyond.

The fact that *Narcos* creates an ambivalent tone right from the start and that it uses such a direct manner to discuss the parameter of the antihero, shows that it not only employs this aspect of 'quality television' but also foregrounds this employment. Steve directly tells the viewer that moral ambiguity is a main theme and explains when to judge and when to postpone one's judgement. The direct quality of this tactic stresses the parameter in such a degree that it becomes foregrounded: the viewer is not able to miss this parameter.

Opposing Character Traits

Antiheroes have a paradoxical nature and have opposing character traits that do not add up. A character can switch between these traits from moment to moment or day to day.[97] It also evens the character out: ugly traits are tempered with a positive side.[98] This also applies to

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[97] Morrell, J. (2008): p. 88.
[98] Morrell, J. (2008): p. 90.

Narcos' Steve. In *Le Catedral* he is shown with his wife Connie and their baby in a garden centre. In a sea of flowers, the viewer sees a romantic and happy picture of the Murphy's talking, kissing and joking. The drive home starts with a close-up of an orchid they purchased that stands between Steve and Connie. While talking about baby names the orchid remains in the picture. When Steve is paying more attention to Connie than to the road, he hits the car in front of him. The man who drives the car before him starts screaming. While Steve gets out of the car to confront him, the orchid, that could be read as a sign of happy family life, has disappeared (image 5). The argument between Steve and the other driver that follows, is suddenly interrupted by a low angle shot of Steve. This comes as a surprise, since before or after his shot the low angle point of view is not used. Steve then points his gun at him and shoots the tire of the man's car. Connie is shocked and scared, unable to move or talk. This is emphasized by the fact that Connie's scared stare is locked in the rearview mirror of the car (image 6). This scene shows the paradoxical nature of Steve, the consequences of it and the quick switching between character traits. This parameter of 'quality television' is foregrounded with the help of several small details: the disappearing of the orchid, the surprising low angle shot and the visual locking in of Connie's eyes.

There are several ways in order to make a morally complex antihero more likable, the Netflix originals show two different tactics to do this. The first technique is to elaborate on a character: the more a viewer knows about someone the more likely one will see him or her as an ally.[99] One of the factors that is necessary for character engagement is allegiance. This is the moral judgement of the character in order to decide whether one sympathises with him or her and starts to emotionally invest in the protagonist.[100] It is thus important for a series to also create some positive allegiance for the antihero. With Steve, allegiance is promoted when the viewer sees him in the garden centre: he is charming, funny, plays with the baby and he gets his wife the orchid that she wants. This positive allegiance is needed to temper his violent and threatening behaviour that will follow.

This tactic is also to be found in *Sense8*. Wolfgang is the antihero: a criminal who cracks safes for a living. Since the viewer needs a reason to emotionally invest in Wolfgang the source

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[99] Mittell, J. (2015): p. 144.
[100] Mittell, J. (2015): p. 134.

of this bad behaviour is quickly shown: the viewer sees a young Wolfgang standing on stage during a school concert who is unable to sing because of his nerves. A man in the audience, who later turns out to be his father, laughs in his face and walks away. According to Martin the viewer starts appreciating and understanding a character when one is familiar with their background. He uses the example of Tony Soprano: the viewer forgave him for his bad behaviour since they were aware of his upbringing and unstable mother.[101] The viewer can most likely relate to the feeling of losing one's temper, as Steve did, especially knowing the stressful job Steve has: it is a struggle everyone can recognize. [102] It shows that even the biggest monsters, such as the stealing and murdering Wolfgang, have to deal with the same issues as the viewer has to deal with.[103]

A second reason why the audience sympathises with antiheroes is fascination. It gives the possibility to experience certain things that in real life the viewer does not have the courage or opportunity for. It gives access to actions and traumas that the audience is safe from in real life.[104] According to Mittell viewers are interested in reading the mind of 'Machiavellian characters' which show social intelligence and the ability to manipulate others. This helps to develop their own social intelligence and therefore triggers fascination.[105] This is for instance the case with the mobster: because he is so paradoxical, he is fascinating.[106] Margrethe Bruun Vaage explains that the antihero is a convention in the gangster film genre.[107] Already around the 1920s a romantic notion was created around the gangster as antihero: a man who refuses to bow down to the systems that will destroy him such as law and ideology.[108] A well known example is Don Corleone: he will help people in need but also murders anyone who betrayed him or has dishonoured his family. 'He simply perceives himself to be an honourable man worthy of respect, a true family man'.[109]

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[101] Martin, B. (2013): p. 177.
[102] Martin, B. (2013): p. 19.
[103] Martin, B. (2013): p. 174.
[104] Mittell, J. (2015): p. 145.
[105] Mittell, J. (2015): p. 145
[106] Morrell, J. (2008): p. 89.
[107] Bruun Vaage, M. (2016): p. 4.
[108] Wilson, R. (2015) 'A Silent Era: From Gangs to Gangsters', in: R. Wilson, *The Gangster Film: Fatal Success in American Cinema*. New York: Wallflower: p. 26.
[109] O'Kane, J. (1992) *The Crooked Ladder: Gangsters, Ethnicity, and the American Dream*. New Brunswick, London: Transaction Publishers: p. 174.

This well established convention is found in *Lilyhammer*. Frank is introduced as a sympathetic villain with the help of intertextuality in two ways. First of all, the stereotype of the Italian mobster is used. This stereotype contains exaggerated speech and mannerisms like for instance certain hand gestures.[110] Furthermore, the stereotypical Mafiosi is considered to be *nouveau riche* with a superficial and tacky style. Their suits are more tastelessly showy than actual chic, according to Stella Bruzzi.[111] Frank is introduced to the viewer at a funeral of his boss with a décor that fits the *nouveau riche* taste: an abundance of red and white roses and chandeliers in a room with red velvet-like walls and wall panels of dark wood. Frank shows certain characteristic features that could be considered as mannerisms: for instance, his way of talking and his body language. Secondly, there is the fact that Frank is the spitting image of Silvio, *consigliere* to Tony in *The Sopranos* also played by Steven van Zandt. He does not only look alike but shows the same characteristic features. This not only inscribes the character even more in the parameter of the antihero but also inscribes *Lilyhammer* to 'quality television'. By complying with the stereotype on this level and simultaneously referring to 'quality television', the character of Frank becomes almost embroidered. Again it shows that Netflix not only uses the parameter of the antihero but also foregrounds this use.

The parameter of the antihero does not apply to all Netflix characters. Nevertheless, the antihero does seem to be a theme, just as masculinity, that is often referred to in Netflix originals. The parameter becomes present by depicting moral ambiguity in the tone of the series by using the mise-en-scène or asking attention for small details. The paradoxical atmosphere also manifests itself within several characters. Remarkable is how in each series this presence of moral ambiguity is created right from the start: most examples either come from the opening scene or the first episode of a series. Furthermore, the tactics used to employ this parameter to the Netflix content are quite emphatic. Directly addressing the audience explaining the theme, the use of stereotypes while simultaneously employing intertextual references, the immediate introduction of childhood traumas and the fact that these tactics are used from the very first moment shows that the antihero is emphasized. Not

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[110] Hart, E. (2007) 'Destabilising Paradise: Men, Women and Mafiosi: Sicilian Stereotypes', in: *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 28, no. 2: p. 217.
[111] Bruzzi, S. (1997) 'The instabilities of the Franco-American Gangster', in: S. Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and identity in the movies*. New York: Routledge: pp. 83, 86 – 87.

only is the presence of the antihero important, but the series make sure that this presence is also recognized.

1.3 Ideal vs. Real: Shifting Moral Boundaries in *Narcos*

Sarah Cardwell explains in *Is Quality Television Any Good?* that 'quality television' often shows a relationship between on the one hand the mythic and ideal and on the other the actualities of everyday. This is done by treating subjects that have affected humankind for centuries: for instance death, relationships with our bodies, masculinity and femininity or family relations.[112] These themes are then represented in lived life; in the actualities of everyday. Protagonists have to reconcile the idealistic idea with the more prosaic experience of it. The series itself is thus not idealistic but engages with ideals. Characters and interrelationships are affected by bigger things such as politics, ethics, work and history. The fact that the ideal is placed alongside the real is what distinguishes them from 'regular television' since that focuses only on the real.[113] Characters are not just emotional individuals as they are often portrayed as by soap operas: characters are 'social and political actors, […] players within a larger scheme'.[114] Cardwell gives *Six Feet Under* as an example: for the family that runs an undertaker's business from home they often encounter the difficult experience of reconciling the beliefs and ideals about life and death with their everyday, more prosaic experience of it.[115] The relationship between the ideal and the real thus impacts the characters.

According to DeFino this impact on the characters often turns into anomie. Anomie arises 'when there is an easy perceivable gap between the expressed values of a society and those that can actually be achieved' or when the prevailing traditional norms and values are perceived as empty.[116] This leads to characters that give up on striving towards the ideal; they no longer try to become better.[117] In *Mad Men* Don Draper explains that love does not exist as society think it does, 'it is just a word "invented by guys like me to sell nylons".'[118]

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[112] Cardwell, S. (2007) 'Is Quality Television Any Good?', in: J. McCabe & K. Akass (eds), *Quality TV. Contemporary American Television and Beyond*. New York, London: I.B. Tauris: p. 28.
[113] Cardwell, S. (2007): pp. 27 – 28.
[114] Cardwell, S. (2007): p. 27.
[115] Cardwell, S. (2007): p. 28.
[116] DeFino, D. (2014): p. 154.
[117] DeFino, D. (2014): p. 156.
[118] DeFino, D. (2014): p. 156.

Experiencing the ideal next to the real teaches them that reality never lives up to its promise: virtue is no reward.[119] This last parameter thus revolves around the character that experiences a discrepancy between an idealistic vision and its own lived experience and thus has difficulties reconciling the real with the ideal.

By analysing how the internal conflict of reconciling the real with the ideal within Steve Murphy is visualized in *Narcos*, insight is created in the possibilities of employing this parameter on a visual level for other Netflix originals. Next, the Netflix series will be analysed again from a structural level. This parameter asks for a specific structure; only then is it possible to portray a complex character and attain the hallmark of 'quality television', which is complexity.[120]

Negotiating Through Lighting

Steve mentions that what caused him to go to Colombia was an idealistic idea: his father's duty-bound and fearless, patriotic masculinity. Based on this idea he thought it was his duty to fight in this war. The ideal at stake in *Narcos* is thus this patriotic masculinity that is connected to traditional moral values and also presents complying to these moral values as a natural given. Complying with this ideal, Steve arrives in Colombia. As he is fighting this war against drugs, his lived experience starts to deviate from the idealistic image: Steve starts to reassess this masculinity and the traditional moral values. He tells the viewer that 'good and bad are only relative concepts'.[121] Murphy and his partner Peña are often put in a position where they have to reconsider their moral boundaries: are they willing to cross a line in order to catch Escobar? At each of these moments Murphy renegotiates the ideal and loosens his moral boundaries multiple times. Thereby he takes a step further away from the ideal towards the more practical goal of catching Escobar. Murphy's turning point is found in *La Gran Mentira* when he decides to deliberately brake the rules and lets Carillo kill several of Escobar's hitmen. He went from bending the rules towards breaking them. A gap is thus created between the ideal and the real. Although he is not an anomic man like Don Draper or Tony Soprano because he does not abandon social standards completely, the gap between the real and the ideal leave room for anomie. DeFino explained that as the anomic man has

[119] DeFino, D. (2014): pp. 156, 158.
[120] McCabe, J. & K. Akass (2007): p. 37.
[121] Murphy, S. (2015) 'Descendo', *Narcos*. Series 1, episode 1, Netflix.

learned from real experience that virtue is no reward, he abandons morality for more practical pursuits.[122] That is exactly what Steve is doing.

By addressing the viewer directly to explain this struggle, the tactic again becomes emphatic. Moreover, the difficulties of reconciling the real with the ideal are also emphasized within the mise-en-scène. With the help of lighting a visual pattern is created that comments on the negotiation of the moral boundaries. This pattern is applied in several critical moments in which the situation asks Steve to push his moral boundaries. The first times Murphy's limits are tested is when he gets acquainted with Carillo's torture techniques in *The Palace in Flames*. Carillo has one of Escobar's man hanging upside down in a basement, naked, throws hot coffee in his face and threatens to kill him. When Murphy, Peña and Carillo walk downstairs the lighting has a sharp edge: there is a clear division between what is lit and what is in the dark (image 7). Murphy and Peña are standing in a dark area watching and in the background is very brightly lit area. As Murphy decides he does not want to be a part of this torture, he turns his back towards the camera and starts walking towards the light. In the same episode one of their informants, Barry Seal, gets killed. Steve does not think he is worth protecting because he is a criminal. Peña disagrees and wants to keep the information Seal gave them secret for Seal's safety. Steve single-handedly decides to share that information with other colleagues anyway, which gets Seal killed. During the conversation in which Peña confronts Murphy there is again a very bright source of light: the window in their office forms a beam of light. Instead of moving towards it, Murphy now blocks it. He is looking at photo negatives and holds them between the window and his face. From the viewpoint of the camera the negatives are exactly placed between his face and the window creating a visual blockade between the two (image 8). The pattern is visible again at Murphy's turning point in *La Gran Mentira*. The lighting comes in from the right side of the screen. When Murphy picks up the phone his face is directed towards the light. Once on the phone he starts turning around. He turns his back towards the light source, which causes his face to be underexposed. Eventually his face is completely covered in the shadow (image 9). The moving towards or away from the light shows the negotiation of the gap between the real and the ideal. This negotiation is again emphasized in *Le Catedral*, after Steve's turning point. One of their informants has information about Escobar, but he wants information in return. This time Murphy actually chooses virtue

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[122] DeFino, D. (2014): p. 156.

over practicality and declines the offer. The lighting however is completely different from the previous moments. Their conversation is held on either the top of a building or hill because the background shows the city by night with all its lights. In the close-ups of the characters, these background lights lie outside the depth-of-field which creates a blur: their faces are surrounded by little bubbles of light (image 10). The pattern started with a clear edge between light and dark: it was very clear where the line was drawn, literally. After breaking the rules and crossing a moral line this division is not as clear anymore. With the help of this lighting pattern *Narcos* is able to foreground this character that is constantly negotiating the real with the ideal. By repeating this pattern in crucial moments in the narrative, the series foregrounds its compliance with this parameter of 'quality television'.

Besides Steve Murphy, Piper Chapman is also struggling with an ideal. She has to deal with her family members who are disappointed that she did not achieve the expectations that society has for someone with her background: white, educated, upper middle-class and with a steady upbringing. She failed first of all because she carried drug money, but also because she was a lesbian. Everybody thought she was attaining the ideal and it is the real life situation of her imprisonment that knocks Piper off her idealistic pedestal. It is because of her real lived experience in prison that Piper comes to terms with her failure: she realises that she is not a victim of the justice system or of Alex, who mentioned her to the police. She is in jail because of her own bad choices. She lets go of the expectations of this virtuous ideal that she long tried to achieve. But from then on it is her environment who does not let go of the ideal: her fellow inmates still see her as 'the privileged white girl' and her family still believes in her innocence. This puts Piper in an unusual position: she cannot reach the ideal because of her current situation but she cannot get rid of the ideal either. She is stuck between on the one hand expectations created by the ideal, and the real, lived experience.

The Complex Conflict
Complexity is one of the hallmarks of 'quality television'. In multiple aspects of a quality series complexity is aspired after: Mittell foregrounds its narrative complexity, Jonathan Bignell has pointed out thematic complexity and McCabe and Akass mention complex characters as an

aspect of 'quality television'.[123+124+125] The parameter of the character that has to negotiate the ideal and real is connected to the aspect of the complex character. It is through the internal conflict that is created by the gap between the ideal and the real, that a complex character can be created.[126] When successfully creating such a character, it evokes with the viewer a critical thinking about these values and ideals.[127] According to Cardwell this parameter provides the viewer with the ability to regard his or her life slightly differently 'especially in terms of the relationship (of whatever kind) between the physical and practical elements of life and the ideals and ideas that are not customarily visible but that are nevertheless determining.'[128] These television shows raise the thoughts and observations of the viewer above the level of the prosaic and quotidian and in doing so they show, reshape and reassess the significance of the everyday.[129] In order to reach this critical thinking the internal conflict within a character is crucial, otherwise it lacks in complexity which is 'quality television's hallmark. Netflix is not able to achieve this in every series. Both *House of Cards* and *Sense8* over-represent either the ideal or the real which is at the cost of the internal conflict that this parameter of 'quality television' requires.

House of Cards represents politics: a public sphere in which ideals and principles are central.[130] However, this idealistic sphere is overshadowed by Underwood's feelings of revenge and anger that come from his everyday life. His thoughts and actions do not come from a negotiation with an ideal and Frank will never let himself be guided by ideals. Instead, he is guided by self-interest. The first subject that the new administration wants to tackle in *House of Cards* is education and Underwood is asked to manage the process of creating a passable bill. Instead of taking the opportunity to let his own ideas about education come to the fore he uses this position to his advantage to get revenge: he leaks a first draft of the bill that is far too leftist too pass to the press which could damage to the reputation of new president Walker. Idealistic subjects are used without hesitation for personal gain. The real

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[123] Mittell, J. (2006): p. 30.
[124] McCabe, J. & K. Akass (2007): p. 169.
[125] McCabe, J. & K. Akass (2007): p. 37.
[126] DeFino, D. (2014): pp. 153, 155 – 156, 159.
[127] DeFino, D. (2014): pp. 153, 162.
[128] Cardwell, S. (2007): p. 30.
[129] Cardwell, S. (2007): p. 30.
[130] Cardwell, S. (2007): p. 27.

overwhelms the ideal and therefore it becomes difficult for the viewer to reflect on the relationship between the ideal and the physical.

Sense8 shows a similar over-representation: a lot of the main characters are idealistic. Nomi is a political activist for the LGBT community, Sun is an example for the emancipation of women in a culture that regards women as less worthy, Will bases his actions and opinions on his moral compass and ethics and the religious Kala never questions her belief. When these principles are shown in the realities of everyday life it does not lead to negotiation or reconciliation. Ideals mostly seem to exist in reality trouble-free. Dividing screen time between eight main characters can of course be the cause of this lack of problematizing ideals: there is simply not enough time to deepen the relationship between ideal and real for each character. The only one who struggles with the ideal and the real is Lito, who experiences a discrepancy between his hypermasculine image and his sexual proclivity. But overall, the prosaic experience of ideals is lacking and therefore Sense8 is not so much engaging with ideals but more being idealistic.

The analysis has shown that some Netflix characters do experience a discrepancy between the ideal and the real which leads to an internal negotiation of ideals and virtues. This negotiation does not immediately lead to anomie. Both Steve and Piper have not given up on social and moral values completely. Steve still creates moral boundaries for himself even after he has deliberately crossed them. Piper can show an anomic performance but also sticks to virtuous behaviour at times. However, at this point it is clear that both characters are in a process of negotiating the ideal and one of the possible outcomes of that process is anomie. Narcos emphasizes this process by connecting it to a pattern that can be found in the mise-en-scène. It is through repetition of this pattern that Steve's struggle with the real and the ideal is foregrounded.

Remarkable is how some Netflix series do discuss the relationship between the ideal and the real but not achieve an internal negotiation within its protagonist. That happens because they have over-represented either the ideal or the real. House of Cards and Sense8 are examples of that. By presenting this imbalance these series miss the opportunity to let their viewers think critically about these values and ideals. Negotiating the ideal through the real offers an opportunity to transcend the notion of entertainment. Providing the viewer with experiences and reflections, letting them take meanings out of the series, shows a depth that

is not found in entertainment. It transcends the image of entertainment as mass culture, uniform and standardised and instead takes on the image of an artistic and cultural product that is made as an utopian critique.[131+132] At first sight, Netflix takes this opportunity but does not always follow through.

Thematic Resemblance

Through its characters Netflix shows a compliance with multiple parameters of 'quality television'. These parameters are masculinity, the antihero and the internal negotiation of ideals. The theme of masculinity is addressed by showing the struggle that comes with attaining an ideal masculinity or trying to conform to a certain norm or code. It does not show masculinity as a natural given, but emphasizes it as a construction that can be performed and also negotiated. Remarkable is how the only Netflix original focusing on women chooses to foreground this aspect. Through editing the struggle of Piper with the masculine code is emphasized: it presents her as speechless and bewildered.

The antihero is another parameter that Netflix applies to its content. Creating an ambivalent tone right form the opening scene of a series and portraying characters with paradoxical traits are tactics that attribute to the portrayal of this particular parameter. Most of the tactics used were quite emphatic, making the presence of the parameter abundantly clear. *Narcos*, *Sense8* and *Lilyhammer* all foregrounded the presence of the antihero.

The internal struggle of the negotiation of the ideal through the real showed a more complicated picture: although several series have shown a deviation of the real from the ideal, this is not always portrayed within the structure of an internal struggle. The series thus focuses more on the appearance of this parameter of 'quality television,' then on the foundational base that carries this appearance.

Combining the three parameters, the analysis shows that Netflix depicts a thematic resemblance towards 'quality television' by discussing themes such as masculinity, ideals and moral ambiguity. There are several gradations in the treatment of these themes. Masculinity can be expanded into an ideal that a character struggles with, or into a performance and construction that is negotiated. In the case of *House of Cards* and *Lilyhammer*, masculinity is

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[131] Hesmondhalgh, D. (2013) *The Cultural Industries*. London: Sage: p. 24.
[132] Hartley, J., J. Potts, S. Cunningham, T. Flew, M. Keane, J. Banks (2013) *Key Concepts in Creative Industries*. London: Sage: p. 78.

only a subject since it is a show that revolves around men and subsequently around their handling of masculinity. The same can be said of the antihero: in *Narcos* moral ambiguity is the main theme. However, in *Lilyhammer* it is used for familiarity. To compare the two: *Narcos* uses at least seven hours of footage to establish an image of their antihero, *Lilyhammer* only uses its introduction, which lasts six minutes.

The several gradations in treatment of these subjects show that the specific identity Netflix tries to build focuses mainly on a thematic level and not as much on a structural level. For Netflix it is more important to emphasize the fact that these themes are being discussed than how these themes are being discussed. With *Orange Is the New Black* Netflix is able to foreground the treatment of the struggle concerning masculinity. With four different series the topic of moral complexity is introduced and emphasized. And through several originals an appearance of a gap between the ideal and the real is created, however without attaining its structural base.

Chapter 2: Mise-en-scène

John Caldwell explains that television retheorized its presentational and aesthetic task and therefore the aspects of stylization and spectacle came to the fore.[133] The visual element is prioritized in television, which means that the pleasure of watching TV not only lies in the narrative but also in the imagery on screen.[134] Style was no longer a signifier, a vessel for content, ideas and issues, but became an important signified in television series.[135] Style became part of the text. In *Television Aesthetics and Style*, Janet McCabe analyses the 'HBO aesthetics'. The branding tactics of this channel has imposed HBO 'as a model for producing the highest quality television possible'.[136] Their original programming philosophy is implanted with a heightened sense of commercial and cultural worth which in turn translates into TV style and aesthetic sensibilities. According to McCabe, HBO not only defines but also makes visible the contemporary era of television art.[137] In her analysis of one of their signature shows, *Boardwalk Empire*, she shows that the story is told '*in* and *through* its stylistically ornate and expensive-looking *mise en scène*.'[138] HBO has taken the tradition of a self-conscious performance of style in television, which started in the 1980s, to another level: a rebirth of television style.[139] The fact that HBO as part of 'quality television' and television art has elevated a self-conscious performance of style into the telling of a story in and through mise-en-scène, shows the importance of discussing the theme within this analysis. The fact that 'quality television' belongs to a tradition that emphasises mise-en-scène and style up to a point that it becomes no longer a vessel for context but is part of the text, emphasizes the importance of this particular theme.

Within the theme of mise-en-scène three particular aspects will be focused on: glossy style, authorial style and stylistic integrity. Just like the previous chapter, in each aspect one Netflix original will function as a starting point. They are then compared to the other series in

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[133] Caldwell, J. (1995) *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press: p. 5.
[134] Mills, B. (2013) 'What does it mean to call television 'cinematic'?', in: J. Jacobs & S. Peacock (eds), *Television Aesthetics and Style*. New York, London: Bloomsbury: p. 58.
[135] Caldwell, J. (1995): p. 5.
[136] McCabe, J. (2013): p. 186.
[137] McCabe, J. (2013): p. 187.
[138] McCabe, J. (2013): p. 188.
[139] McCabe, J. (2013): p. 188.

order to create a broader perspective about if and how Netflix original content employs these parameters of 'quality television' regarding mise-en-scène.

The first parameter is the glossy style of 'quality television'. Every quality series shows a certain amount of this visual sumptuousness and shininess: it is a look that focuses on creating immaculate beauty and glamour. The look is bright, attractive, clean and spacious: [140] 'a beautiful spectacle [and] visual delight.' [141] Looking at the glossiness of the Netflix originals can give a first indicator whether Netflix also prioritizes the visual according to the tradition. *House of Cards* will be central to this aspect: as will become clear, this series foregrounds its glamorous and glossy aspects in several ways. It is therefore a clear example of how glossiness can manifest itself and thus what to look for in the other Netflix originals.

Second, authorial style is chosen because collaborating with auteurs is a custom often found in 'quality television'. According to Janet McCabe the author as discourse carries cultural capital and creative meaning that can help to establish a certain reputation for a series and its producer. An author can deliver a visual template to a show.[142] It is interesting to see in what ways Netflix uses this technique to establish a reputation of quality for both the organisation as well as the individual original series. For the analysis of authorial style *Lilyhammer* will be the starting point. *Lilyhammer* was Netflix's first original series and therefore stood at the beginning of creating a reputation for both their original content and the company. It will become clear that with *Lilyhammer* Netflix made a very clear choice in how they want to portray themselves and their content.

The last theme is stylistic integrity. Sarah Cardwell explains that glossiness is not enough: theme and style have to be intertwined creating stylistic integrity. This parameter is displayed when there is a high level of synthesis or cohesion presented between stylistic choices and the 'meanings' of a series.[143] This combination leads to a discussion or negotiation of these, often moral or ideological, meanings and thus invites critical thinking about these subjects.[144] Since 'looks' alone are not enough, it is necessary to create insight in how mise-en-scène goes beyond being a mere vessel and becomes part of the text by contributing, in this case, on a thematic level. *Marco Polo* will play a central role in the analysis of stylistic

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[140] Nelson, R. (2007): p. 133.
[141] McCabe, J. & K. Akass (2007): p. 40.
[142] McCabe, J. (2013): p. 190.
[143] Cardwell, S. (2007): p. 30.
[144] DeFino, D. (2014): p. 153.

integrity. The series negotiates an ideal masculinity of the adventurer mainly by using visual techniques. Therefore, it fits with the aspect of stylistic integrity to combine theme and visual style. It gives a clear picture of the ways in which mise-en-scène can contribute to a theme.

By focusing on these aspects mise-en-scène will be highlighted in three different ways: the appearance of mise-en-scène, mise-en-scène as a technique or tool and mise-en-scène in relation to other aspects of a television series focusing on how they work together. This gives a more complete image of how Netflix employs mise-en-scène in their original content when it comes to the notion of 'quality television'.

2.1 Glossy Television: The Glamour of *House of Cards*

In *Televisuality* Caldwell explains that since the 1990s television has begun to portray a self-conscious performance of style.[145] More and more style itself became the subject of television: 'In fact, this self-consciousness of style became so great that it can more accurately be described as an activity, as a performance of style, rather than as a particular look.'[146] Style was no longer a signifier, a vessel for content, ideas and issues, but became an important signified in television series.[147] What had always belonged in the background, now came to the fore. Televisuality stands for a structural inversion 'between narrative and discourse, form and content, subject and style.'[148]

Many have called this prioritising of the visual in 'quality television' 'cinematic'. This stems from the longstanding distinction between cinema and television on supposed specificities. Horace Newcomb explained intimacy, continuity and immediacy as the primary attributes of television, while visual stylishness belongs to cinema.[149] This raises the idea of 'quality television' having a cinematic glossy look like Hollywood has: 'American quality television would seem to indicate expensive output with high production values as typically exemplified by cinema' according to Robin Nelson.[150] Deborah Jaramillo shows that the term cinematic television is highly problematic. It holds a hierarchy in place of cinema as being

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[145] Caldwell, J. (1995): p. VII.
[146] Caldwell, J. (1995): p. 5.
[147] Caldwell, J. (1995): p. 5.
[148] Caldwell, J. (1995): p. 6.
[149] McCabe, J. & K. Akass (2007): p. 158.
[150] Nelson, R. (2007): pp. 180, 184.

superior to television, it does not help to understand where the sound and look of television are developing towards and it implicates that cinema has understood some sort of essence that lacks in television.[151] This is why in this analysis the broader, not medium specific term glossy television will be used. Glossiness stands for visual sumptuousness and shininess, and all 'quality TV' output has a certain amount of this according to Robin Nelson. Glossy can be understood as a shiny, smooth, stylish and glamourous visual style. It is a certain look that is brightly lit, contains conventionally attractive performers 'with white teeth and immaculate hair' and it is located in a clean, spacious, well-furnished environment.[152] It is 'a beautiful spectacle [and] visual delight.'[153] It is often set across from the British tradition of social realism: an inexpensive studio or grainy documentary look.[154] Nelson explains it as a legacy of early Hollywood glamour. Within the generic glossy look there is a range of visual styles.[155]

It will become clear that all originals show a certain amount of glossiness, but some, and in particular *House of Cards*, use several techniques to emphasize their glamorous assets. At first sight *House of Cards* already fits the bill of glossy television: the story plays out in a well-furnished environment with spacious living rooms and luxurious hotels, which gives the series a glamorous look. The characters are dressed in tailor-made clothing and look attractive. Even in private the characters' appearances are tidy and good-looking most of the time. For example, in *Chapter 27* Frank and Claire have a discussion in the middle of the night in their pyjama's and their look is still sophisticated. The wealth displayed in the mise-en-scène gives the series a glossiness and visual sumptuousness: it creates a visual delight. However, *House of Cards* does not leave it at that and chooses to enhance this glamour by turning it into a priority within the mise-en-scène. Shiny and glamourous elements are foregrounded by using three techniques: with the help of symmetry, details and by giving the décor an unusual amount of space the presence of the glossy style is stressed.

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[151] Jaramillo, D. (2013) 'Rescuing television from 'the cinematic': the perils of dismissing television style', in: J. Jacobs & S. Peacock (eds), *Television Aesthetics and Style*. New York, London: Bloomsbury: pp. 67 – 68.

[152] Nelson, R. (2007): p. 133.

[153] McCabe, J. & K. Akass (2007): p. 40.

[154] Nelson, R. (2007): p. 133.

[155] Nelson, R. (2007): p. 183.

Symmetry

The series chooses to often display décors that are highly symmetrical. This symmetry is mostly bilateral which makes it a striking element of the mise-en-scène: it has come to the fore as a clear stylistic choice that through repetition has become a visual signature of the show. [156] Several examples can be found throughout the series. For example, in *Chapter 41* there are twenty-one moments in which the symmetry of the mise-en-scène is emphasized (images 11 and 12). Other examples are *Chapter 8* that shows at least sixteen of these moments or *Chapter 18* that has fourteen. Louis Thonsgaard explains that the use of symmetry in film is a composition that draws attention to itself. [157] It is thus with the symmetrical shots that *House of Cards* can ask attention for its glamorous and glossy décor since that is what the symmetry is built out of. It sends a clear message to the viewer: the mise-en-scène is worth paying attention to and thereby it shows a prioritization of the visual and a foregrounding of its glossy elements.

Another Netflix series that asks attention for its glossy aspects through symmetry is *Marco Polo*. Especially the décor of the court of Kublai Khan shows a high degree of symmetry. Again by creating a symmetrical composition the attention is drawn to the mise-en-scène itself. In this case symmetry is also part of a more encompassing tactic of creating excessive visual events. Historical representation is associated with visual excess and the genre has the tendency to create visual events that are excessive and overwhelming both in scale and detail. History and the spectacle are inseparable. [158] Wide shots that establish grand dimensions, emphasizing the scale of architecture, panoramic views, massive crowd scenes and the visual trope of a sky filled with arrows are all genre conventions of the period piece. [159] *Marco Polo* shows all of these conventions and thereby literally creates 'a beautiful spectacle'. [160] By creating overwhelming and excessive visual events the series foregrounds its glossiness and visual sumptuousness.

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[156] McCabe, J. & K. Akass (2007): p. 160.
[157] Thonsgaard, L. (March 2003) 'Symmetry - the Forbidden Fruit of Picture Composition in Film', *P.O.V. A Danish Journal of Film Studies*, 8, no. 15: pp. 181 – 196.
[158] Stubbs, J. (2013) 'Spectacle, Technology, and Aesthetics', in: J. Stubbs, *Historical Film: A Critical Introduction*, New York, London: Bloomsbury: pp. 152- 153.
[159] Stubbs, J. (2013): pp. 149 – 151.
[160] McCabe, J. & K. Akass (2007): p. 40.

Spacious Décors

A second way *House of Cards* draws attention to its glossiness is by giving the mise-en-scène an unusual amount of space at moments that the viewer may not expect it. This is linked to the series' stylistic choice concerning close-ups: they are only used occasionally. This means that sometimes the viewer gets access to the reaction and emotions that can be read on the character's faces through a close-up but sometimes this access is denied. In *Chapter 11* Claire returns home after a short extramarital affair. Frank is waiting for her in the living room, aware of what she has been up to. Claire walks towards Frank and they hug each other. This is shown in a medium long shot; the viewer does not get any closer than that. One of the effects of this stylistic choice is that even in moments of which one expects that emotion will be the focus point, the shiny mise-en-scène is not out of the picture. The medium long shot shows a lot of other elements to look at besides Claire and Frank.

The same technique is used in dialogue scenes. The conventional shot for a dialogue scene is a medium shot, according to Bordwell.[161] *House of Cards* chooses however to show certain dialogues in a medium long shot or long shot. Thereby, it foregrounds the presence of the décor because the tactic deviates from the norm. An example can be found when Claire and Frank are arguing in *Chapter 41* visualized in a medium longshot (image 13). This scene illustrates their failing partnership but still the shot leaves plenty of room to show off its luxurious décor and even again portrays it in a symmetrical manner. Another example is found in the dialogue between Frank and Petrov: they are on the phone with one another which is portrayed in long shots. Instead of channelling all the attention to the storyline the series instead demands attention for its surroundings. In these shots Frank and Petrov are only one of the many details that are presented for the viewer to look at.

Other Netflix originals show a similar glossy base as *House of Cards* has, but not all focus their attention on foregrounding this aspect. The base however is visible in all Netflix series: the scenes are carefully lit, the characters look handsome even in distressing moments and are portrayed in mostly spacious, well-organized environments. Overall, the elements of the mise-en-scène work together to create a picture that is nice to look at. For example, *Orange Is the*

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[161] Bordwell, D. (2006) *The Way Hollywood Tells it: Story and Style in Modern Movies*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press: p. 133.

New Black: although the female inmates do not look glamorous they are still shown in a somewhat favourable light. With make up and lighting the close ups show their faces with a polished look.

Details

A third and last tactic *House of Cards* uses to foreground its style is through details. A high level of detail is an often mentioned aspect of 'quality television'.[162] It also endorses the idea of the smoothness and sleekness by giving the impression of a carefully tended style. What it focuses on the most, however, is prioritizing the visual: by giving attention to details the series implies that style and mise-en-scène play a part that goes beyond being a vessel for content. 'Quality television' allows the focus to narrow down to a small detail that can be connotatively rich and encourages the viewer to do interpretative work.[163] It is for *House of Cards* also another way to foreground its glossiness. By giving details thematic importance the viewer is invited to pay attention to its glossy details. Two different details will be analysed: first a detail in Frank Underwood's choice of words, second a detail in the décor of *House of Cards*.

During the inauguration of president Walker in *Chapter 1* Frank Underwood talks directly to the viewer about his position within the frame. This scene is shot from two perspectives: there is the footage that looks like it is broadcasted live by CNN which focuses on the President's speech and there is the camera that not only focuses on the president but also on Frank. He is explaining to the viewer that power is linked to location: the closer to the source, the higher the value and power. About the CNN broadcast he says: 'centuries from now when people watch this footage, who will they see smiling just at the edge of the frame?'[164] The camera moves away from president Walker, leaving him out of the frame, and moves towards Frank who waves to the camera. This scene shows two things. First, Frank connects power to the location someone has within the frame. Frank directly acknowledges the importance of space within the mise-en-scène and the possibility of analysing it in terms of power. John Gibbs calls space a vital expressive element for the filmmaker and shows that the disposition of actors and the camera make available the metaphorical power of a scene. The meaning of a scene is dependent, among other things, on the organisation of actors and

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[162] Cardwell, S. (2007): p. 30.
[163] Cardwell, S. (2007): p. 28.
[164] Underwood, F. (2012) 'Chapter 1', *House of Cards*. Series 1, episode 1, Netflix.

camera.[165] Second, this knowledge is directly put to use when the 'regular' camera leaves Walker out of the picture and moves to Frank: Frank is centred. The movement of the camera makes it clear what Frank's intentions are: gaining more power and value. Through this detail the series give a positive value judgement about image analysis. By first explicitly addressing the idea and then executing it, the series foregrounds this judgement and lets the viewer know that the image is not just a vessel but belongs to the text of the series.

Another way *House of Cards* chooses to prioritize the visual is by the level of detail in the décor. A telling example is found in the interior decoration in Frank's rooms: his offices and bedroom. These spaces have more pointy and sharp objects in them than other rooms. Both in his private office and the Oval Office Frank has lamps and mantelpieces that are ornamented with what looks like gold-plated pineapple leaves. They are sharp, pointy and create fanciful lines within the frame. Although only a small detail, their presence is foregrounded within the mise-en-scène: multiple times they are put in the foreground of the frame very close to the camera when it is directed towards Frank (image 14). Their pointy shapes do not make the frame more aesthetically pleasing; it is almost as if their sharp edges force themselves into the frame. The sharp shapes emphasize Frank's scheming and felonious character.

Narcos being a period piece of the seventies and eighties also has a distinct relationship with details in several different elements of the show. A connection between attention to detail and period pieces is found more often. A well known period piece within 'quality television' is *Mad Men*. Alan Sepinwall explains: 'The detail work turned *Mad Men* itself into a time machine like the Kodak slide projector.'[166] Jeremy Butler in *How To Watch Television* confirms this by saying that *Mad Men* is a carefully constructed period piece with a distinct look: 'the program has vividly evoked mid-century American life—the hairstyles and clothing, the offices and homes'.[167] Butler also remarks that the dressing of the sets with time-appropriate objects creates a certain viewing pleasure of picking out the period details.[168] It is likely that *Narcos* aimed at that same pleasure by creating a style that fits with the seventies

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[165] Gibbs, J. (2002) *Mise-en-scène: Film Style and Interpretation*. New York: Wallflower: p. 17.

[166] Sepinwall, A. (2012) *The Revolution Was Televised: The Cops, Crooks, Slingers and Slayers Who Changed TV Drama Forever*. Los Gatos: Smashwords: p. 347.

[167] Butler, J. (2013) 'Mad Men: Visual Style', in: E. Thompson & J. Mittell, *How to Watch Television*. New York, London: New York University Press: pp. 38 – 39.

[168] Butler, J. (2013): p. 41.

and eighties. Characters wear flared and bleached jeans, denim jackets, striped blouses with big collars and big glasses. The men have moustaches and the women have big wavy hair. The scenes in Miami show art deco buildings, pastel colours and eighties cars. The seventies and eighties are also found in the interior of their houses: Murphy lives in a mint green apartment with different patterned wallpapers. The non-diegetic music that is used references to eighties synth-pop and in bars and clubs a lot of neon lighting is used. Throughout the series there are several period details to be picked up on. This means that the viewer gets a constant reminder of the series' high production values. Whatever happens within the narrative, the viewer is also reminded of the smooth and sleek style of the series. It is through the repetition of visual reminders that the glossy side of *Narcos* is foregrounded.

It has become clear that all Netflix series have a glossy base, they have a certain amount of sumptuousness and shininess to them. Some series leave it at that and others use certain techniques to foreground this parameter of 'quality television'. *House of Cards* uses the most techniques by showing a repetition in composition and camera shots that both ask attention for the mise-en-scène and foreground its shiny assets. Other techniques are creating visual excess or a viewing pleasure with the help of details within the mise-en-scène. Giving the mise-en-scène a prominent position within the content of Netflix also emphasizes the idea of prioritizing the visual. As *House of Cards* has shown by its intricate details: the style is not a vessel but part of the text. When assessing details of a series their connotatively rich side will come to the fore. This prioritization of the visual is a first step in applying the parameter of the prominent role mise-en-scène has within 'quality television'. Glossiness alone it not enough as Sarah Cardwell states: it also has to move beyond its glossiness of style and the style has to intertwine with the themes of the series.[169]

The prioritization of the visual shows that Netflix complies with the social hierarchy in terms of brands. Robin Nelson explains that in Western culture the look of a product is all-important: 'in the economy of postmodernity, general commodity production and sales are typically marked by branding, displayed in visual style and logos.'[170] In the current social climate the personal identity has been called into question, which lead people wanting to

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[169] Cardwell, S. (2007): p. 26.
[170] Nelson, R. (2007): p. 182.

refashion their identities. Commodities are designed to help with this process which lead to the reconstruction of social hierarchy in terms of brands. By producing products that foreground the visual, the stylish and the glossy Netflix puts itself high up in the hierarchy. Viewers will start to use Netflix commodities to create their personal identities. This leads to the idea that if one does not commit to Netflix they mark themselves as inferior because one cannot see the difference in quality.[171]

2.2. Auteurs: A New Series from the Creator of …

In *Television Aesthetics and Style* Janet McCabe mentions that HBO frequently works together with film auteurs, often linked with American independent cinema. 'Drawing directly on the talents of auteur celebrities […] known for bringing something unique to a particular genre enables HBO to sell its signature shows as exceptional, happening only once and never again.'[172] Working together with auteurs helps in two ways: first, working with someone who has an established reputation makes sure that a coherent authorial vision with a visual style is behind the show.[173] Second, it amplifies the belief in the creative contribution that, in this case, HBO is making to contemporary TV culture and makes sure the company's commodities stay at the high end of the social hierarchy of brands.[174] McCabe explains: 'the auteur as discourse carries important creative meaning and cultural capital that help establish a reputation for a new series.'[175] As an example she takes Martin Scorsese who directed the pilot episode of HBO's *Boardwalk Empire*. The mise-en-scène shows many elements that Scorsese is known for. The viewer is thus constantly reminded of the fact that they are 'watching art (re)assembled, piece by piece, from familiar fragments of older cultural myths and Hollywood storytelling.'[176]

Just like HBO, Netflix has a similar connection to American independent film. Netflix was a means for independent movies that would not get theatrical distribution to get

[171] Nelson, R. (2007): p. 182.
[172] McCabe, J. (2013): p. 189.
[173] McCabe, J. & K. Akass (2008) 'It's not TV, it's HBO's original programming: Producing quality TV', in: M. Leverette, B. Ott & C. Buckley (eds), *It's not TV: Watching HBO In the Post Television Era*. New York: Routledge: p. 88.
[174] McCabe, J. (2013): p. 190.
[175] McCabe, J. (2013): p. 190.
[176] McCabe, J. (2013): p. 191.

distributed after all. For Netflix it meant exclusive content. It also brought Netflix a brand identity of being hip, serious and outside of the mainstream:[177] 'Netflix as a top underdog brand, cool and mighty with an ironic wink.'[178] Besides a reputation for the company as a whole, each individual original also needs to build up a reputation. Netflix searches for legitimization and thereby tries to build up a reputation in two different ways. First, this is done by alliancing their own products with other television series and their visual style. As will become clear, these series are often considered to be 'quality television'. Second, the originals show their own quality by referencing to cinema. This is done by either referencing to certain movies or by working together with an auteur.

As Qualitative as *The Sopranos*

The auteur of Netflix' first original series *Lilyhammer* is not a director but an actor: Steven van Zandt who played Silvio Dante in *The Sopranos* from 1999 until 2007. Silvio was Tony's *Consigliere* and therefore an often appearing character in the series. The fact that he played this part for eight years and did not play any other leading parts before or after *The Sopranos* makes his name and appearance connected to the gangster genre and also to 'quality television'. It is through this connection that Netflix has access to an authorial vision with a visual style and a belief in a creative contribution. To attain this *Lilyhammer* uses references to *The Sopranos*. These references are found at three different aspects of the series: within the appearance and behaviour of its main character, on a visual level and also in a direct manner by using certain actors, music or when it written directly into the dialogue.

In *The Sopranos* Silvio was the owner of the strip club, he had a loud appearance with gaudy suits, mannerisms and pompadour hair. Silvio was also a diplomatic figure, someone who was skilled in not rocking the boat.[179] When comparing this to *Lilyhammer*'s Frank Tagliano there are similarities to be found. Before Frank immigrated he owned a nightclub in New York and in Lillehammer he again opens up one. His appearance is equally loud: he sticks to his shiny suits in Lillehammer even though nobody dresses up like that and his hair is pompadour-like. The mannerisms are also present. In New York he was named Frankie the

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[177] Keating, G. (2012) *Netflixed: The Epic Battle For America's Eyeballs*. New York: Portfolio / Penguin: p. 211.
[178] Keating, G. (2012): p. 210.
[179] Vincent, C. (2008) *Paying Respect to The Sopranos: A Psychosocial Analysis*. Jefferson, London: McFarland & Company: pp. 38 – 39.

Fixer and was known for getting along with everyone. The position of the likeable fixer is reminiscent of Silvio's diplomatic tendencies of keeping the peace and not letting situations escalate.

On a visual level the series also refers to *The Sopranos*. The opening credits of *The Sopranos* show Tony driving through Jersey to his house and it shows the view from outside the car window. Frank's journey is depicted in a similar way. When he leaves New York he is shown inside a car followed by a shot out of the car window that shows the skyline of Manhattan. Once he is in Lillehammer Frank is shown inside of a train and again the view from the window is shown. This scene from the first episode become the opening credits of *Lilyhammer*. Even though the opening credits are not identical, both show a journey of its main character with shots from inside a vehicle.

Lilyhammer takes the references to a more direct level in the episode *Ghosts*. Frank returns to New York to kill Aldo Delucci, the mobster who ordered Franks death twice. Frank calls his former partner Angelina about his return. Angelina's part is played by Maureen van Zandt, who also played the wife of Silvio Dante in *The Sopranos*, Gabriella Dante.[180] Angelina tells Frank on the phone that his return 'is like a *Sopranos* episode'.[181] After Frank has put down the phone the song *Woke Up This Morning* of Alabama 3 starts playing; the song of the opening credits of *The Sopranos*. While the music is playing the viewer sees Frank inside a car alternated with shots of the view from outside the car window. Again a very direct reference to the opening credits of *The Sopranos*. In order to get to Delucci, Frank needs the help of his estranged brother. When he goes to reconcile with his brother it turns out that the part of Tony Tagliano is played by Tony Sirico, who played Paulie Gualtieri in *The Sopranos*.[182] The episode is full of mostly very direct references to the HBO series. Also in other episodes there are references to be found. For instance, in *Tiger Boy* Frank lies in the hospital in a room together with a mental patient. Out of the blue this man starts calling him Silvio.

This repetition of intertextuality on several levels is a tool to foreground its position within 'quality television'. Jim Collins calls this referencing-as-positioning. According to Collins intertextual references have become a marker of 'quality television' because it takes up a

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[180] S.n. (2016) 'Maureen van Zandt', *IMDB*.
http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0888347/?ref_=fn_al_nm_1 (July 9, 2016).
[181] Tagliano, A. (2013) 'Ghosts', *Lilyhammer*. Series 2, episode 8, Netflix.
[182] S.n. (2016) 'Tony Sirico', *IMDB*. http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0802831/?ref_=fn_al_nm_1 (July 9, 2016).

more self-conscious position. But as 'quality television' developed across networks and production companies intertextuality has been used to situate a certain program in relation to other 'quality television' products.[183] *Lilyhammer* wants to build its own reputation by tapping into the notions of quality, creativity and coherent vision that *The Sopranos* already attains: *Lilyhammer* is related to *The Sopranos* and therefore worth watching.

Lilyhammer is not the only Netflix original that tries to get cultural cachet through television. Netflix has often worked together with directors who have worked on other 'quality television' shows. Since these directors have a background in prioritizing the visual it can help to establish a visual style that is recognisable as quality and thereby foreground the believe that the series is a creative contribution to television since that is what 'quality television' is praised for. *Orange Is the New Black* is created by Jenji Kohan, who also created *Weeds*. The series has different directors, among others Michal Trim and Phil Abraham. Trim worked on *Weeds* and *Parks and Recreation*. Abraham directed episodes of *The Sopranos*, *Mad Men*, *Breaking Bad*, *Sons of Anarchy* and *Weeds*. On *Marco Polo* also several directors have worked that are experienced in 'quality television'. David Petrarca worked on *Games of Thrones* and *Boardwalk Empire*, Daniel Minahan directed episodes of *Games of Thrones*, *Deadwood* and *Six Feet Under*, and Alik Sakharov was director at *Games of Thrones*, *Dexter* and *Boardwalk Empire*. In this case Netflix does not refer to one auteur and his of her visual signatures in particular, but to the creative meaning and cultural capital of 'quality television' in general. Working with directors who are experienced in this kind of television is a way for Netflix to inscribe its own product into the canon of quality shows.

Gangster Clichés

Lilyhammer's referencing moves beyond just *The Sopranos* and also takes on the gangster genre in general. This is done in two ways. Either by showing a visual style that the gangster genre is known for, namely gangster noir, or by adapting iconic scenes from gangster movies to fit its own narrative.

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[183] Collins, J. (1992) 'Postmodernism and Television', in: R. Allen (ed), *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press: p. 334.

In the episode *Reality Check* a pet sheep of a little boy is attacked by a wolf. Frank addresses the situation according to Mafia rules: an eye for an eye. He promises the boy that he will kill the wolf. The mise-en-scène makes it reminiscent of the gangster genre: the sheep lies in a dark ally and the chiaroscuro-like lighting only comes from the left side showing half of Frank's face and leaving the other half in the dark. The grandfather of the boy decides to shoot the sheep to release it from its misery. The shot shows the grandfather and Frank standing around the sheep and looking down while the grandfather aims his shotgun to the ground, the sheep itself cannot be seen. When the shot is fired nobody moves or blinks. The darkness, the lighting, the position of the camera and the coldness of the characters help to create a film noir style that is reminiscent of many gangster movies. Film noir and the gangster genre heavily influenced each other creating the genre of the gangster noir. The connection can still be found in several neo noir gangster films, among others in Martin Scorcese's *Goodfellas*, *Casino* and *The Departed*.[184] Frank kills the wolf and since the unlicensed killing of wild animals is forbidden in Norway, he has to get rid of the evidence. He wraps the wolf together with heavy stones into a plastic sheet and drops it into a lake to let it sink to the bottom. A technique that the audience has gotten familiar with through the gangster genre in which enemies are often left sleeping with the fishes.

Lilyhammer also shows several references to *The Godfather* trilogy. This is done by adapting iconic scenes from these movies into scenes that fit its own narrative. In the episode *Pack Your Lederhosen* Torgeir takes his brother Roar fishing. Both brothers belong to Frank's newly assembled crew and Roar just told on Frank to the local police. Torgeir takes him on a fishing trip to confront Roar with his betrayal. They are shown in a little rowing boat in the middle of the lake. Roar gets scared for a moment but eventually he is forgiven. In *The Godfather II* Fredo Corleone is taken on a fishing trip and is also shown in a little boat in the middle of a lake. On that boat he gets killed by assassin Al Neri because of his betrayal of his brother Michael Corleone.

Another very direct reference can be found in *Millwall Brick*: in the opening scene of *Lilyhammer*'s second season the opening scene of *The Godfather* is re-enacted. It begins with a man saying 'I believe in Norway' instead of 'I believe in America'. In both openings the

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[184] Spicer, A. (2010) *Historical Dictionary of Film Noir*. Lanham, Toronto, Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press: p. 106.

camera is focused on the face of these men speaking, then slowly starts zooming out until the viewer sees a desk and someone sitting across from these men. Meanwhile, the men explain their problem. In *Lilyhammer* the man complains that refugees broke the jaw of his dog, in *The Godfather* it is the jaw of the man's daughter that is broken and in both cases the police did nothing to help them. In both openings the unrecognisable men across the desk then raise their hands; in *The Godfather* this means that the man that asks for help is given a drink, in *Lilyhammer* a paper tissue. Then the viewer gets to see who is sitting behind the desk: it is Don Corleone and Frank. Both Don and Frank are dressed in a tuxedo with a red rose instead of a pocket square. The similarities continue when both Frank and Don see these men out of their offices: they both put an arm around them and say that they will take care of their problem and that one day they might call upon these men to return the favour, even though that day may never come. For now, these men should consider it a gift on this special day, since Frank's twins are getting baptized and for Don it is the day of his daughter's wedding. Both scenes take place in a similar setting: a dark office with chiaroscuro lighting and warm, dark colours. Again the visual style of the gangster noir comes to the fore.

In these examples *Lilyhammer* again shows it self-conscious position: it directly acknowledges the presence of other texts both in television and cinema. It goes further than acknowledgement since the series borrows it visual style from the gangster genre. The adaptation of iconic scenes is a way to foreground the series knowledge: *Lilyhammer* knows its classics. Furthermore, by borrowing the visual signatures the product has a similar style as products from the high end of the social hierarchy of brands. Thereby it implies that the series itself also belongs at the high end of this hierarchy.

Other Netflix originals who borrow elements from cinema are *House of Cards* and *Sense8*. With *House of Cards* Netflix works together with auteur David Fincher. He is known for *Se7en* (1995), *Fight Club* (1999), *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008) and *The Social Network* (2010) among others. His style is minimalistic; it is not about what you do as a director, it is about what you do not do. The cameras are on tripods, avoiding hand held shots. Preferably, the audience does not see that a camera is manually operated. Close-ups and moving the

camera are only used if absolutely necessary.[185] What Scorsese did for *Boardwalk Empire*, Fincher does for *House of Cards*: they deliver a visual template for the series. They create a mise-en-scène full of authorial flourishes. Exactly these moments of artifice are recognized as the celebrity auteur's own that give the series 'artistic legitimacy and cultural kudos', according to Janet McCabe.[186]

Sense8 is directed by the Wachowski siblings, who are known for *The Matrix* (1999). Their style could be described as fast-paced both in narration and mise-en-scène but they are also known for using slow motion, especially since they are the first ones to use the bullet time effect. Their visual style has Asian influences and is inspired on comic books.[187] The Wachowski's are often considered the innovators of Science Fiction because of their special effects.[188] The slow motion effect is used immediately in *Sense8*; the first time the audience sees the main characters they are portrayed in slow motion. Also the fast-paced style is a central element of *Sense8*; it is the most prominent visual signature of the series. Again the authorial style creates legitimacy and cultural cachet.

An exception is *Narcos*. Of the different directors, José Padihla is the best known. He is a Brazilian filmmaker who switches between big-budget action movies and documentaries. He directed the remake of *Robocop* (2014) but also worked on the art-house film *Rio, I Love You* (2014). For *Elite Squad* (2008) he was awarded the Golden Bear in Berlin. His name is not unfamiliar but he is not an auteur like Scorsese, Fincher or the Wachowski's. Aside from Padihla, no writer, actor with a leading role or director has significant experience with either Hollywood or 'quality television'.

This analysis has shown that Netflix tries to legitimize the quality of its original series in two ways. First of all, it tries to associate its own shows with the notion of 'quality television'. This can be done by working with people that have experience in this field of television, either people who are not known in the outside world or a celebrity auteur. A way to foreground

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[185] Salovaara, S. (October 2, 2014) 'Watch: Breaking Down David Fincher's Directorial Techniques', *Filmmaker Magazine*. http://filmmakermagazine.com/87750-watch-breaking-down-david-finchers-directorial-techniques/#.V74qaZOLTBJ (March 23 2016).
[186] McCabe, J. (2013): pp. 190 – 191.
[187] Donovan, B. (2008) *The Asian Influence on Hollywood Action Films*. Jefferson, London: McFarland: p. 219.
[188] Donovan, B. (2008): p. 219.

this association is by borrowing pieces of a visual style of certain 'quality television' shows or by direct referencing to a specific series. A second way Netflix legitimizes and foregrounds its high quality is by associating itself to cinema. Again, this can be done either by bringing in an auteur with an authorial style or by referencing to certain movies in a direct or visual manner.

The foregrounding becomes clearest in the direct techniques of *Lilyhammer*. The series fits the bill when it comes to McCabe's explanation of the connection between auteur and 'quality television': 'watching art (re)assembled, piece by piece, from familiar fragments of older cultural myths and Hollywood storytelling.' [189] *Lilyhammer* uses bits and pieces from artworks and cultural myths and reassembles them into something new. *Lilyhammer* is not just a fish out of water tale, it is also a series about Silvio Dante, *The Sopranos*, TV tropes and Hollywood classics.

What Netflix markets as originals, are thus actually assembled bits and pieces. McCabe explains that the apparent original DNA of the show actually has a palimpsest nature built out of formal techniques and visual styles of auteurs, genres and other media.[190] DeFino explains that any network can only survive if it knows how to carefully balance the familiar with the new.[191] Netflix is no exception: it has to build forward on something in order to survive. With their first original series they made their intentions clear: the layers of the palimpsest are chosen carefully in order to build a legitimization and foregrounding of quality. They decided to build forward on a basis that already has attained its label of quality. It is by reassembling these bits and pieces that the viewer keeps getting reminded of this label and that is how Netflix foregrounds it own quality.

2.3 Stylistic Integrity: Marco Polo's Masculine Adventures

Sarah Cardwell explains that 'quality television' integrates pace, style of camerawork, level of detail in the mise-en-scène, types of performances and a set of themes into 'a coherent whole that has stylistic integrity'.[192] She emphasises that she is not talking about 'a "glossiness" of style': it goes beyond this since theme and style are intertwined.[193] Thus, within stylistic

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[189] McCabe, J. (2013): p. 191.
[190] McCabe, J. (2013): p. 193.
[191] DeFino, D. (2014): p. 15.
[192] Cardwell, S. (2007): p. 30.
[193] Cardwell, S. (2007): p. 26.

integrity the concerns, themes and emphases of the series are visualized within its style in an accurate and expressive manner.[194] To illustrate her argument Cardwell refers to the series *Nip/Tuck*, a show about the lives of two plastic surgeons, and shows how the glossy style and themes come together. The stark, clinical surroundings of their practice with design furniture and strong lines is not merely a backdrop for the narrative; it reflects on the Western cultural concept of carving and designing 'better' bodies, and thus on 'the relationship between our selves and our bodies, our identities and our images.'[195]

The everyday incidents that are portrayed are transformed by the suggestion that they point to something greater: for instance broader truths about life or society.[196] DeFino explains that the themes discussed in 'quality television' are often ideological or moral: these series do not take a certain position on a particular issue but are interested in putting the values of the viewer in a more critical light and want to disrupt easy assumptions the viewer may have about that particular issue. Examples of themes that are deliberated on are religion, education, family values or sexuality. [197] In order to apply this parameter of 'quality television' the content needs to show a 'high level of synthesis and cohesion between stylistic choices and the programmes' 'meanings'.'[198] These 'meanings' have to focus on ideological or moral themes with the goal to disrupt easy assumptions about that particular theme.

This section starts with an analysis of how stylistic integrity is established in *Marco Polo*. This will give insight in how stylistic integrity can come to the fore within a series and can help to recognize similar situations in other Netflix originals. This is followed by a closer look at the structure that this stylistic integrity is built on. This will show whether the parameter is not only used on a visual level, but also on a structural level.

Complexities Visualized

The theme discussed in *Marco Polo* is the ideal masculinity. In this case that is intertwined with the ideal of fatherhood. Marco calls his father 'the adventurer' like an archetype for masculine behaviour. He cannot be more than an archetype, since he was absent during Marco's life. Nevertheless, Marco tells him that he waited all his life for the adventurer to take

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[194] Cardwell, S. (2007): p. 27.
[195] Cardwell, S. (2007): p. 28.
[196] Cardwell, S. (2007): p. 26.
[197] DeFino, D. (2014): p. 153.
[198] McCabe, J. & K. Akass (2007): p. 30.

him on a trip, and thus to become an adventurer himself. He wants to be like his father and attain this masculinity. An adventurer is 'brave, bold and reckless.'[199] He seeks thrills, takes risks and searches for excitement. By taking on and mastering an adventure a man can prove that he is strong, smart and cunning.[200] His father turns out to be a disappointment: he abandons his son by giving him to Kublai Khan as a gift so that he can continue trading on the silk route. It is from this point on that Marco starts negotiating this ideal: through his own experiences he learns that the ideal is hard to attain. The viewer sees Marco struggling with the ideal: sometimes he succeeds in performing it and sometimes he fails. The negotiation of this ideal is visualized in the mise-en-scène, which shows a synthesis between the theme and the style of the series. Furthermore, the theme discussed does not rely on easy assumptions. It does not provide a blueprint of this masculinity, but openly shows the struggle that comes with trying to attain it.[201]

Throughout the whole series, symmetry is a recurring and therefore foregrounded aspect of the mise-en-scène. The décor as well as the camerawork often emphasize symmetry: for instance, rooms that are decorated symmetrical, characters that are put between similar objects on either side or soldiers and guards that walk in symmetrical patterns. At certain moments, this symmetry is distorted by actions of Marco. It is in these moments he portrays behaviour that does not fit with the ideal masculinity of the adventurer. The symmetry is distorted when Marco shows doubt or uncertainty, or when he is unable to show the qualities of an adventurer.

This happens for the first time when Marco, his father and his uncle are brought to Khan's palace. In these shots symmetry is emphasized: the gates of the palace open right in the centre of the shot; people that are standing in front of the gate are exactly centred within the frame; the décor of Kublai Khan's throne hall is symmetrical; Marco, his father and his uncle are centred within the frame and shown in a symmetrical décor. At the moment this symmetry becomes striking, Marco sabotages it by standing slightly closer to his father. The fact that the symmetry is so carefully crafted makes is possible for details to disturb it. When walking through the gate and kneeling in front of Khan it becomes more visible how the three

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[199] Harris, I. (1995) *Messages Men Hear: Constructing Masculinities*. London, Bristol: Taylor & Francis: p. 116.
[200] Harris, I. (1995): p. 116.
[201] Lotz, A. (2014): p. 80.

Latins are not spaced evenly apart from each other, due to Marco (image 15). At the same time, it becomes clear that Marco is overwhelmed by everything that is happening: he is uncertain of how to act and scared of what is going to happen. These feelings go against the ideal masculinity of the adventurer: this is not mastering an adventure; this is trying to survive.

The symmetry is again distorted when Marco visits martial arts teacher Hundred Eyes who shows him that he is not a skilled fighter: with one move he lets Marco slip and fall on the ground. Marco thus fails to respond within the fight and is unable to protect himself. He is not mastering the situation. When he starts practicing with Hundred Eyes they do this in a décor that is highly symmetrical. Hundred Eyes stays at the centre of the room, together with his composed and controlled behaviour he fits within this symmetrical environment. Marco however, gets pushed into the corners of the room and falls down on the ground. His wild movements and decentred position disturb the symmetry within the shot (image 16). In this scene, this happens up to four times.

A third and last example is found in the episode *Hashshashin*. Marco asks Khan to spare his father and uncle even though they were smuggling and have hidden contraband. He is willing to do so, if Marco himself puts a brand mark on their hands. Right after he has done this, there is a moment of doubt: does he follow Kublai Khan upstairs or does he stay with his father who is in pain? His face is shown at the left side of the screen, with in the background Kublai Khan framed by two guards on either side and the doorway in which he stands, again in a symmetrical manner. This symmetry is disturbed by Marco, looking first at Kublai Khan and then at his father choosing between the two of them (image 17). He chooses Khan, and as soon as this decision is made the symmetry is restored. Khan and Marco are positioned in the centre of the screen, with the guards and doorway emphasizing their central position and creating symmetry around them (image 18).

Through a cohesion between theme and style it is possible to elevate Marco's experiences into a negotiation of the ideal masculinity of the adventurer. It is the synthesis of those two elements that bring the negotiation forward: by focusing only at either the theme or the visual style the discussion around this masculinity would not be as clear. Thereby it also fits DeFino's explanation of 'quality television's disinterest of taking a certain position on a particular issue but instead chooses to show values in a more critical light.[202] By showing this

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[202] DeFino, D. (2014): p. 153.

masculinity as a performance and the struggles that come with attaining it, the series focuses on the negotiation and asks questions about this ideal. For example, what does an adventurer do with feelings of anxiety and doubt? Furthermore, by repetition throughout the series and also within a single scene this parameter is foregrounded. The series does not only want to portray stylistic integrity, but also wants the viewer to know that it does. The repetition works as a reminder of this and as a technique to emphasize this element.

Marco Polo gives a clear indication of how stylistic integrity can be established. To gain more insight in the use of stylistic integrity in other Netflix originals, three other examples will follow. *Sense8* visualises the theme of sexuality, *House of Cards* comments on gender and *Orange Is the New Black* takes a critical stance towards the penal system.

Sense8 chooses to go against the heteronormativity shown in most television series with the help of Lito, a homosexual telenovela actor with a hypermasculine image. The intertwining of theme and style comes to the fore in the episode *Limbic Resonance* when the mise-en-scène comments on Lito's struggle in combining those two elements. Lito is at work practicing his role in the mirror. This scene shows alternating shots of ones where he looks into the mirror and the audience sees his face via the mirror and others where the audiences sees Lito directly from the side. The shots that show his expression via the mirror are almost always the shots where he is trying to get into his role: when he tries to convince himself that he is or at least can portray the hyper masculine male that this movie asks for. Every time he falls out of character or complains about the part the audience sees him from the side, looking at him directly. The mise-en-scène and cinematography thus shows Lito in a confined space, namely the edges of the mirror, when he tries to fulfil the hyper masculine role and shows him in a less confined space when he falls out of it or disagrees with it. It can be read as a critique on the narrow definition of masculinity that excludes homosexuality and can cause entrapment.

Details also play a part in the stylistic integrity of *House of Cards*. In *Chapter 28* Claire is trying to get the job of United Nations ambassador. While busy fulfilling her political ambitions, she also needs to pick out the eggs for The Easter Egg Roll as one of her First Lady duties. While choosing the eggs she hears that she will not get the job. At the end of the episode she tells Frank she wants another chance and he is the only one who can arrange this. The fact that she has to ask for help is so discomforting to her that after their conversation

she gags. Right after this, she stands up straight, and determinedly walks towards the refrigerator to fry two eggs. Although these (Easter) eggs seem to be only a small detail of life inside the White House, they symbolize a lot more. Eggs are a traditional symbol for femininity.[203] In this case they can be seen as a commentary on Claire being stuck in her role as First Lady. The Easter Eggs show that the tradition of the First Lady holds on to a femininity that is first of all ladylike and it connects femininity to futile or frivolous tasks. Claire's ambitions go beyond this but it seems that her femininity only works against her. The fact that she is the wife of the president makes the nomination as ambassador more difficult because it leads to allegations of nepotism, and during the interview she is accused of not holding her emotions in check. The only one who actually benefits from Claire's femininity is Frank: he obtains one of the Easter eggs. He holds the egg while thinking of a solution to his problem and eventually it is the egg that inspires him to think of an idea. When once again Claire's oppressive role is emphasized through dependence she decides to go against it: by breaking and frying these eggs she literally fries up the tradition and the idea of a frivolous femininity that comes with it.

A last example of stylistic integrity is *Orange Is the New Black*. One of the themes discussed is the penal system itself and its arbitrariness: for instance, if and how a prisoner gets punished depends on the mood and feelings of the correctional officer or which inmates receive a better paying job is chosen at random. This arbitrariness can also be found in the mise-en-scène: The décor looks like a patchwork with all different bits and pieces put together to convey the arbitrariness of the prison experience.

Deconstructing the Convention

Now that there is an indication of the possibilities of stylistic integrity within the Netflix originals, a deeper understanding of the structure that is used within these examples is necessary. Because not only should theme and style be combined, it is equally important to look at the structure of that exact combination.

According to DeFino 'quality television' neither idealizes nor devalues a theme, the focus instead lies upon the dynamic structure between them.[204] These shows are not

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[203] Greven, D. (2011) *Representations of Femininity in American Genre Cinema*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan: p. 124.
[204] DeFino, D. (2014): p. 152.

interesting in being a moral reference point and prove the worth of its beliefs.[205] Because when a series is proving that worth, it becomes difficult to also take a critical stance towards the moral or ideological theme that is discussed. Within stylistic integrity the moral or ideological theme is not inverted but rather its basic structure is deconstructed.[206] As an example DeFino takes *Breaking Bad*, *The Shield* and *The Sopranos* and their deconstruction of the nuclear family: the head of the household is nearly always the father and he is shown imagining himself sacrificing his own wellbeing and sense of right and wrong for the sake of his family. However, their actions also reveal a pattern of tough love and domination that undermines the idea of the benign patriarch.[207]

Some of Netflix's series show rather an inversion of a certain theme than a deconstruction or negotiation. For example, *House of Cards* and *Sense8*. In *Sense8* most characters function as moral reference points; Lito is the exception. His predicament is also solved towards the end of the first season after Nomi has talked to him and proved the worth of her values: he now shares these values with her and overcomes his problem. Furthermore, *Sense8* inverts the heteronormativity by opposing it with same sex relationships and giving those storylines the most screen time out of all the romantic narrative strands. *House of Cards* also inclines towards inversion instead of a deconstruction in its treatment of moral and ideological subjects. A clear example is Frank's morality: he never questions whether his actions are right or wrong. Morality is replaced by functionality; by replacing it completely the theme is inverted instead of negotiated or deconstructed.

Since the goal of stylistic integrity is to disrupt assumptions of the viewer the structure of the discussion is as important as the discussion itself. When the discussion is formed as a deconstruction a series takes part in seeking out and displaying the unacknowledged assumptions that exist about that subject.[208] By showing a convention as a cultural construct the opportunity is created to look critically at a subject. The series provides the visibility of the construction, the viewer has to decide what he or she wants to do with it. When the discussion is not structured as a deconstruction the series lacks in confronting the viewer with this cultural construct. Keep proving a certain point of view or taking a radical opposite standpoint

[205] DeFino, D. (2014): p. 149.
[206] DeFino, D. (2014): p. 152.
[207] DeFino, D. (2014): p. 152.
[208] Barker, C. (2008) *Cultural Studies: Theory & Practice*. London: Sage: p. 87.

by inversion do not have the same effect as deconstruction: it does not confront the viewer with the unacknowledged cultural construction in their own beliefs.

All Netflix originals show a connection between style and theme in some way. For instance, *Lilyhammer* that elaborates on its main character through intertextual references of well-known gangster movies. However, in order to display stylistic integrity, the connection needs to take on a form of synthesis or cohesion: combining those two elements leads into a discussion or negotiation of moral or ideological themes to evoke critical thinking. Four Netflix originals seem to educe such a debate. *Marco Polo* even foregrounds this aspect by visual repetition and creating a pattern. Subjects like moral values, gender, sexuality and stereotypes are discussed by combining theme with style. Focusing on the construction of the debates, it becomes clear that it does not always take on the structure that this parameter asks for. Instead of deconstructing the conventional notion it either inverts the convention or a series is unable to take a critical stance towards the subject because it tries to prove the worth of a certain opinion about the subject discussed. The analysis of stylistic integrity has therefore also brought to the fore a discrepancy between Netflix and 'quality television': there is a definite appearance of stylistic integrity but in most cases the series already chooses to idealize or devalue a theme before the negotiation by the viewer has started.

Tick All the Boxes

The mise-en-scène of the Netflix originals is analysed from three perspectives: as appearance, as technique and in relationship to other elements of the text. It has become clear that most Netflix originals can be considered to have a glossy look. Some choose to emphasize this element; *House of Cards* is the clearest example of that. Techniques such as visual repetition, creating visual excess and attention to detail create a foregrounding of these glossy assets. The visual is prioritized and presented as an attraction of the series: a viewing pleasure is created by paying attention to details, by suggesting that the mise-en-scène points to something greater, or by creating a picture that is enjoyable to look at.

Looking at mise-en-scène as a tool has uncovered the intentions of Netflix: the company builds forward on bits and pieces that are already considered to have quality. These bits and pieces come from either television or cinema. If with *Boardwalk Empire* the viewer is constantly reminded that he or she is 'watching art (re)assembled', with Netflix the viewer is

constantly reminded that he or she is watching quality.[209] By transforming these bits into pieces of intertextuality Netflix tries to get access to the label of quality that is already attained by the texts that the series are referring towards. With this cultural cachet the company builds its own reputation and identity that focuses on 'quality television'.

Looking at mise-en-scène in relation to theme, it became clear that at first sight some of the original series do portray stylistic integrity. When focusing on the structure that the stylistic integrity is built on, a contrast between the originals and the parameter of 'quality television' becomes clear. Most Netflix originals do not structure this parameter in order to be able to deconstruct the themes that it discusses. Some series choose to already idealize or devalue a theme before the negotiation by the viewer has started. This implicates that in some cases the Netflix originals focus on portraying a thematic depth within its visual style but do not follow through on the desired outcome of this tactic, which is negotiation by deconstruction.

Netflix shows the formal aspects of 'quality television'. It is visually sumptuous, it is a creative contribution to television, it has cultural capital and the visual elements are not just a vessel but part of the text by showing thematic depth. By not only showing but foregrounding the aspects of high production values, creative contribution, cultural capital, the knowledge about other products within film and television and the thematic importance of its visual style, the visual appearance of 'quality television' is established. In its identity Netflix relies far less on the structural elements of 'quality television', such as the deconstructive structure seen in stylistic integrity. A focus within their identity on the more formal and visual aspects is in line with the emphasis on looks found in the social hierarchy of brands.[210] If creating a product with a high placement within this hierarchy is the main goal, perhaps a commitment towards the structural elements of 'quality television' is not necessary.

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[209] McCabe, J. (2013): p. 191.
[210] Nelson, R. (2007): p. 182.

Chapter 3: Narrative Structure

> If you look at season one or two of *The Wire*, you'll find an A story line, and a B story line, with maybe a small C. All of a sudden, we started having A-line, A-line, A-line, B-line, B-line, C-line, C-line . . . and it's like, "What the fuck are we doing here?"[211] – Ed Burns

Ed Burns, writer of a series often brought up as an example of 'quality television', *The Wire*, illustrates a shift in how television tells its stories. Jason Mittell has seen a change in the narrative structure of television: in the past fifteen years the possibilities and practices have drastically changed. What once was risky and innovative, such as a jumbled chronology, has now become a cliché. Changing viewer practices, new technologies and the alterations in the ways producers create stories have all transformed American television, according to Mittell.[212] These shifts have lead to a new form of television with a new narrative mode which he calls complex television.[213] He explains this as one of the most notable impacts of these shifts because it moved away from television as formulaic and convention bound. The fact that the narrative structure of 'quality television' has such a prominent position within the transformation of American television, shows the importance of taking this element on as one of the parameters within this analysis. Another reason to focus on narrative structure is the fact that it opens up the possibility to analyse the Netflix content not only in a visual way, but also on a structural level. This is why narrative structure is the subject of the third and last chapter.

Three different parameters of 'quality television's narrative structure will be addressed: narrative density, narrative complexity and at last flexi-narratives. Each subject takes a different approach towards the narrative structure. Narrative density concerns itself with the size of the structure: in order to portray density multiple storylines must develop simultaneously and together create a dense weave.[214] A series needs to show a sufficient

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[211] Martin, B. (2013): p. 320.
[212] Mittell, J. (2015): pp. 2 – 3.
[213] Mittell, J. (2015): p. 3.
[214] Thompson, K. (2003) *Storytelling in Film and Television*. Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press: p. 55.

amount of plotlines and move quickly between those plotlines in order to create a synergistic effect.[215]

It is also necessary to look at the structure of the narrative. How do the different elements of episode, season and the series in it entirety work together? Mittell argues that the hallmark of complex television is a balance between episodic and serial storytelling and he calls this narrative complexity.[216] This means that an episode is both able to stand on its own without being linked to previous or later episodes, but nevertheless also contributes to the serialized story world. Martin explains every episode as a brick with its own solid shape, but a brick is also part of something bigger: a building. The building represents the season-long arc of even the series in its entirety.[217]

The third and last theme is flexi-narratives. 'Quality television' often shows a flexi-narrative, which means that the narrative structure is hybrid: it is built out of different conventions and narrative structures that can be found elsewhere in television such as in advertising, the serial soap opera or episodic television series.

The structure is similar to the previous chapters: one Netflix original functions as a starting point which in this case is *Sense8*. When Netflix released the first three episodes of *Sense8* to the press to review, confusion came into being. Some said that they had 'experienced' *Sense8*, since they really could not explain what they had been watching for the past three hours.[218] Tim Surette explains: 'watching an episode of *Sense8* is like watching eight mediocre shorts simultaneously with flashes of bleed through as though the period between changing channels lingered between both for a while.'[219] It seems that *Sense8* expanded to at least eight different A-lines, surpassing *The Wire*. Since the narrative of *Sense8* kicked up a dust within the press it is an interesting case study for the analysis of narrative structure. Since the three subjects in this chapter lie closer together than in the other chapters it will cause some overlap. Therefore, the series will function as a starting point for all three subjects.

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[215] Thompson, K. (2003): pp. 55, 57.
[216] Mittell, J. (2015): p. 23.
[217] Martin, B. (2013): p. 20.
[218] Surette, T. (June 5, 2015): http://www.tv.com/shows/sense8/community/post/sense8-series-premiere-netflix-review-143335272771/ (March 21, 2016).
[219] Surette, T. (June 5, 2015): http://www.tv.com/shows/sense8/community/post/sense8-series-premiere-netflix-review-143335272771/ (March 21, 2016).

Looking at these parameters creates an image of the narrative structure from multiple angles: it gives an idea of the size of the narrative, it shows how the structure of the narrative is put together and it gives insight in the materials that the structure is built out of. Creating insight in the narrative structure that is as broad as possible, a platform is generated on which a perspective can be built about if and how Netflix original content is related to these parameters of 'quality television' when it comes to narrative structure.

3.1 Narrative Density: Bouncing Between Stories

DeFino explains that HBO series in general, which he considers to be related to 'quality television', are efficient and accurate in their storytelling. Although a season mostly consists out of twelve one-hour episodes, it will show as many or even more plots and subplots than a series with twenty-two or more episodes. This is because HBO series are structured differently: since there are no commercial breaks on HBO there is no need to build in climaxes or cliff-hangers to keep the attention of the audience during these breaks. If there are breaks, all the energy goes into maximizing the impact before the commercials and there is only little left to deepen the plot. Episodes of HBO have a full hour to weave together several narrative threads: a plot is not just advanced, it is enriched and complicated.[220] He calls this narrative density.[221] This concept is not used just by HBO, for instance *Hill Street Blues* already showed this density according to Alan Sepinwall:

> the narrative bounced around constantly among a huge, diverse cast. Scenes might begin by focusing on one character, then immediately shift their attention to a different character who passed him in the hallway, then flip around to yet a third set of characters before cutting away to the next location.[222]

Kristin Thompson also points out *Hill Street Blues* as a pioneer in dense storytelling: it established a new format for storytelling in dramatic series. She considers it to be a trend in hour-long dramas: multiple storylines develop simultaneously and together create a dense

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[220] DeFino, D. (2014): pp. 121 – 122.
[221] DeFino, D. (2014): p. 121.
[222] Sepinwall, A. (2012): p. 14.

weave.[223] This gives the impression of cramming a lot of action into a relatively short time span. A reason why this kind of narrative structure is used, according to Thompson, is the synergistic effect that is created by these multiple threads being woven together. It gives as much dramatic power as a traditional single main story. This effect is created by moving very quickly among plots: the scenes are short providing only a slight progress in each plotline. By moving quickly the impression of density and lifelikeness is created.[224] She also comments that the quality of dense storytelling is seen by some critics as a notion of 'quality television'.[225]

While focusing on narrative density in the Netflix original series two elements are central: first of all, the amount of plotlines. Second, the number of times the narrative switches between plotlines which gives an indication of the pace of the storytelling. There needs to be a sufficient amount of plotlines and the pace needs to be quick enough in order to have a dense narrative. Although there is no fixed number of plotlines or precise pace a series needs to show, the two elements together need to give a convincing indication of a dense narrative.

Sense8: Eight Strangers That Have Never Met

One element of *Sense8*'s coherent authorial vision is rapid editing. This stylistic feature shows the possibility of creating density in its storytelling, but does *Sense8* act upon that potential and if so, in what ways? The first episode, *Limbic Resonance*, already introduces the viewer to a large number of plotlines:

1. A woman named Angelica, accompanied with a man named Jonas, is hiding from a man called Whispers. Simultaneously she is 'giving birth', which means making telepathic contact with eight other individuals around the world. After she has done this, Whispers walks into the room and Angelica kills herself.

2. A policeman from Chicago named Will has a nightmare about Angelica. The following day while at work he visits the place he saw in his dreams, and saves the life of a boy that was shot by bringing him to the hospital.

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[223] Thompson, K. (2003): p. 55.
[224] Thompson, K. (2003): p. 57.
[225] Thompson, K. (2003): p. 57.

3. In London a female DJ named Riley uses drugs with her friends and a stranger they have just met. This suddenly turns into a gunfight. Everybody seems dead except for Riley.

4. A Mexican actor Lito is having a bad day at work, since he cannot seem to remember his lines.

5. Businesswoman Sun in Seoul is also at work and having a tough day, since one of their clients does not take her seriously because she is a woman.

6. Kala in Mumbai is off to work and when she visits a chapel the viewer learns that she is soon to be married to man she does not love.

7. Wolfgang is in Berlin at a funeral, while at the graveyard he urinates on the grave of his father. Later that day he visits his best friend and they break into an apartment to crack the safe that is there.

8. Capheus is at home in Nairobi with his sick mother, then goes to work. He is a bus driver and business is not going so well.

9. In San Francisco Nomi is having sex with her girlfriend Amanita, later that day they go out to celebrate Pride.

These plotlines are not connected expect for that fact that each main character from plotline two to nine has a vision of Angelica and that some of them have visions or hear sounds from other plotlines. Each plotline is presented as a stand alone story: neither one of the characters knows each other and each story plays out in a different part of the world. The viewer is thus provided with many plotlines and also with stories that seem unrelated. He or she has to figure out how they are connected: any piece of information may be relevant at this point. It is not one story world in which different plotlines develop: at this stage it seems that there are nine story worlds each with its own development.

The figure below indicates per scene in the episode *Limbic Resonance* which one of the characters plays the main role, in which story world the scene takes place and if there are any other supporting main characters. The figure shows a structure in the narrative of the series. First, all the plotlines are introduced and this happens in a criss-cross manner. The plotlines are not introduced one after another but interrupt each other creating a chaotic order. After the introduction the series focuses on three plotlines: Will, Riley and Wolfgang. As soon as the number of plotlines is decreased a pattern arises: two plotlines alternate constantly. First

EPISODE 1 *SENSE 8*: *LIMBIC RESONANCE*

Legend: ■ Storyworld ▲ Other Characters ◆ Main Character

X-axis: SCENES
Y-axis: PLOTLINES
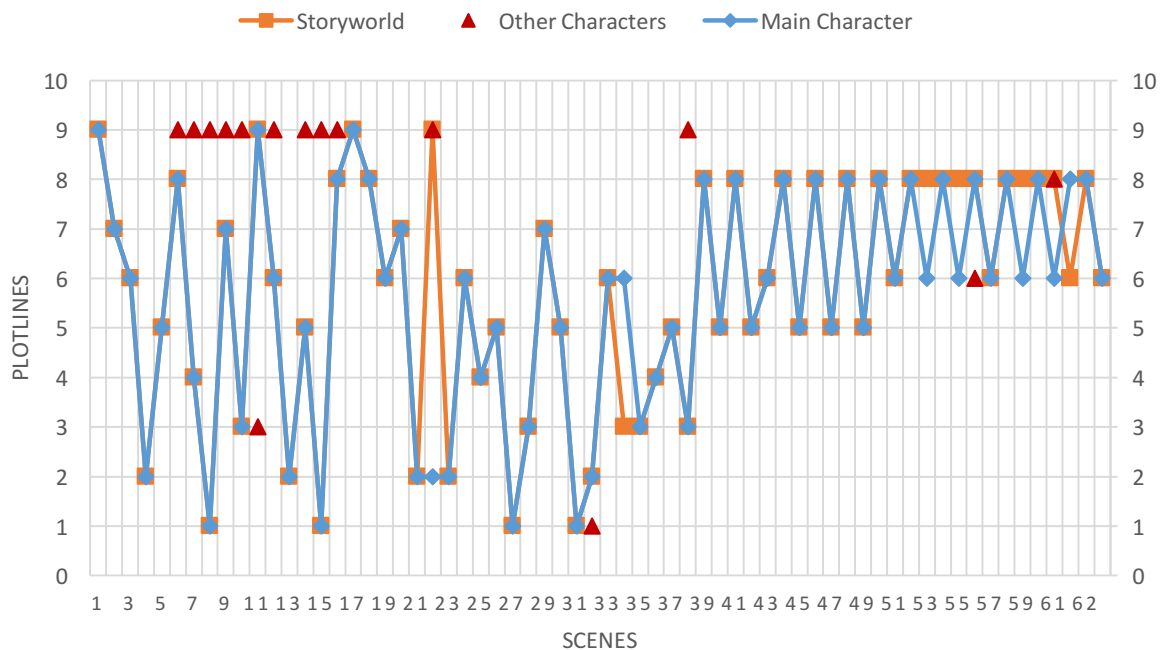
1: Capheus	4: Kala	7: Lito
2: Sun	5: Wolfgang	8: Will
3: Nomi	6: Riley	9: Angelica, Jonas, Whispers

Wolfgang's and Will's, then Will's and Riley's. This means that what the series looses in density when it zooms in on fewer plotlines, it makes up in emphasizing the switching between the plotlines by creating a pattern. In total the narrative structure switches 65 times between plotlines, creating a fragmentation in the storytelling. Just as *Hill Street Blues*, *Sense8* moves quickly between plotlines to create an impression of density. Within the first episode *Sense8* uses three ways to create narrative density: first of all, it introduces a large amount of plotlines. Second, it introduces stand alone plotlines and the connection between the plotlines is not yet clear. This means that the viewer has a lot of information to process: each plotline introduces new characters and new environments. Third and last, the series moves quickly between plotlines either in a chaotic manner or using a pattern. This way a fragmentation is created that gives the series that synergistic effect. Using three tactics simultaneously also illustrates the emphasis that is put upon density: the parameter becomes foregrounded.

The figures displaying the structure of episodes two and three make clear that the chaotic manner of moving between plotlines disappears more to the background and that the pattern of constant alternating between at least two plotlines takes over. The series chooses

EPISODE 2 SENSE8

EPISODE 3 SENSE8
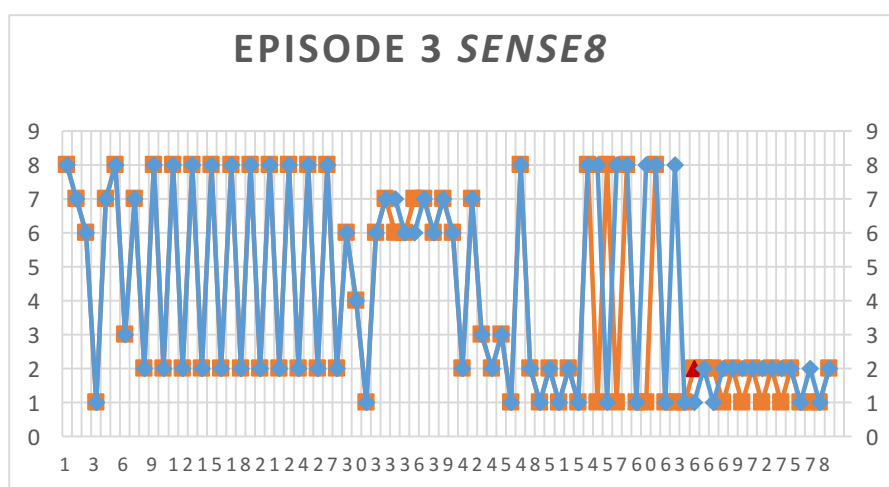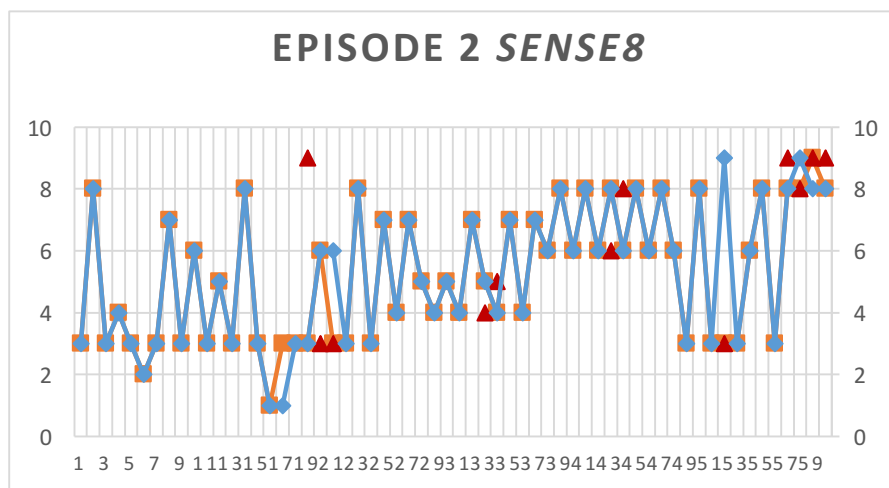
to spend more time with one plotline but never without interruption. The fragmentation and quick moving between plotlines keeps being emphasized by the show. Episode two switches 61 times between plotlines, episode three 81 times. Overall this shows that fragmentation and speed are at the core of the storytelling structure of *Sense8*. Together a dense weave of plotlines is created. Just as Thompson's description, the series shows plots that only involve a few brief scenes and those are woven swiftly together to create the impression of dense action.[226]

As the story of *Sense8* unfolds, the different plotlines start to grow towards each other: characters are interacting and visiting each others story worlds. They help each other and through telepathic contact they borrow each other's skills. This indicates that there are no longer nine stand alone plotlines. This accumulates in the season finale *I Can't Leave Her*: Riley is abducted and all other seven sensates try to rescue her. All the plotlines thus focus on Riley's abduction. Going from several stand alone plotlines to only a few big plotlines or even one main plotline is at the expense of narrative density. *Sense8* is able to provide density in yet another way: as the interaction between plotlines increases, the coherency between character and story world decreases. This becomes clear in the figure below that displays the narrative structure of *I Can't Leave Her*: the orange line which represents the story world and

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226 Thompson, K. (2003): p. 53.

EPISODE 12 *SENSE 8*: *I CAN'T LEAVE HER*
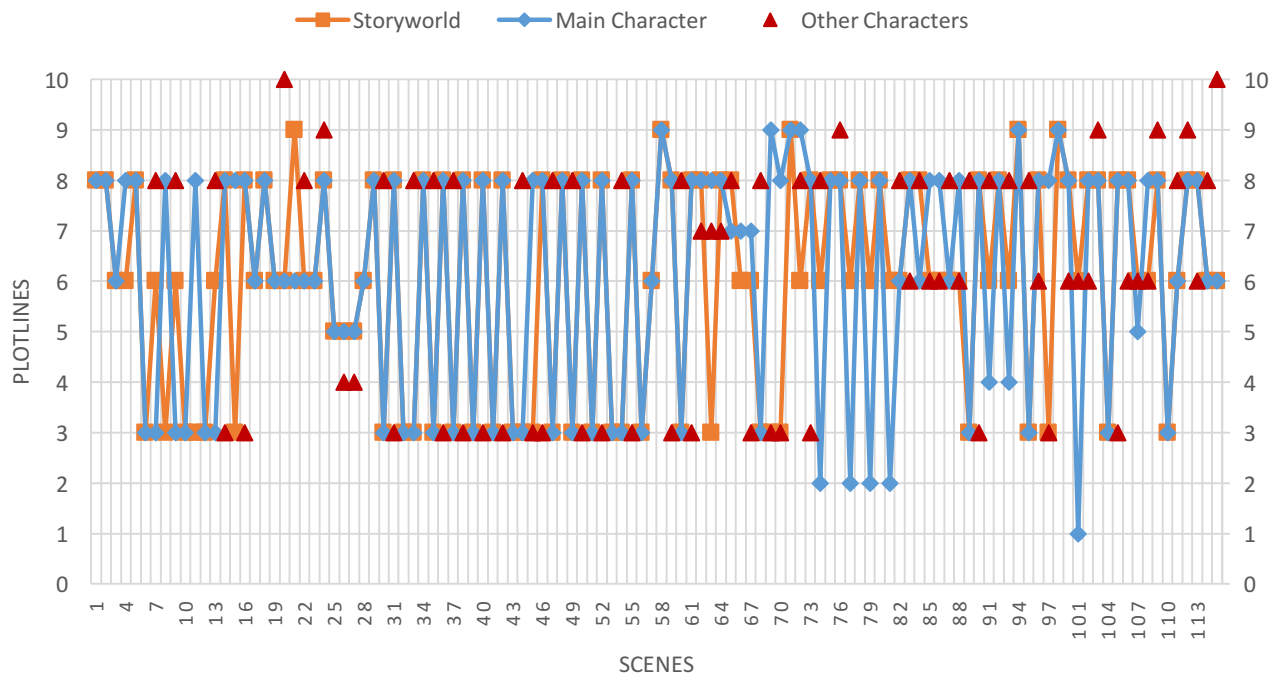
1: Capheus	3: Nomi	5: Wolfgang	7: Lito	9: Angelica, Jonas, Whispers
2: Sun	4: Kala	6: Riley	8: Will	10: 1 – 8 together

the blue line that stands for the main character of the scene more often do not match than in other episodes. Furthermore, in most scenes in episode twelve there are multiple characters (in the figure this is represented by the red triangles). This means that almost in every scene characters are displayed that are not in their own story world but in others. This leads to scenes such as Will, who is in Iceland, having a conversation with Lito, who is in Mexico, and the conversation is displayed in Nomi's loft in San Francisco. So even though the number of plotlines drop, narrative density is maintained by dismantling the main elements of a plotline: character, plot and setting. They are handled as separate entities. So even though the different plots may grow closer together, the elements of setting and character do not. This creates one big plotline, but a multi-layered one of which each layer is considered to stand alone since that is how the audience has come to know them. The scene is not a coherent whole that brings everything together, it is more a carefully interwoven fabric that is made from clear independent threads.

Sense8 shows at least four different techniques to create density: when one technique decreases there is another one to take over and maintain the narrative density. One tactic

used throughout the series is the high speed of its storytelling: on average the series only sticks with a plotline for 45 seconds (Appendix 2). This speed combined with other techniques create a foregrounding of density. There are always multiple techniques used that all point in the same direction of density: it is through emphasis that density is foregrounded.

The other Netflix originals show a lot of differences in narrative density. Some show a similar structure as *Sense8*, like *Orange Is the New Black*. Some show it in a lesser degree, like *House of Cards* and *Marco Polo*. *Narcos* and *Lilyhammer* make different choices in their narrative structure.

Orange Is the New Black shows growth in its plotlines in the opposite direction of *Sense8*: in the beginning the series focuses on only one person, Piper, creating only a few plotlines. As the show develops, more and more plotlines come into being as the series focuses less on Piper and more on other inmates (Appendix 2). This becomes clear when the number of plotlines of the first episode, *I Wasn't Ready*, is compared to the plotlines of an episode of the third season, *Mother's Day*. *I Wasn't Ready* shows three plotlines all revolving around Piper. In comparison, *Mother's Day* shows seven plotlines, each focuses on other persons or groups and Piper is not the main character in any of them. One of the plotlines, one concerning a Mother's Day party, has several subplots since it discusses the experiences of several characters concerning motherhood. These subplots are scattered throughout the episode and function as short intermezzos of the Mother's Day party as all except one are told by showing flashbacks. The narrative structure is thus not one of continuous development in plotlines, but shifts between plotlines letting them only develop a little bit at a time. As the series develops, its narrative structure becomes denser.

Other Netflix originals that show multiple plotlines are *House of Cards* and *Marco Polo*. Having looked at several episodes from different seasons, chosen at random, shows that *House of Cards* has around six plotlines per episode and *Marco Polo* around seven (Appendix 2). The switching between the plotline is less emphasized as in *Sense8* with its rapid editing or *Orange Is the New Black* with its flashbacks. In *House of Cards* it is not a steady feature since the pace can change from episode to episode.[227] In *Marco Polo* the switching between

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[227] For instance, in *Chapter 17* the narrative switches about 41 times between plotlines and the longest it sticks with one plotline is 2:47 minutes. However, in *Chapter 36* the narrative only switches about 24 times and the longest it focused on one plotline is 7:24 minutes.

plotlines is more steady: about 25 times per episode. This shows that these series do have multiple plotlines but they chose to not bounce around so much as other series: they spend more time with one plotline before moving on to the next. This is not to say that they stay with one plotline very long: on average *House of Cards* stays 1:52 minutes with one plotline, *Marco Polo* around 2:13 minutes.

Lilyhammer shows four plotlines per episode, which makes the narrative structure more static and clear-cut. When it comes to switching between plotlines however, it is similar to *House of Cards* and *Marco Polo*. So the series could be considered to show some level of narrative density, since it moves around between plotlines letting them develop only a little at a time. On the other hand, it shows considerable less plotlines per episode as the others.

Narcos shows a different structure: although the episodes show a lot of events happening in a short amount of time, together these events make for only a few plotlines. Furthermore, in each episode three to four plotlines are the main plotlines that get the most attention. Next to that there are one to two plotlines that only get attention very briefly. *Narcos* switches not as much between plotlines as the others do with an average of twelve times per episode. Instead of focusing on switching between plotlines the series focuses on showing the different sides of one plotline. For instance, the main plotline of the episode *There Will Be a Future*, the preparations for the total war between Escobar and the government, is shown from three different sides: from the perspective of president Gaviria, from officer Carrillo and from Pablo Escobar. Since the series made other choices in its narrative structure it shows the least dense narrative of all six Netflix originals.

It can be said that a number of the Netflix originals uses the dramatic power of narrative density. Only two series have made other choices in its narrative structure: *Narcos* chose to focus on other elements within the storytelling structure and *Lilyhammer* has a more solid structure than the other series. Within the four remaining originals a big diversity in the use of narrative density is found. Two series choose to foreground its density by emphasizing the switching between plotlines. *Sense8* has done this through the speed that is used, the pattern that it developed in its storytelling and the dismantling of the basic structure of a plotline. Multiple tactics are used simultaneously in order to foreground its density. *Orange Is the New Black* does emphasize it as well but in a lesser degree: by using multiple flashbacks as intermezzos of bigger plotlines and expanding the number of storylines, it emphasizes the

bouncing between plotlines as a structuring element of its narrative structure. With *House of Cards* and *Marco Polo* narrative density is not a primary element, but they do show elements of a dense weave of plotlines.

3.2 Narrative complexity: A Tendency Towards the Serial

Narrative complexity is a narrational mode that is different from the norm of narrational construction and comprehension in television.[228] Instead of choosing for either an episodic or serial form narrative complexity creates a shifting balance between the two within one series.[229] Episodic series work with recurring characters and situations, but what happens within one episode is not related to events in other episodes; episodes stand on their own. Within serial television the narrative develops within several episodes and thus they are related to one another.[230] Mittell explains that 'quality television' thus uses both forms and therefore also goes against the conventions of these forms: narrative complexity is never uniform or convention driven.[231] The hallmark of narrative complexity is: 'an interplay between the demands of episodic and serial storytelling, often oscillating between long-term arcs and stand-alone episodes.'[232] Brett Martin explains this storytelling form as a colonnade: every episode is a brick with its own solid shape, but as a brick it is also part of a larger element of the building, part of the season-long arc, and this larger element is again part of the building as a freestanding work of art, the series in its entirety.[233]

Mittell argues that *The Sopranos* exemplifies the narrative model that most 'quality television' applies: mostly episodic plots that are built into a serialized story world.[234] Creator David Chase expressed that he wanted every episode to be a 'minimovie' regardless of what was necessary for the ongoing story arc.[235] Sean O'Sullivan expands on this by comparing two episodes of this series: *College* and *A Hit Is a Hit*. Both episodes have a lateral approach: they are not focused on the forward thrust of the seasonal arc but are stand-alone stories which

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[228] Mittell, J. (2015): p. 17.
[229] Mittell, J. (2015): p. 18.
[230] DeFino, D. (2014): p. 110.
[231] Mittell, J. (2015): p. 18.
[232] Mittell, J. (2015): p. 19.
[233] Martin, B. (2013): p. 20.
[234] Mittell, J. (2015): p. 29.
[235] Martin, B. (2013): p. 149.

gives the viewer no clue as whether the events are important in the bigger scheme of things.[236] It has not related to what happened beforehand, nor what happens later.[237] Although both episodes stand alone, there is a big difference: the events portrayed in *College* have a profound impact on the relationship between the audience and Tony, this is the first time they see him as a killer. *A Hit is a Hit* is truly stand-alone since it revolves around the music industry and a rapper who never again appears in *The Sopranos*. In one way both episodes have nothing to do with major serial developments, in another *College* has everything to do with it: it explains how Tony's world works.[238] O'Sullivan explains this as one of the reasons why *College* is considered one of the best episodes and why *A Hit Is a Hit* is one of the least beloved.[239] Therefore one could say that a successful episode is both episodic and serial at the same time.

Two perspectives are used to create an overview of the different plotlines of *Sense8* and their episodic or serial qualities. First the serial aspects of the series and its seasonal arcs will be analysed. Second, the analysis will switch to an episodic perspective.

Serial Storytelling: Moving the Narrative Forward

Sense8 shows a more serial character than an episodic one. None of the episodes show an episodic plotline that starts and finishes in the same episode: the episodes do not offer closure. Since fragmentation is central to the narrative structure of the series, it would also be difficult to create an episode as a mini-movie. The series chooses instead to tell each story in a fragmented manner creating stories that develop a little bit each episode and therefore turn into seasonal arcs. Every main character carries its own seasonal arc (Appendix 3). Each episode is built from fragments from these seasonal arcs combined with fragments of the plotline that connects them together: their sensate abilities and the villain Whispers that chases them. This brings the total to nine seasonal arcs. This perspective shows that *Sense8* misses the hallmark of narrative complexity: a balance between episodic and serial storytelling. The description of each episode as a brick with its own solid shape is not applicable in this case.

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[236] O'Sullivan, S. (2013) 'The Sopranos: Episodic Storytelling', in: E. Thompson & J. Mittell, *How to Watch Television*. New York, London: New York University Press: p. 65.
[237] O'Sullivan, S. (2013): p. 67.
[238] O'Sullivan, S. (2013): p. 69.
[239] O'Sullivan, S. (2013): p. 66.

Other Netflix originals that focus more on seriality than episodic storytelling are *House of Cards*, *Marco Polo* and *Narcos*. A first indicator that *House of Cards* focuses on seriality is the fact that sometimes an episode begins right where the previous episode left off. For instance, Frank is eating ribs at the end of *Chapter 1* and he still sits at that table at the beginning of *Chapter 2*. Even between seasons no time seems to have passed: in the last scene of season one Frank and Claire go out running together, the first scene of season 2 shows that same run. This goes against the goal of episodic storytelling: to show that characters have a life without the viewer, and one only gets to see pieces of it.[240] By stressing the serial aspect with this technique it looks like Frank's life and story world do not exist when the viewer is not there. *House of Cards* does sometimes use episodic storytelling, but only occasionally. For instance, *Chapter 8*: Frank visits his university where he is being honoured. Over there he has a conversation with an old friend that could imply a previous romantic relationship between them but the viewer never gets a definitive answer. It is not certain whether this is important for the larger story arc: its place is and will remain uncertain since it is not referred to after this scene.

In *Marco Polo* almost all plotlines function as a way to push the seasonal arcs forward. Season one has five seasonal arcs, and each episode shows events that help to push these plotlines forward.[241] Only occasionally there is an episodic plotline to be found: for instance, the White Moon festival. The sixth episode of the first season revolves around this festival, from the preparations to the actual festivities. It functions as a backdrop for the seasonal arcs since during the preparations and the festival they develop. However, it also has another function: it is not just there to support other plotlines but it also illustrates life at court and tells the viewer about the culture of the Mongol empire in the 13th century. Nonetheless this type of storytelling does not have a steady position with the narrative structure of the series. Therefore, the show mostly has a serial character.

Narcos also has a predominantly serial character. Like the previous two series, there is an occasional episodic plotline but not often enough to consider it an interplay between

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[240] Rustad, G. & T. Vermeulen (2012) 'Did You Get Pears?: Temporality and Temps Mortality in *The Wire*, *Mad Men* and *Arrested Development*', in: M. Ames, *Time in Television Narrative: Exploring Temporality in Twenty-First Programming*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi: pp. 157 – 158.
[241] The five seasonal arcs are: 1) the war between Kublai Khan and the city of Xiangyang, 2) Marco Polo's acceptance in court, 3) Jingim's doubt about himself, 4) Kokachin's love life and 5) the smaller arc of Khutulun and who she will marry.

episodic and serial storytelling. An example of an episodic storyline is Pablo Escobar's political ambitions to become president of Colombia in *The Man of Always*. He starts with is political campaign in the beginning of the episode and his political career is ended by Minister of Justice Lara at the end of it. However most of the times *Narcos'* storytelling is serial. Even little plotlines are divided into multiple episodes: for instance, the killing of Steve's and Connie's cat as a warning sign. This happens in the end of episode two and is expanded on in episode three. This illustrates the series' inclination towards the serial.

Episodic Storytelling: Minimovies and Lateral Stories

A different perspective on *Sense8*'s narrative structure does show some aspects of lateral and episodic storytelling. Because even though each story seems to be an arc stretching over multiple episode, when they are compared to each other they do show a lateral character. In some cases, the initial events in the lives of the main character have nothing to do with the other main characters, Whispers or being sensate. For example, the story of Sun discovering the fraud of her brother and then deciding to take the fall for him because it saves the company and she ends up in prison. This stands separate from her discovering her sensate abilities nor does it interact with the storyline of Whispers, Angelica and Jonas. This means that the story is not focused on the forward thrust of the coordinating seasonal arc and it is not yet clear whether the events in Sun's live are important in the bigger scheme of being sensate.

The lateral character is also emphasized in another way: Sun and Wolfgang have never interacted with each other and Lito and Will introduce themselves to each other in the final episode of season one. This means that these characters have never interacted; their plotlines have developed separate from each other. It shows that the plotlines are focused on themselves and not so much on the interaction between the cluster of sensates.

It seems that *Sense8* shows stories with a lateral character but does this in a way that is fragmented: bits and pieces are scattered throughout the different episodes of the season. The series goes against the idea of episodic storytelling but at the same time borrows characteristics of this technique. The boundaries of distinct episodes have become blurrier since Netflix offers all episode of a season at once. Traditionally, television networks shied away from serials since they were afraid it would alienate viewers who were unable to see all

episodes and therefore would be unable to understand the story.[242] Since the viewer is now in charge of when he or she watches an episode, the problem of missing out is non-existent for Netflix. This creates an opportunity to experiment with letting go of episodic boundaries without any of the risks. This can explain how *Sense8* uses the technique of episodic storytelling: the series does show stories with a lateral character but they are not confined to the boundaries of an episode. Nevertheless, caution is required: the term lateral character seems more appropriate than lateral stories because the fact remains that they are serial arcs that focus on pushing their own narrative forward.

The Netflix originals that do show a more episodic character are *Orange Is the New Black* and *Lilyhammer*. *Orange Is the New Black* shows a structure similar to *The Sopranos* with the episode *The Chickening*. The episode's main plotline revolves around the fact that Piper saw a chicken in the yard of the prison. Besides a little cameo of the chicken in the episode *Don't Make Me Come Back There* in season three, the chicken is never mentioned before or after this episode. It is a stand alone story that does not advance the bigger plot in any way, it is just there to illustrate prison life. Besides episodic minimovie-like episodes, the series also has one episodic plotline per episode. Each episode singles out one person and through flashbacks tells more about the history of that particular person. *Take a Break from Your Values* for example tells the story of how sister Jane became a political activist and how she ended up in prison. *Don't Make Me Come Back There* tells the story of Aleida and how she feels being a mother by showing several flashbacks. As the series focuses less on Piper and more on other people around her, some critics argued that the series has become too episodic, especially season three. According to them it has too many episodic storylines and not really a season-long arc.[243] In this way the series takes after *Mad Men*:

> *Mad Men* used the ongoing, open-ended format to approach a kind of radical realism that
> went way beyond whether, say, the refrigerator in the Draper home was the perfect shade of

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[242] DeFino, D. (2014): p. 110.
[243] Matthews, D. (June 24, 2015) 'Why Orange Is the New Black season 3 isn't as bingeable as seasons 1 and 2', *Vox*. http://www.vox.com/2015/6/24/8835167/orange-is-the-new-black-season-3-binge (May 7, 2016).

1962 olive green. The show, in a wildly un-TV-like way, insisted on portraying how the passage of life feels.[244]

Mad Men resolved all its initial mysteries in the first two seasons, after that it is focused on life happening as it does in real life. In *Orange Is the New Black* the first two season discuss Piper adjusting to prison life and accepting her situation. At the end of season two this has happened: she learned how to survive in prison and she is no longer focused on what happens on the outside. This leaves room for other things: prison life is happening as it is, and that is what is portrayed. This results in the structure that in each episode both serial plotlines develop and at least one episodic plotline is resolved which results in the interplay narrative complexity displays.

The series that shows the most balance between episodic and serial storytelling is *Lilyhammer*: in each episode there are two plotlines that take multiple episodes and two that begin and end within the same episode. The series lets its viewer invest in new characters that get a reasonable amount of screen time within one episode to never or barely let them return again. In the episode *Guantanomo Blues* Frank wants to buy a property from a couple Tord and Siw who are eco-philosophers. When Frank made Tord an offer he initially would not take it. As the viewer sees the couple inside of their home it becomes clear that Siw is washed out, tired of the eco-philosophy and not fitting in with the community. The episode shows the couple arguing, shows the troubles they have with the upbringing of their son and finally giving up and selling their property. The viewer is asked to invest in these characters but it will never become clear what happens to this family after they made the deal with Frank.[245] Another example of the episodic storytelling technique is found in the episode *The Midwife*. Sigrid and Frank visit their friends Anette and Per. Over dinner the couple keeps on arguing about several issues until Per leaves upset. Frank goes upstairs to look for him and finds him in his bedroom crying. Sigrid wants Frank to invite Per to his poker night so he can make some friends. It ends in Per losing a lot of money. In this episode the viewer has learned about Per's marital issues, his disappointment in life, his loneliness and insecurities but it is never to be mentioned again:

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[244] Martin, B. (2013): p. 430.
[245] The other episodic plotline in this episode is Frank getting his drivers license because his American license is not valid in Lillehammer. The other two plotlines are serial: one is about Frank getting in a relationship with Sigrid and the other is about the police in Lillehammer having a theory that Frank is a terrorist.

a plotline that is not to be continued. This technique makes sure that each episode is like a minimovie; the episode stands on its own. However, it is not disconnected from the main story arc either: it gives the viewer information about Frank and shows how life in Lillehammer, and more general in Norway, is. It makes clear that the viewer only sees a bit of everything that is going on: the community and its events, thus the story world, are much larger. The characters have a life even when the cameras are not with them.

The analysis of narrative complexity has shown big differences in the Netflix originals. Only two series show a balance in both serial and episodic storytelling and thereby attain the quality of narrative complexity: *Orange Is the New Black* and *Lilyhammer*. Their episodes are stand alone entities as well as a part of a bigger entity, the season and the series in its entirety. These are also the only two series that show a pattern: *Orange Is the New Black* highlights a character per episode and *Lilyhammer* always has two episodic plotlines. They are presented as fixed parts of the narrative structure and thereby they get recognized: the episodic storylines with flashbacks of other inmates are a well-known element of *Orange Is the New Black*. By structuring its narrative structure into a fixed pattern, the chances for recognition are enhanced. That is why this can be seen as a technique to foreground its narrative complexity. However, *Sense8* has shown a new attitude towards the balance between serial and episodic storytelling. By providing the viewer with all episodes of a series at once, Netflix takes away episodic boundaries. This can explain the inclination of most of the originals towards seriality. For example, J. Michael Straczynski, one of the directors of *Sense8*, said the series was written as a continuous 12-hour movie.[246] This means that Netflix's way of distributing its own content may lead the way to a new approach in the narrative structure of drama series.

3.3 Flexi-narratives: A Narrative from Different Materials

Robin Nelson devised the term flexi-narrative that also refers to the mixing of both episodic and serial storytelling. This means that television series borrow conventions and narrative structures from other programme genres: the rapid editing and short sequences of

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[246] McCabe, J. (June 6, 2015) 'Exclusice: J. Michael Straczynski Prepares Us For His Netflix Series Sense8', *Nerdist*. http://nerdist.com/exclusive-j-michael-straczynski-prepares-us-for-his-netflix-series-sense8/ (June 10, 2016).

advertisements, the serial development found in soap opera and the episodic new stories in each episode that come from television series.[247] For instance, a series can switch between slower and longer scenes that are based on the conventions of the soap opera and rapid activity with hand-held shots and quick editing which is a convention of the observational documentary and news footage of action caught on the run.[248] The distinction between the different structures is blurred by rapidly intercutting between multiple narrative strands.[249] By mixing conventions and structures these series pick up on the disposition in contemporary television and, more broadly, in contemporary culture for hybrids and fusions.[250]

Examples of flexi-narratives are for instance *The Sopranos*: 'Mixing the discursive "feminine" of the soap genre with the macho action of the discursively "masculine" mobster genre, *Sopranos* invites the negotiation of two apparently incompatible codes'.[251] Another is *ER*: its narrative include both periodic bursts of rapid action alternated with more leisurely character development. Furthermore, its narrative structure is segmented into a lot of short scenes.[252]

In order to see whether Netflix also creates hybrids and fusions, an outline of *Sense8*'s displayed conventions and structures will follow. Comparing this to the other originals, differences become visible. Some show a high degree of hybridity and others merely meet the preconditions of a flexi-narrative.

Sense8 borrows from multiple genres: it shows rapid editing and also conventions of the soap opera, the puzzle film and action movies. As mentioned earlier, rapid editing and short sequences are key in the visual style and narrative structure of the series. Nelson points to advertisements as the source of this kind of editing. With this *Sense8* goes along with the accelerated pace found in contemporary television.[253]

Genre conventions of the soap opera also appear frequently, for instance when Lito apologises to his ex Hernando in *What is Human?.* Lito has chosen his career above his

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[247] Bignell, J. & J. Orlebar (2005) *The Television Handbook*. New York: Routledge: p. 100.
[248] Bignell, J. & J. Orlebar (2005): p. 100.
[249] Nelson, R. (2007): p. 120.
[250] Nelson, R. (2007): p. 52.
[251] Nelson, R. (2007): p. 53.
[252] Bignell, J. & J. Orlebar (2005): p. 100.
[253] Nelson, R. (2007): p. 120.

relationship, which led into Hernando leaving him. Later Lito realises the mistake he has made and wants to apologize. This scene shows the soap opera's convention of foregrounding the realm of the personal and feelings and using conversation as the major narrational strategy.[254] The scene mainly shows close-ups of their faces: this way the emotional reaction of both characters becomes clearly visible and foreground the personal and emotional. The scene contains a monologue of Lito explaining that he now sees the error of his ways, making talking its main narrative strategy. Emotional cues provided by music is another soap opera convention that *Sense8* uses.[255] The moment Hernando kisses Lito as a sign that he forgives him and that they are back together, the music swells.

Sense8 also borrows form nineties puzzle films. In a puzzle plot the arrangement of events is not only complex, it is also perplexing and complicated: 'the events are not simply interwoven, they are entangled.'[256] It goes beyond interweaving plotlines by for instance showing characters at two places at the same time, embracing time loops and non-linearity, showing a fragmented spatio-temporal reality, blurring boundaries of different realities and creating gaps in its storytelling. The complexity of puzzle films operates at two levels at once: narrative and narration. Both the telling of the story as the story itself is complex.[257] *Sense8* shows a similar structure: the sensates can be at multiple places at once which also leads to different levels of reality: the reality where sensate see and speak to each other and the reality of the environment that each of them are in. For example, When Will and Riley kiss for the first time the viewer first sees them kissing and the next shot shows Will kissing thin air: both realities are shown. Moreover, the detached spatial and temporal aspects of these realities are one of the techniques used to create density. There are also gaps in the storytelling to be found, especially in the beginning. Normally the first episode is used to explain the rules and boundaries of the world.[258] *Sense8* has chosen to not do this and jump right into the story. This can lead to a lot of confusion with the viewer, who does not know yet how the world of

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[254] Hall, S. (1997) *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage: p. 380.
[255] Bignell, J. & J. Orlebar (2005): p. 100.
[256] Buckland, W. (2009) 'Introduction: Puzze Plots', in: W. Buckland, *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell: pp. 1, 3.
[257] Buckland, W. (2009): pp. 5 – 6.
[258] McCabe, J. (June 6, 2015): http://nerdist.com/exclusive-j-michael-straczynski-prepares-us-for-his-netflix-series-sense8/ (June 10, 2016).

sensates work. By making both the narration as the narrative complex, the series takes over the convention and narrative structure of puzzle films.

The series also uses the structure of action movies' fight scenes. The narrative structure of a classical action movies is built on a response of the hero towards actions of the villain. Initially the hero survives the threat, then starts to actively resists it and finally overcomes it.[259] There is also a strong connection to martial arts: from the eighties onward, action movies moved from the hard body towards a more evolved body that can deliver impossible performances with the help of digital enhancement. Movies started to negotiate with the impossible creating a limitless imaginary.[260] This narrative structure can be found in the story of Capheus: while driving the bus at work he and his costumers get robbed by a criminal gang. The very expensive medications he bought for his mother are taken and although he is threatened with a gun, he survives. Immediately after, he actively resists it by going after them. With the help of Sun's martial arts qualities, he gets the medicine back. Later in the season he is abducted by this criminal gang but together with Sun he defeats them. Hereby it follows the classical narrative structure of the action movie. It is Sun however who delivers the impossible performances. Sun attacks every armoured criminal that is waiting for her, doing most of the work without weapons and with intricate fighting techniques and swift moves as if she has eyes in the back of her head. *Sense8* also shows a limitless imaginary the viewer is familiar with through action movies.

Borrowing narrative structures and conventions from at least four different genres shows how *Sense8* is a hybrid form of television. By showing these conventions in a visual style of rapid editing the boundaries between the different genres are blurred creating a mixed entity. With these qualities *Sense8* can be called a flexi-narrative. The series does not foreground all aspects of its flexi structure, but does emphasize the fact that it takes after the puzzle film and action movies. The structure of the puzzle film overlaps with the techniques of narrative density creating an ever bigger emphasis on its complexity, fragmentation and density. By having yet another element asking attention for the complex dense narrative, it is singled out as one of the hallmarks of this show. The series also asks attention for its scenes based on action movies. The series focuses longer on these scenes than the average 45

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[259] O'Brien, H. (2012) *Action Movies: The Cinema of Striking Back*. New York: Wallflower: p. 14.
[260] O'Brien, H. (2012): pp. 14 – 15.

seconds. An example is the abduction of Capheus: the scene that builds up towards the fighting scene takes 2.21 minutes, the fighting scene itself takes 1.15 minutes. The narrative structure then jumps to another plotline, but later comes back to show Capheus in a chasing scene that takes 2.00 minutes. By deviating from its usual speed the series foregrounds its connections with action movies.

The other Netflix originals also show influences from different narrative structures. The series quite frequently show conventions of the soap opera: the personal and the emotional are often prioritized. One of *Orange Is the New Black*'s main focuses is on the relationships between the inmates. Emotions, love interests and sexual relationships are central which are also the themes of the soap opera.[261] For these moments the close-up is often used so that the viewer can read the expressions on the character's faces. *Marco Polo* shows similar signs of the soap opera in the plotline of Marco an Kokachin who fall in love. For example, In *Rendering* they express their love for on another and spend the night together, this is again portrayed with close-ups and swelling music when they start to kiss. In *Narcos* the soap opera is visible sometimes: when Pablo's wife confronts him with his adultery or when Steven spends times with his wife Connie and their adopted baby the personal and the emotional come to the fore. It is not the most visible convention that the series shows; it stays secondary to other plotlines. *House of Cards* and *Lilyhammer* have a more ambiguous relationship to the soap opera. *House of Cards* does ask attention for the emotional and the personal but does not always portray it in the conventional manner of the soap opera. An example is the affair of Claire. As mentioned earlier the audience does not get access to the feelings of Frank or Claire when they reunite. *Lilyhammer* also portrays the emotional aspects of the lives of its characters, but these aspects only have a supportive role. It is there to create a humorous scene: for instance, when Torgeir is upset that he has let people down, Frank does not really know how to handle the situation and feels awkward comforting him. The emotional is mostly there to create an uncomfortable situation.

The convention of the mafia genre is shown in both *Lilyhammer* and *Narcos*. This convention entails: unpredictable violence, male bonding, strong but questionable loyalty

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[261] Seiter, E. & M. Wilson (2005) 'Soap opera survival tactics', in: G. Edgerton & B. Rose (eds), *Thinking Outside the Box: A Contemporary Television Genre Reader*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky: p. 136.

among the crew, a sense of community, sexually available women and family values.[262] As is shown in Chapter 2 all these conventions are shown in *Lilyhammer* since it very much focuses on its mafia-themed predecessors. Also in *Narcos* these themes are discussed: Pablo Escobar is portrayed as a family man with a crew that is very loyal to him. Violence can come out of nowhere and women seem always available to him and his crew.

Narcos also shows conventions of the cop genre. This becomes clearest within the buddy dynamic of Murphy and Peña.[263] Furthermore, there is the convention of cops being loners: they do not life a happy family life, according to Thomas Leitch.[264] Although Murphy's job puts a strain on his marriage, he is still happily married to Connie. Peña however, is a loner. He does not commit to a relationship and tells Murphy about his dysfunctional behaviour in relationships in *There Will Be a Future*: he left his fiancé at the altar.

There are also conventions of the (political) thriller to be found, this time in *House of Cards*. Charles Derry explains that a convention of the political thriller is a contrast between the actual story and the official story that is given by an authority such as the government.[265] In *House of Cards* this contrast is made by opposing the actions of Claire and Frank with the focus on speeches, speech writers and public appearances. The series makes very clear that the official story is almost never similar to the actual events. The series shows this time and again. Another convention is the presence of an investigative force, not unlikely to be a journalist.[266] This is also present in *House of Cards*: what begins as a cooperation between Frank and Zoe Barnes ends up in a journalistic investigation by Zoe's co-workers.

At last, there is the rapid editing that creates a narrative structure that is segmented and shows a lot of short scenes, that is one of the qualities of flexi-narratives. As has become clear, most Netflix originals already create rapid editing by changing between plotlines. This already means that the episodes are divided into pieces of around two minutes, which shows that a segmented structure is presented in these series. On top of this is the editing that is done while the narrative structure stays with one plotline. This means that the pieces can be even shorter. This is for instance the case with *Narcos*: it does not switch as often between

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[262] Nelson, R. (2007): p. 30.
[263] O'Brien, H. (2012): p. 53.
[264] Leich, T. (2002) *Crime Films*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press: p. 222.
[265] Derry, C. (2001) *The Suspense Thriller: Films in the Shadow of Alfred Hitchcock*. Jefferson, London: McFarland: p. 148.
[266] Derry, C. (2001): p. 148.

plotlines as the others do but while progressing one plotline it shows the development from multiple perspectives that also create a segmentation in the storytelling.

The different conventions on display in Netflix originals show that there are hybrid forms to be found that point towards flexi-narratives. For instance, *Narcos* brings together the cop movie, the mafia genre and the soap opera. *House of Cards* combines the soap opera with the political thriller. *Sense8* shows elements of the soap opera, the puzzle film and the action movie and brings them together. The series also chooses to foreground this element by asking attention for its fighting scenes and its dense narrative. Other instances of foregrounding the flexi-narrative mainly happen concerning intertextuality, like *Lilyhammer*. As became clear in Chapter 2, through making explicit a connection with other content that already has a reputation of quality, Netflix tries to attain the label of quality itself. *Orange Is the New Black* shows less hybridity but nevertheless fulfils the preconditions of a flexi-narrative: the rapid editing of advertisements, with the ongoing serial storytelling of the soap opera and the episodic storytelling of a series. Although some series are more hybrid than others, all Netflix originals show enough hybridity to display the parameter of a flexi-narrative.

The Looks but Not the Structure

The analysis of narrative structure has made visible many differences between the Netflix originals. Most series have shown signs of narrative density, although in various degrees. Moreover, this parameter was foregrounded by some and especially *Sense8*. By using several techniques at once the series asks attention for its dense narrative. Density could be a technique to create a multi-layered textuality that, according to Nelson, retains a dimension of openness that requires the reader to work hard and actively produce significance.[267] The series thus create a viewing experience in which the series demands the attention of the viewer. According to Mittell, that is exactly what 'quality television' does: demanding active engagement and reflection of the viewer.[268] Therefore, it is plausible that Netflix invites sophisticated medialiterate viewers, the kind that 'quality television' aims at.[269] The flexi-narrative analysis shows a similar outcome: most series show a hybrid structure, again in

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[267] Nelson, R. (2007): pp. 205 – 206.
[268] Mittell, J. (2015): pp. 51, 53.
[269] Nelson, R. (2007): p. 205.

various degrees. Again it is *Sense8* who foregrounds this element: mainly to once again emphasize its dense structure. Foregrounding the flexi-narrative is also a way to display intertextuality. Thereby it foregrounds the connection between the content of Netflix and other products in film or television and gain access to already attained cultural cachet. This also explains why Netflix chooses to foreground some parts of the flexi-narrative and not all of it: it does not foreground the elements of the soap opera but does ask attention for structures of action movies, puzzle films and the gangster genre.

A clear deviation is shown when looking at narrative complexity: most of the Netflix series do not show enough signs of using this technique. Instead a strong inclination for the serial comes to the foreground. The reason for this new attitude may be the difference in distribution. In this case distribution affects content. If the focus is always on pushing the seasonal arcs forward other aspects concerning content will get lost. For instance, showing that the characters have a life away from the camera or showing that there are more people inside the story world than the viewer follows around. These series fail in showing that what is happening in the lives of the main characters is only one of many events happening within the complete story world: that there is happening a lot more than the viewer is seeing.[270] Yet, the creation of a story world larger than its main characters is a parameter of 'quality television'.[271] A clear deviation from the tradition becomes visible: Netflix chooses another way. The two exceptions are *Orange is the New Black* and *Lilyhammer*. They do not only portray narrative complexity but also foreground it by creating a fixed narrative structure. This way they turn narrative complexity into recognisable feature of its content. Overall, the Netflix series do show complexity in the sense of size, pace and hybridity of the narrative structure and they ask the active participation of the viewer. However, looking more closely it becomes clear that most of them do not have the narrative structure that backs up this initial complexity.

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[270] Rustad, G. & T. Vermeulen (2012): pp. 157 – 158.
[271] McCabe, J. & K. Akass (2007): pp. 247 – 248.

Conclusion: Choosing Form over Structure

The arrival of Netflix created a new TV landscape. This analysis has aimed at entering this landscape to assess the possible impact of Netflix on this TV landscape. As indicators have pointed towards a possible relationship between Netflix and the phenomenon of 'quality television', the analysis focused on gaining a deeper understanding of the possible style that is built by Netflix and the role that certain parameters of 'quality television' play in this style, since that can create insight in the impact of Netflix on the current field of television. This brought forward the research question: in what ways does Netflix employ parameters of 'quality television' in their original content? By focusing on three themes, characters, mise-en-scène and narrative structure, with each their own set of parameters this question is addressed. First a reflection on the outcomes of each of these themes will be outlined, followed by a framework of the impact Netflix has on the field of television concentrated on the relationship between Netflix and 'quality television'. This research does not only search for answers, but also creates new questions. Therefore, the last part will address possible topics for further research.

The topic of characters has shown a link between Netflix's original content and 'quality television'. The link is found in the fact that most Netflix originals series show a treatment of themes that are often discussed in 'quality television': the struggle of performing masculinity, ideals are not taken at face value but negotiated and with the help from the antihero the ambivalence towards social moral values was brought up. In some of the series, the treatment of these subjects is foregrounded: through a repetition in the editing, to direct address, patterns in visual style and the use of stereotypes emphasis is put on these themes. Only at one of the parameters Netflix shows a discrepancy: with the internal negotiation of the ideal through the real the specific structure that this parameter asks for is not always present. Moreover, there are differences found in the treatment of these themes. Sometimes the themes are only lightly touched and sometimes they are at the centre of a series. The several gradations in treatment of these subjects and the lack of a structural foundation show that for Netflix it is more important to emphasize the fact that these themes are being discussed than how these themes are being discussed. The specific style and identity Netflix tries to build focuses mainly on a thematic level and not as much on a structural level.

The analysis of mise-en-scène also confirmed the relationship between Netflix and 'quality television'. The link is created by Netflix because the visual elements of their series are presented as a main attraction. Moreover, the visual is prioritized: through linking visual elements to the discussed themes of a series Netflix shows that mise-en-scène is not a vessel for content, but is part of the content itself. The visual attraction and prioritization is emphasized through tactics of visual and glamorous excess, using certain compositions, intertextuality, creating visual patterns and visual repetition. Especially striking is the foregrounding of cultural cachet and creativity by using intertextuality. Again it is a structural foundation that is lacking within most of the Netflix originals: in the parameter of stylistic integrity most series do not use the structure of deconstruction and therefore their negotiated ideals are not presented as cultural constructions. Instead, there is a tendency to already choose to idealize or devalue a theme. Again it becomes clear that Netflix in forming its identifiable style it mainly focuses on formal, visible aspects and not on structural foundations. The focus thus lies on the appearance of 'quality television' and at first sight it does look Netflix ticks all the boxes, but looking closer it becomes clear a basis is missing.

The analysis of narrative structure has on the one hand confirmed the relationship between Netflix and 'quality television'. On the other, it has also shown a deviation. Most Netflix narratives are complex in the sense that they have relative density and that the structures are built from different kinds of sources, creating a flexi-narrative. Lacking is however the actual hallmark of 'quality television' storytelling: narrative complexity. Most series show an inclination towards the serial and almost completely pass over on episodic storytelling while 'quality television' is known for the interplay between episodic and serial plotlines. The foregrounding of these parameters changes from series to series: *Sense8* uses an abundance of tactics at once to foreground its complex storytelling, forming it into the single most typical characteristic of the show. Flexi-narratives are foregrounded on the basis of intertextuality: foregrounding the structures that contained cultural cachet and the label of quality, while passing over others. It becomes clear that Netflix concerning these parameters takes it own course, but it shows also a repetition of the outcome that is already shown by the other themes: Netflix uses narrative density and flexi-narratives to create a stylistic identity. This identity is based on the size and materials of the narrative but again not on the structure.

Focusing on Form

A first remarkability of the analysis of these three themes is the fact that there is a variation in the employment of these parameters between the Netflix series. The theme of masculinity is an example of this as well as the negotiation of the ideal through the real. Also narrative density can be an example with some series having more plotlines and switching a lot more between them than others. *Lilyhammer* shows a very different attitude towards these aspects than, for instance, *Orange Is the New Black*. Instead of letting each series tick as many boxes as possible each series foregrounds specific parameters of 'quality television'. For example, *Sense8* foregrounds its narrative structure, for *House of Cards* that is glossy style and for *Lilyhammer* it is the notion of the auteur. Another striking result is the fact that in building its identity and style, Netflix passes over structural foundations and instead focuses on foregrounding the form of 'quality television' by emphasising formal and visual parameters. This became most visible in the elements of negotiating the ideal through the real, stylistic integrity and narrative complexity. In these cases, it has become clear that a series does show the form of that specific quality, but the structure that is the foundation to this form is missing.

These differences in employment and the foregrounding of the form and not the structure in its identity, suggests that Netflix's identity focuses more on the possibility and appearance of 'quality television' than on proving that the products themselves belong to 'quality television'. 'Quality television' within Netflix thus has a more flexible coordinating function than a fixed defining function. Remarkable is that Netflix builds an identity based on parameters of 'quality television' but from this same identity does not directly speak the ambition to ascribe its own product to the tradition of 'quality television'. These parameters are thus not primarily employed to legitimize Netflix originals as 'quality television'. A next step is thus to look at how this identity is employed.

Ted Sarandos explained that with the Netflix brand they 'want to restore a sense of emotional connection between consumers and content'.[272] It is highly likely that this emotional connection is built on this stylistic identity that foregrounds the form of 'quality television'. As became clear in Chapter 2: the looks of a product are qualifying in the social hierarchy in terms of brands. By producing products that foreground the form and the visual elements of 'quality television' Netflix puts itself high up in this hierarchy. Once high up in the

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[272] Landau, N. (2016b): p. 16.

hierarchy, because of its stylistic identity, their content becomes a commodity that the viewer can identify with. 'Quality television' is connected to the ideas of commitment, belonging and identification and Netflix gains access to these abilities through its specific stylistic identity.[273] Netflix depends on this emotional connection: on their online platform a viewer always needs to make an active decision to start watching a certain product thus he or she needs to think that the series they are about the watch is worth committing to. It is the initial appearance of 'quality television' that is foregrounded in their stylistic identity that can convince the viewer to start committing.

The parameters of 'quality television' that together form the stylistic identity of Netflix are thus employed for commitment. In order to create commitment Netflix needs access to 'quality television'. This access is set up through foregrounding several parameters of 'quality television'. It is through foregrounding these parameters that Netflix is able to create an appearance and possibility of 'quality television', and it is the foregrounded appearance that Netflix gives access to notions such as quality, creative attribution, thematic depth and complexity. Having access to notions surrounding 'quality television' it also gains access to the commitment of the viewer. These parameters main function is thus not about legitimizing Netflix originals as 'quality television' but about asking attention and being foregrounded. In a way they are employed as attention signals: pay attention, this has quality.

Niche Is the New Mainstream

By not focusing on fitting the bill of 'quality television' exactly but more on creating an appearance or possibility of it, Netflix creates an opportunity to deviate from the notion of 'quality television'. This becomes clear in Sarandos' description of the Netflix brand: 'You have to be a niche in the way that you have a deeply passionate relationship with the brand. You have to be big enough to have scale but as passionate as the smallest niche.'[274] On the one hand Netflix uses the emotional connection of 'quality television' of belonging to a certain social group, the niche of 'quality television' viewers, to create a passion with the viewer about Netflix's content. On the other hand, by focusing on the possibility and appearance of 'quality television' they create a bigger scale that crosses the boundaries of that specific niche. And it

[273] DeFino, D. (2014): pp. 10 – 11.
[274] Landau, N. (2016b): p. 13.

is in this element that Netflix also crosses the boundaries of the notion of 'quality television' as it is known today.

A comparison with the working definition of 'quality television' shows that all except for the element of the niche audience is applicable to Netflix. It sets itself apart from other forms of television by using 'quality television' as a branding tool; Netflix often works together with auteurs or people who have experience in the field of 'quality television'; within the content there is an emphasis on visual style and complexity, however in different degrees; in most of the cases the content asks active participation of its viewer as has became clear with the analysis of narrative density; and it is inextricably bound to aesthetic judgement as is explained with the social hierarchy in terms of brands.

Attracting a well educated and wealthy niche with an interest in culture is the only element that Netflix deviates from. Since Netflix is an monthly subscription it will always remain focused on an audience with a certain amount of wealth.[275] Nevertheless, as became clear earlier, Netflix wants to reach a bigger scale than just the 'quality television' niche. They want to release around twenty original series a year.[276] Cindy Holland, Head of original content at Netflix, explained that there is not a lot of overlap between the different niches:

> There's some overlap but surprisingly little. We have several series that have been pretty successful, and when that happens there's a natural overlap. But as a general rule, the audience who watches House of Cards does not watch Hemlock Grove — and yet again, is not the audience that watches Arrested Development. We hope to reach the entire subscriber base with at least one original series by the time we're done.[277]

This demonstrates that each original is made to reach a different niche which shows that with twenty originals each year their aimed reach is a lot more diverse and broader than what 'quality television' up until now has aimed for.

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[275] Although the monthly fee is considerably lower than HBO's. A Netflix subscription can be shared between a maximum of four people, making the monthly fee €3,00 a person. The similar service of HBO called HBO Go is only available to those who have a subscription to the television cable network and is not as easily shared as Netflix's, it can be used on only one computer, one smartphone and one tablet. This makes the monthly fee around €15,00 a person.

[276] Landau, N. (2016b): p. 13.

[277] Rose, L. (June 18, 2014) 'Netflix's Original Content VP on Development Plans, Pilots, Late-Night and Rival HBO (Q&A)', *The Hollywood Reporter*. http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/netflixs-original-content-vp-development-712293 (March 20, 2015).

It is in this element that Netflix influences the notion of 'quality television' by deviating from it. Instead of using the notion to get access to that one profitable wealthy niche as many cable networks have done, Netflix does the opposite. It uses the focus of 'quality television' on a particular niche and uses it to reach a larger audience built out of several niches.[278] Because only by focusing on a niche it is possible to create a passionate and thus emotional connection between viewer and product. An effect of this tactic is that parameters of quality are spread across a bigger and more diverse audience. This means that 'quality television' can no longer be connected to one cultural and elitist niche, while according to Jane Feuer the attraction of this 'quality demographic' is one of the reasons that the phenomenon came into being.[279] This means that Netflix's tactics possibly affect a pillar of the definition of 'quality television'.

Netflix employs 'quality television' in a different manner from how it is known to be used. First and foremost, its parameters work as attention signals to gain commitment from the viewer and only some parameters have to be foregrounded to attain it. The appearance of 'quality television' has become more important than actually attaining the label. By handling 'quality television' differently, Netflix also impacts other elements within the TV landscape. A first signal of this impact is that the current definition of 'quality television' is no longer viable due to Netflix's tactics concerning this notion.

Further Questions

This analysis has given clarity on two different spots on the map of the TV Landscape. It has gained insight in the original content of Netflix regarding 'quality television' as well as the impact Netflix has on 'quality television' itself. Making these parts of the map visible creates the possibility to add other parts to the map. Because the answers that this research has provided also triggers new questions.

For instance, the role of digitalisation needs to be addressed. A subject left out of this research on purpose due to the scope of the analysis, has nevertheless already proven to be of influence. Looking at narrative complexity it became clear that Netflix makes different choices because of how their product is distributed. The fact that no viewer will ever miss out of an episode gives more space to the structure of serial storytelling, for example. The

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[278] Landau, N. (2016a): p. 161.
[279] Feuer, J., Kerr P. & T. Vahimagi (1984): p. 56.

digitalisation that Netflix has introduced together with other players in the field influences the content that is produced and thereby also the definition of 'quality television'. It can be therefore valuable to continue with research in this area to create a more complete and detailed map of the television landscape. Another important question to answer is what happens to the wedge that 'quality television' has created between itself and 'not-quality television'? Netflix has made this boundary blurrier by introducing several parameters of 'quality television' to a bigger and broader audience. By looking into this issue the findings of this research can be worked out into greater detail. Another question that needs answering in order to create a map of the new TV landscape is in what ways do other players within the field react to this development? In this way a broader view on the new TV landscape can be created.

This research stands at the beginning of the mapping of the TV landscape and has indicated a starting-point of the developments created by this renewed TV landscape. It focused on exploring the field regarding the relationship between Netflix and 'quality television' but there is a lot more left to explore. Now further research is needed to look at the direction these developments will grow into. Further questions and answers are needed to create a unified view on the map of the new TV landscape. For now, it has become clear that Netflix employs parameters of 'quality television' as attention signals and spreads these over a larger audience. By employing 'quality television' differently Netflix also impacted this concept. 'Quality television' as it is defined today has stopped by a new player in the field, which is Netflix. As this map of the TV landscape has just started to unfold an endpoint is in this case also a new beginning.

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Appendices

Appendix 1:

Image 1:

Image 2:

Image 3:

Image 4:

- [overlapping gunfire]
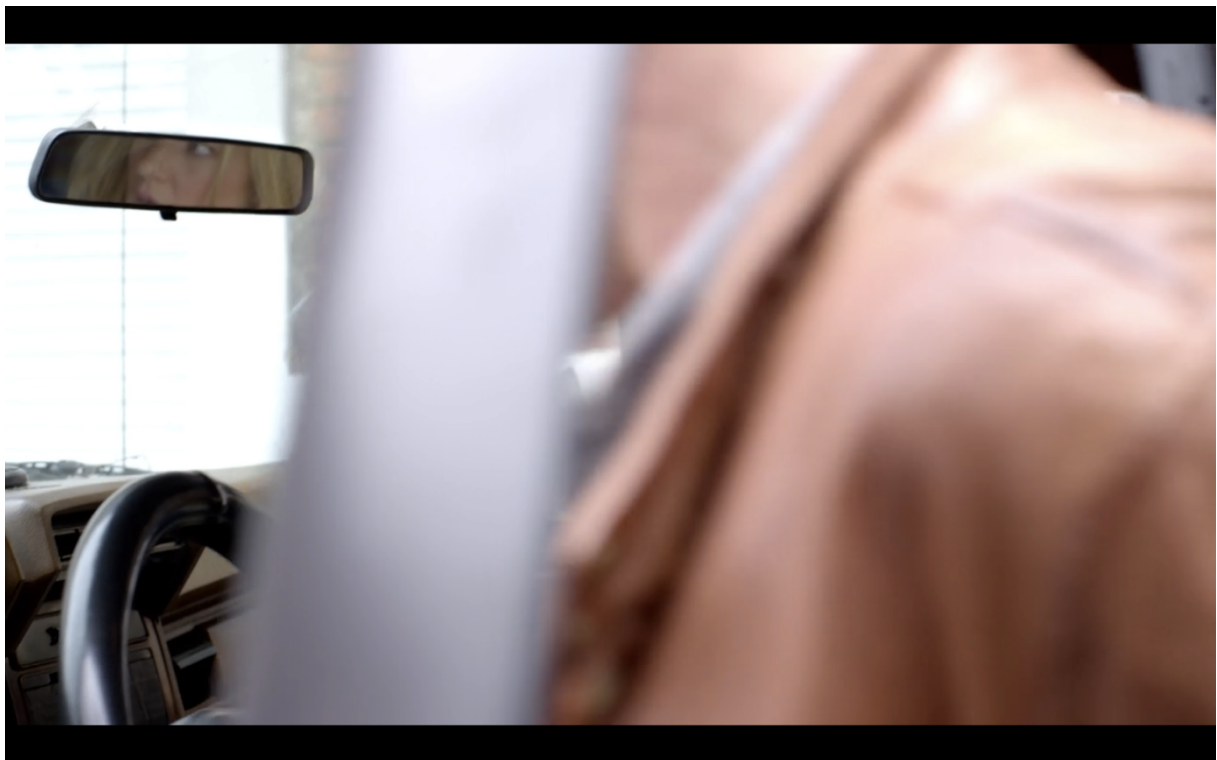- [screaming]

Image 5:
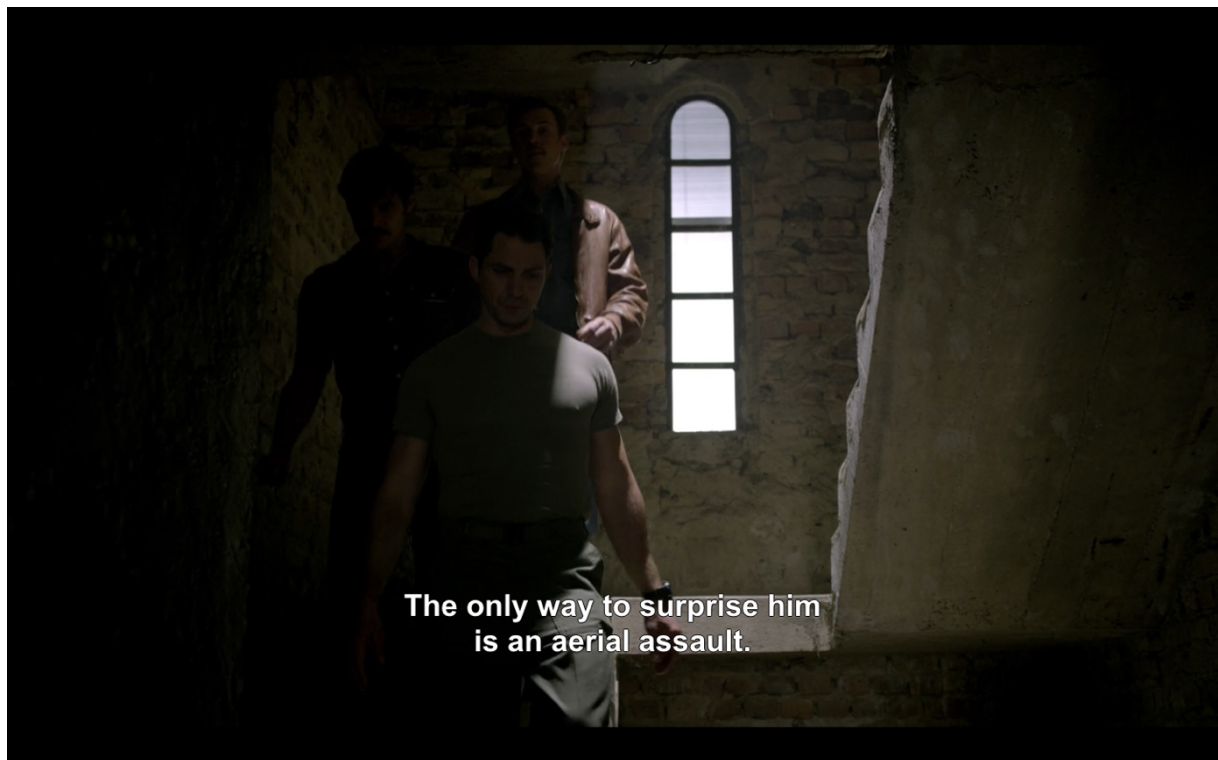
Image 6:

Image 7:

Image 8:

Image 9:

Image 10:

Image 11:

But why didn't you tell us?

Image 12:

Image 13:

Image 14:

Image 15:

Image 16:

Image 17:

Image 18:

Appendix 2

Series	Number of Plotlines	Episodic plotlines	Serial plotlines	Switching between plotlines	Duration of episode	Average time spent with plotline
Sense8						
1.01 Limbic Resonance	9	0	9	65	67 minutes	1:02 minutes
1.02 I Am Also a We	8 (+ 2 sub)	0	8 (+ 2 sub)	61	54 minutes	53 seconds
1.03 Smart Money Is on the Skinny Bitch	7	0	7	81	48 minutes	35 seconds
1.13 I Can't Leave Her	5	0	5	115	54 minutes	28 seconds
Average:	**7,25**	**0**	**7,25**	**81**	**56 minutes**	**45 seconds**
Orange Is the New Black						
1.01 I Wasn't Ready	3	0	3	13	51 minutes	3:55 minutes
2.11 Take a Break From Your Values	10	1	9	39	58 minutes	1:29 minutes
3.01 Mother's Day	7 (+ 7 sub)	1 (+ 7 sub)	6	37	52 minutes	1:25 minutes
3.12 Don't Make Me Come Back There	12	2	10	38	60 minutes	1:35 minutes
Average:	**8**	**1**	**7**	**32**	**55 minutes**	**2:06 minutes**
House Of Cards						
1.05 Chapter 5	6	0	6	34	52 minutes	1:32 minutes
2.04 Chapter 17	5	2	3	41	48 minutes	1:10 minutes
3.10 Chapter 36	6	0	6	24	57 minutes	2:22 minutes
4. 10 Chapter 39	7	0	7	24	57 minutes	2:23 minutes
Average:	**6**	**0,5**	**5,5**	**31**	**54 minutes**	**1:52 minutes**
Marco Polo						
1.03 Feast	6	1	5	26	60 minutes	2:18 minutes

1.06 White Moon	7	1	6	27	54 minutes	2:00 minutes
1.09 Prisoners	7	0	7	23	54 minutes	2:21 minutes
Average:	**6,67**	**0,67**	**6**	**25**	**56 minutes**	**2:13 minutes**
Lilyhammer						
1.03 Guantanamo Blues	4	2	2	21	44 minutes	2:06 minutes
2.01 Millwall Brick	4	2	2	20	45 minutes	2:15 minutes
2.06 Special Education	4	2	2	26	44 minutes	1:41 minutes
3.02 Foreign Affair	4	2	2	22	44 minutes	2:00 minutes
Average:	**4**	**2**	**2**	**22,25**	**44 minutes**	**2:00 minutes**
Narcos						
1.03 The Man of Always	5	1	4	10	46 minutes	4:36 minutes
1.05 There Will Be a Future	5	0	5	16	54 minutes	3:23 minutes
1.08 La Gran Mentira	4	0	4	10	51 minutes	5:06 minutes
Average:	**4,67**	**0,33**	**4,33**	**12**	**50 minutes**	**4:22 minutes**

Appendix 3

Seasonal arcs of each character in season 1 of *Sense8*:

- Kala struggles with her upcoming marriage. This plotline is introduced in episode one and continues until episode twelve.
- Will is hunted by a childhood memory. This plotline is also introduced in episode one and continues until episode twelve.
- Lito is having difficulties accepting his sexuality. This story is introduced in episode two and last until episode ten.
- Wolfgang has family issues, which begin in episode one and are resolved in episode twelve.
- Riley's arc revolves around her thinking she is hexed which start around episode three and ends in episode twelve.
- Capheus wants to take care of his mother, which is introduced in the first episode and ends in the eleventh.
- Sun discovers the fraud of her brother. She discovers it in the third episode and the story lasts until the eleventh episode.
- Nomi tries to find out the truth about her being hospitalized. This starts in episode two and last until episode nine.