TV Series and Their Boundaries

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I follow Ted Nannicelli in the project of establishing boundaries of television works. I focus on serialized television works pertaining to a particular genre and I set out to provide an account of their identity. My claim is that external identity of such works is determined by their specific genre-affiliation, given the way in which generic norms determine the content of the series, namely, its characteristic storylines and regular set of characters. From the internal perspective, a series' identity is determined by the particular way in which it implements abstract generic norms. I describe the process of such implementation as creation of series-specific formulaic patterns, and I analyze different layers of works where such patterns are evident. My central claim is that series-specific formulaic patterns create a coherent set of norms which, through repeated instantiation in the series' episodes, become associated with that particular series. The function of this set is to establish the series' boundaries, and to maintain its identity when different modifications to the patterns are made.
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1. Ontology of television works

1 Nannicelli 2012: 165-166.

2 My examples will pertain to crime genre, but the account I end up providing can accommodate other d (…)

1 Writing about the ontology of TV works, Ted Nannicelli argued that «the possibility of critical debate about a work of television depends upon our ability to identify and individuate the work – to establish its boundaries in such a way that our analysis is of this work and not any other(s)»**1**. In this paper, I take the task of 'establishing boundaries' to one of the most prevailing TV programs, serialized fictional works affiliated with a particular genre – I refer to such works as genre fiction TV series, GFTVSs for short. Examples include *Columbo* (NBC), *Law and Order (*NBC, hereafter *L&O*), *Criminal Minds* (CBS, hereafter *CM)*, *Cold   Case* (CBS,   hereafter *CC), CSI: Crime   Scene

Investigation (CBS), *NYPD Blue* (ABC), H*omicide: Life on the Street* (NBC), *the Mentalist* (CBS) and the like**2**.

3 This is particularly evident with works which generate the so-called spin-offs. Examples include *CS* (...)

2Genre-affiliation of works that interest me is relevant for establishing their boundaries because the norms associated with the genre determine the kind of a work that is created. Works pertaining to one genre share a striking similarity with respect to the representative, expressive and formal properties, which is why they are often considered formulaic**3**. In light of the shared genre-determined stories and other homogeneity (which I describe below), what is it – other than different titles – that makes two GFTVSs different works?

4 See Kazzloff (1992), Nannicelli (2009), Andrzejewski and Salwa (2018) for discussions on series/ser (...)

5 As Andrzejewski and Salwa (2018) point out, this is not a trivial matter as it has implications for (...)

3An additional reason why establishing boundaries of GFTVSs is challenging relates to their episodic nature. According to the dominant view, series are distinct from other forms of serialized works (namely, serials) because, rather than contributing to an overall arch-story of the work, each episode tells its own story, the conclusion of which is reached by its end**4**. Therefore, episodes are (or can be) considered as stand-alone units, with no necessary temporal or causal connections among them, as rarely does an event X in episode 1 cause an event Z in episode 7**5**. To properly establish the boundaries of such works, we need to explain why we recognize and individuate the compilation of these episodes as one work, rather than as different works. To answer that, we first need to account for the relation between series and its constituent parts, episodes, and we need to determine conditions under which an episode can be rightly recognized as belonging to a particular TV work.

4It will immediately be obvious that, with the exception of *Columbo*, most of the examples on my list gravitate towards serials and thus do not fit nicely into the category of series as just described. Although they hold on to the 'one problem per *episode'* structure – rather than 'one problem per *season'*, as for example *The Wire* (HBO) does – series that concern me exhibit some degree of connecting ties among the episodes, primarily evident in psychological continuity of the main characters, as when *L&O: SVU'*s detective Benson keeps chasing her mother's rapist, or in an ongoing arch-story, as in the *Mentalist*, where the search for Red John does not regulate the action of each episode, but it unites them by being the constant motivational imperative of the lead character. Thus, it might be questionable whether all my examples can fit under the same ontological account.

5Postponing this question for later, I first explain the influence of genre-affiliation on a work's identity, claiming that the so-called genre-determined norms (i.e. generic norms) specify its external identity. By analysing some of the most prominent TV series, I explicate how genre-determined norms are instantiated in a particular series, describing this process as one of individuation, i.e. of establishing work's internal identity. The central notion in my account is that of *series-specific formulaic patterns*, that is, a set of instructions on how to create a certain work. In the second part I analyze these patterns and show how they serve the task of determining and sustaining a series' identity, primarily by uniting individual episodes under a single series.

6 See Davies (2017), Nannicelli (2012, 2013), and Thomasson (2005).

7 While I am aware of the challenges that can be launched against a theory that makes use of 'critica (...)

6My account is sensitive to the methodological constraint definitive of descriptive ontology (DO), which asks us to carry out our discussions of works of television with an eye to our critical and appreciative practices**6**. Thus, to explicate the nature of a TV work, we first need to consider what these practices tell us about our conception of it**7**. In line with such constraint, and, I add, with what I take to be *an ordinary viewer's watching experience*, I will consider a GFTVS as a work, perhaps even a work of art, which is the object of our appreciative interest and commitment. By 'work', I have in mind a particular series, nominally individuated by its title (*Law and Order*), and composed of all the episodes that, as they are (or have been / will be) produced, are intended (by the creators) to be constitutive parts of that series, and are recognized and appreciated (by the audience) as such.

2. Genre fiction TV series: a descriptivist ontological account

7The starting point in my account of GFTVSs' identity makes a reference to a genre to which they pertain, where I take genre to be determined primarily by a specific subject matter, which in turn determines the content of a series**8**. The series that interest me can easily be affiliated with a particular genre in light of their *general mimetic focus*: most commonly, they are dealing with a particular social practice that is at the centre of their subject matter and thematic concerns (subject/theme nexus). Some of the most highly acclaimed series nowadays deal with criminal justice system, legal system and medicine. Almost regularly, a series' mimetic focus is reflected in its title – think of 'crime´ in *CSI* – thus signalling to potential viewers the kind of content the series brings forward**9**. Following DO's methodological constraint and my claim that the mimetic focus of a series is the most easily recognizable factor in how viewers classify TV works, I want to suggest that the project of establishing boundaries of a TV work is best achieved if we recognize the particular manner in which *generic norms* are played out in a series. I will refer to such norms as *formulaic patterns*, and will argue that they are of two kinds: *genre-determined* and *series-specific*.

8Genre-specific subject matter determines what the series is about, which is why I take it as determinative of a series' identity. It establishes the boundaries of the content of the series, by specifying characteristic story-lines and the set of characters and their interactions. Character-slots are as constitutive of a genre as its mimetic focus, as one cannot enjoy a crime story without someone committing the crime and someone trying to find a perpetrator. Such close link between mimetic aspect of a series and its characters is understandable, given that social practices that genre fiction is concerned with are defined by a particular set of problems, conventions specifying how to deal with these problems and agents who perform specific actions to solve these problems.

9Genre-specific subject guides viewers' preferences in deciding what to watch, it sets up their expectations regarding the kind of content the series brings to view and it provides them with clues on how to interpret what is going on. These formulaic patterns determine the identity of a series from the external perspective, by positioning it within a particular genre (i.e. in a Waltonian sense of a category)**10**. The function of this determination is prescriptive: formulaic patterns at this level determine the characteristic story lines and more or less fixed set of characters' functions. These patterns also serve as a set of instructions on how to create a work *of a certain kind*, namely a work that pertains to a certain genre, and are most evident in the consistency along the subject matter and thematic concerns (i.e. subject/theme nexus): crime fiction is always about a crime being committed and measures taken to find and prosecute the culprit. All crime fiction series exhibit this pattern, even if some pile up crimes, some suspects and some the quirkiness of a detective**11**.

10Genre-determined patterns condition the kind of content distinctive of particular genre, not *the details of how such content is developed*. Viewers know beforehand that detectives will chase criminals, but they do not know any details about how such actions will take place in a given show. Each series creates its own particular manner of implementing genre-determined stories (as I'll show below), and in doing so, it creates its own, *series-specific formulaic patterns*, inserting them on episodic basis. A series thus creates its own identity from the internal perspective – i.e. perspective of the fictional world of the series – and in doing so, it becomes individuated from other series of the same genre.

11Development of such patterns is operative along several dimensions, the most obvious of which refers to a particular way in which the content is organized in terms of narrative complexity, structure, aesthetics and the like. With respect to subject/theme nexus and characteristic plotlines, each series develops its own patterns, usually by focusing on one and downplaying other aspects of

the social practice at its core, i.e., by limiting its mimetic focus. While there are overlaps between subgenres and the *specific mimetic focus*, the two are not identical and overlap only partially. Police procedurals *CSI* and *CM* are both subgenres of crime fiction, but their specific mimetic focus differs significantly: *CSI* revolves around the state of the art forensics and *CM* around behavioural analysis. As a way of contrast, think of traditional police procedurals such as *NYPD Blue*.

12 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNjtcXLS7XQ.

13 For numerous examples of how individual series develop their own patterns, see Mittell (2006, 2015) (...)

12Series-specific patterns are most evident in the manner in which individual episodes are organized, as each series develops a distinguishing narrative style, i.e. the manner in which generic stories are presented, structured and brought to conclusion. An illuminative example comes from the creator of *L&O* franchise, Dick Wolf. «We take», he said, «a newspaper headline and we turn it into a moral puzzle»**12**. Compare such narrative structure to one characteristic of *CC,* which switches past and present, *Columbo,* which reveals the culprit's identity at the very beginning of each episode, or with *CM's* contrasting profilers' efforts to capture the culprit with the culprit's actions**13**.

14 Vidmar (2017) discusses the process whereby a fictional character becomes recogized as a human like (...)

15 As do Scotty Valens and Nick Amaro, both portrayed by Danny Pino. Individuation of characters is fu (...)

13One of the crucial steps in individuating a series relates to specification of its regularly occurring characters. This is a process whereby genre-determined character-slots are filled in with concrete individuals: agents who perform the relevant actions determinative of social practice, but who also invite recognition as individual human beings in light of their ethical, psychological, moral and other character traits**14**. Creation of such personae is, at the most general level, a matter of a particular actor or actress appearing in a given role. From the perspective of a fictional world, it is a matter of naming a character and providing it with its identity and its own distinctive, highly individualized and personal story-line which enables him to break free from the genre-determined character-slots and patterns of behaviour. Scotty Valens (Danny Pinno) and Fin Tutuola (Ice-T) both occupy the same genre-determined slot (that of a detective) and execute the same function (that of solving crimes), but within the fictional worlds of the series they belong to – *CC* and *L&O: SVU* respectively – they have personalities and recognizable identities with no overlapping similarities**15**.

16 Consider a critical commentary by one of the series' makers: «After several decades of viewing cops (...)

14Particularities in development of genre-determined story-lines and the specification of regularly appearing characters are two crucial steps in individuation of any *GFTVSs* – arguably, these two aspects are most absorbing to viewers. However, the relevant series-specific formulaic patterns that determine the identity of an individual series include additional structures via which a series makes itself different from other series of the same genre. One such structure relates to the consistency of its overall artistic and aesthetic features. Details of technological productions are relevant in the process of developing series-specific patterns, as are visual imagery and auditory features. What made *Miami vice* (NBC) stand out from other cops show was, apart from its focus on undercover cops, the bright and colourful wardrobe, fast cars, rock music and vivid shots of the environmental beauties of the sunny city of Miami – a formula not unlike the one employed a decade or so later by *CSI: Miami***16***.

17 An exception are occasional cross-overs, of which more below.

15With respect to the latter, notice the contribution of such vivid geographical location to distinctive identity of the series, in comparison to its close relatives, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* and *CSI: New York*. Repeatedly depicting the state of the art forensic equipment and vivid images of disfigured human body, the *CSI* franchise created a unique blend of aesthetics and science, but each of the three made its own visual identity related to its spatial location. In terms of characteristic story-lines and set of characters, there is not much of a difference between the original *CSI* and its two spin-offs, as these are similar in how they implement genre-determined norms. However, once we zero in on the series-specific patterns related to aesthetic features and regular characters, we can recognize fictional worlds that are worlds apart**17**. For all the similarities between the character-slot

of Gill Grissom (William Petersen), Mac Taylor (Gary Sinise) and Horatio Cane (David Caruso), individualization of these characters, their personal stories and intra-series relations with other characters turns them, experientially, into significantly different characters. For eager fans of *CSI*, watching an episode of *CSI: Miami* will be a significantly different experience, one they might not even want to pursue.

16The underlying series-specific formulaic patterns – those concerning a series' specific mimetic focus and thematic concerns, development of individualized characters, their habitual behaviour, appearance and personality, series' aesthetics and artistic features and features of its technological production – are crucial for a series' individuation. To attract viewers' interest, a series has to find new and original ways of implementing genre-specific stories ('subject') into its own unique way of telling them (form), adjusting the two according to the standards of a series' individual, yet highly formulaic framework.

17Creating a story for each episode is thus a matter of coming up with a particular genre-specific 'problem of the week' – a crime in crime fiction, a medical case in hospital drama or a legal case in courtroom drama – that is solved by a regularly occurring characters who occupy genre-specific roles in accordance with the specific mimetic focus of the series. This is where the formulaic nature of the GFTVSs is most evident, as episodes are highly homogeneous with respect to their development: series-specific patterns are implemented episodically, featuring the same set of characters doing the same thing in the same spatio-temporal circumstances over and over again. Notice that this is precisely how series differ from serials, as in serials, the specific patters are implemented at the level of season, not at the level of episode, as each episode has to push the story forward towards its conclusion. What I am suggesting is that series' homogeneity is the result of the same set of series-specific patterns being repeatedly instantiated in new episodes. Such patterns are the backbone to a work's identity: they unite seemingly disconnected episodes experienced as stand-alone units into one work with established boundaries.

3. Formulaic patterns as instructions for creating works

18So far, I have spoken of a series developing its formulaic patterns, though it is more precise to say that creators of the series develop them: it is through their actions that a series comes to exist with the features that it has. As Nannicelli argued, thus uniting his ontological project of establishing works' boundaries with works' makers' intentions, «the collaborating artists' creative decisions and the intentions behind them establish work-identity» (2012: 175). Following the lead of Paisley Livingston, Nannicelli refers to such intentions as categorical intentions, which specify not what the work means, but how it is fundamentally conceived or approached. According to this specification, creation of a series affiliated with the specific genre is a manifestation of its creators' categorical intentions. What my account adds to this is an explanation of how categorical intentions are manifested: by development of series-specific formulaic patterns.

18 See Moine (2008) who talks about «recurring configurations of formal and thematic elements» and of (...)

19With respect to GFTVSs, categorical intentions are primarily evident in creators' treatment of genre-determined norms. Namely, these norms only exist as abstractions, as generalizations or stereotypes which can be specified as broad descriptions of the content habitually found in works related to a genre18, but cannot, as such, be the focus of aesthetic appreciation or viewer's engagement. In order for a detective to chase criminals, one has to decide whether a detective is a male or a female, Belgian or English, of considerable deductive skills or with severe drug addiction. In other words, the only way to implement genre-determined patterns is to specify them. In the previous part I showed how this specification takes place via development of series-specific patterns, whereby genre-determined norms become instantiated in a particular work. Such specification thus brings and maintains a particular work into existence; determines its identity conditions and makes it distinctive from other works. Categorical intentions of creators are manifested in the particular choices they make to give content to abstract generic stories, and imbue them with representative, expressive, formal and other features.

20To highlight: creation of a TV series is a process whereby a maker, in light of her categorical intentions, decides how generic norms will be instantiated and she repeats such instantiations,

usually with slight modifications, from one episode to the next. Once these episodic repetitions become recognizable in virtue of their uniqueness – they are recognized as specific to one particular series – we can say that a TV series has been individuated, i.e. we know what its identity conditions are. With that in mind, we can offer an explanation of how to establish a work's boundaries, by postulating the following definition:

An instance of FGFTVS is recognized as a distinctive work W (i) in light of its exhibiting all, or most of, the relevant formulaic patterns that make up for the representative, expressive, aesthetic and other features associated with and determinative of W, (ii) which the work does not share with other works, i.e. which are work-specific.

21Condition (i) specifies what it is that makes any work the work that it is: the fact that its features are determined by the particular set of formulaic-patterns, which are in turn determined by work's creators' intentions. While it is neither necessary that all of the work's features are determined by creators' intentions, nor that all intentions are realized, we have to presuppose that the series has the features that it has because its creators intended it so. Condition (ii) emphasizes the fact that formulaic patterns are specific to a particular series and are not instantiated in any other series, regardless of the fact that two series can be affiliated with the same genre, and, as in the case of spin-offs, even have saliently similar features and identical specific mimetic focus and character slots. The series' boundaries are, on this view, established by a coherence of its series-specific formulaic patterns.

22This explanation can help us determine the exact nature of the relation between a series and its episodes. We saw that with series, instantiation of genre-determined patterns takes place episodically, with each episode telling its own story. This implies that, although series-specific patterns are instantiated in each episode, viewers watch and appreciate a different story each time they watch a particular episode – a conclusion supported by the fact that they can skip an episode and not lose track of what goes on in a series. However, in order to understand individual episodes, and to appreciate a particular manner of instantiating generic norms, viewers need to have sufficient experience of engaging with the series: they rely on their knowledge about the series to make sense of individual episodes. This shows that regardless of the absence of connecting ties among the episodes, or an encompassing arch-story, viewers see episodes as belonging to one particular work – so much so that they usually refer to episodes by the series' name, not by the title of individual episode.

23On my suggestion, what unites such seemingly independent episodes under one series is the fact that each episode is made with the intention that it becomes a part of that particular series, where this intention is evident in and fulfilled by the choice of general and specific mimetic aspect, usual characters fulfilling character-slots, narrative structures and other aesthetic features distinctive and definitive of one particular series. In other words, the systematic implementation of series-specific patterns from one episode to the next generates unity among stand-alone episodes. Paraphrasing slightly P. Livingston's classification of the intentions relevant in creation of art, we can argue that creators of TV series have *a work-specific conscious intention*: the intention to create a constitutive part of a specific work. Thus,

For an episode E to be a constitutive member of a series S, E has to be made with the intention that it belongs to S, which is achieved by its creators intentionally creating E in such a way that E exhibits sufficient similarity with other members of S, where such similarity is achieved by having E instantiate series-specific patterns definitive of S.

24What this means, roughly, is that creators develop new episodes by intentionally reinforcing the particular way in which they *originally* implemented genre-determined norms. By originally, I have in mind the implementation on the first instance of creating a new work, namely, in the pilot episode. As Andrzejewski and Salwa (2018) pointed out, pilot episodes are relevant in instructing the audience on what goes on in a series, and, I add, in revealing to them series-specific patterns. While there are usually modifications in how these patterns are instantiated later on, pilot introduces the viewers to the particularities of the series – its specific mimetic focus, regular cast members, aesthetic features… For the makers, pilot serves as a kind of a blueprint for how to bring new episodes of the same work into existence. With the accumulation of episodes, series-specific patterns are repeated and reinforced, and creation of new episodes is a manner, as it were, of 'looking back' into the previous ones, in order to create enough similarity with respect to their subject/theme nexus, set of individualized characters, narrative structures… By persistently repeating these similarities, patterns develop and are codified and applied to subsequent episodes, which enables

viewers to abstract those factors which are constant in a series and to associate that particular specification of generic norms with a particular series.

25An instructive way to think about the formulaic patterns is via analogy with different sets of instructions for the creation of works, particularly in the performing arts. Of course, neither episodes not series are performing arts, and series-specific patterns are not composed of the same structural elements as, for example, musical scores: as I will show below, regardless of the consistency and homogeneity of their applications, series-specific patterns can be implemented with high degree of variations. However, once they are instantiated in a pilot episode, more or less general instructions are given on how to create a new episode of the same work. In that sense, series-specific formulaic patterns have a role similar to that of a musical script: by properly executing them, creators manage to bring about an episode that shares enough similarities with other episodes created on the basis of those same patterns. Series-specific patterns thus serve as a set of instructions on how to create a new episode, and are therefore work-determinative, in that they specify most of the features of the final product[19].

26For a viewer to identify series-specific patterns – and to thus come up with a concept of how the particular series is – she needs to be familiar with the norms associated with the particular genre. That enables her to properly identify creators' categorical intentions and to recognize how genre-determined norms are implemented within individual series via series-specific formulaic patterns[20]. Repeated engagements with the series enable viewers to come up with more or less loose understanding of the relevant series-specific patterns, and to notice modifications that are introduced from one episode to the next. However, series-specific patterns do not exist as a collection of propositions one can verbalize to describe all the relevant features of the series. Rather, they are more or less loosely abstracted schema of how the series is that one acquires through repeated engagements with it, i.e. with its episodes, which is relevant for associating the episodes with a particular work. My suggestion is that episodic connections are generated by the repetitious implementation of series-specific patterns from one episode to the next, and not, as is the case in serials, by an event E in episode E1 causing an event E2 in subsequent episode 2, where both events contribute to the overall arch story uniting all the episodes. We recognize a certain episode as belonging to a certain series primarily in light of its formulaic patterns, which, as experienced viewers, we associate with the work in question.

27Contrast that with serials such as *The Wire*, where new episodes are introduced with an eye toward their contribution to the series' main problem, introduced in the pilot. This isn't to say that episodes are not homogeneous in terms of characters, spatio-temporal location… but connections are firmly established by progression of a story, i.e. a causal order of events depicted in episodes. One cannot skip an episode without a loss of understanding of what goes on in the overall arch-story. More importantly, serials-specific patterns are repeated at the level of seasons, as new season puts forward a new problem (e.g. global smuggling operation run from the Baltimore port area) which is then solved in accordance with series-specific mimetic focus introduced in the first season (i.e. keeping tabs on those suspect of a criminal behaviour). So, to answer the question from the beginning, my account can accommodate both series and serials, because pattern-instantiation is relevant in both, although it works in different ways: at the level of episodes in the case of series and at the level of seasons in case of serials[21].

4. Change of patterns and works' identity

28As a coherent set of instructions, series-specific formulaic patterns specify how to bring a new episode into existence. However, unlike with musical scores, creators of TV series do not have to execute instructions down to the very last detail; they can, and often do, modify patterns in various ways and for various, mostly artistic and aesthetic purposes, or to adjust to the circumstances of production. With the exception of Olivia Benson, all of the original characters of *L&O:SVU* have been replaced during the twenty plus years of its existence, thus giving rise to significant changes of

formulaic patterns related to characters' interactions. Changes also occur when a series modifies its other patterns, for example – proposed by my reviewer – by having the main detective pair chase romance rather than criminals in an episode, or by having, why not, the series change its specific mimetic focus. If, as I claimed, series-specific patterns are constitutive of a series' identity, it seems that the series is ontologically different once such changes take place. This implies that series-specific patterns are too unstable to anchor the series' identity and keep its boundaries.

22 This is why viewers do not make an identity mistake when an actor switches from one series to anoth (…)

29However, such a conclusion is premature. Nothing on my account prevents shifts in some patterns, as long as other identity-determining factors, internal and external, remain intact. As stated, the series' identity is maintained by the joint working of formulaic patterns, rather than by one pattern, even though with respect to the series that interest me, the most significant identity mark is series' specific mimetic focus: *CM* is recognized as *CM* for as long as the episodic problem is solved by behavioural analysis rather than, say, forensic equipment**22**. However, even if changes occur with respect to mimetic focus, series' identity (i.e. an episode's identity as related to the series) is maintained for as long as such change is coherently incorporated within the fictional world of a series, itself maintained by series' other specific patterns. Given that character psychological continuity is one such element, as long as that continuity is preserved, work's identity is secured: Grissom's turning to behavioural analysis would not jeopardize the identity of a *CSI* episode as long as such a turn is enmeshed with other story-lines, themselves developed in accordance with series-specific patterns.

30The same holds for character shifts. Consider Chris Meloni's decision to leave *L&O: SVU.* Not only was such a course of events embodied in the actions related to the solution of the episodic problem (thus contributing to and maintaining series' subject/theme nexus), but the character who replaced Melony's character (Nick Amaro) went on doing what regular characters in the show always did, solve crimes, and he did so in accordance with the series' specific formulae. Thus, the exit of one regular character and the introduction of a new one did not affect the overall identity of a series – even if it affected its expressive and representative properties, particularly for viewers who were fans of the actor or the character, because it did not jeopardize the fictional world of a series, nor the generic norms associated with it – after all, a change of character does not imply abolishment of character-slots definitive of a certain genre. All in all, the series remained an instance of a crime puzzle turned into moral puzzle, developed in accordance with its overall aesthetic and other formulae.

23 See Berliner 2017 for the role of novelty and familiarity in generating aesthetic pleasure. As expl (…)

31To conclude, various modifications do not disturb the identity of a work; rather, they bring diversity into otherwise familiar experience, thus enhancing viewer's aesthetic engagement with the work**23**. In the process, a series reinforces its own patterns, keeping those that 'work' and modifying those that do not, thus reaffirming its identity. Furthermore, viewer's awareness of the schema of series-specific formulaic patterns keeps the series' identity intact in face of occasional modification, precisely through viewers' capacity to identify the modification, in light of their familiarity with a series' overall design.

5. Final remarks

24 I am grateful to my reviewer for bringing this up. In what follows, I rely on RA as s/he describes (…)

32To conclude, let me explain why the account I suggested should be preferred to some accounts that might seem more intuitive, such as the Relational Account (RA), according to which two works are different because they have different relational features, such as titles, producers, show-runners…**24**.

25 This criterion is developed by J. Levinson in his work on ontology of music, but here I rely on Nan (…)

26 This is not to suggest that viewers do not choose what to watch given the type of content, aestheti (…)

33Notwithstanding RA's intuitive plausibility, I worry about some of its consequences. For one, it does not fit the ordinary viewer's watching experience. As stated by DO, works must be individuated such that they bear the aesthetic and artistic attributes we importantly ascribe to them**25**, and it does not seem that the ordinary viewer necessarily thinks of a particular GFTVS via the means provided by RA. While we refer to a given series by its title, other relational features are not what primarily comes to mind when one thinks of a given work. Therefore, RA is explanatory poor. In one sense, it states the obvious – two works are different because they have different properties – but if fails to explain viewers' first-hand experience that in watching an episode of *L&O* they are watching something substantially different from watching *CM,* or even *L&O: SVU* (even though, as part of the same franchise, the two share most of the referential properties). This is also why indicating that two works are different because they have different titles might not allow for more than a trivial explanation. In short, RA does not tell us anything that inherently relates to viewers' experience and appreciative interest: in principle (and I suspect, often in practice), a viewer can enjoy each episode of *L&O* without ever taking the effort to learn something about the producers, network and other relational aspect of the show, including the title itself – in fact, I see no reason to claim that awareness of such factors is a dominant aspect of regular viewers' experience**26**.

34Furthermore, RA should explain how the change of relational properties affects series' identity. In one sense, on RA, a series changes its identity if it is, as it happens, cancelled by one and taken up by another network (screenwriter/producer). This seems highly problematic from the perspective of our experience, as such changes matter little if we want to pursue aesthetic pleasure – pleasure, by the way, we derive from the way a series is, i.e. from its ontological core, namely, its series-specific patterns. What this suggests is that relational properties can be changed without affecting those properties by which we recognize a work as a particular work, and thus, without significantly affecting viewers' experience. This is because relational properties do not (as I think the formulaic patterns in my account do) depict aesthetic essentials of a given work, or, as we just saw, pinpoint their ontological and epistemic identity – what the series is and that by which we recognize and individuate it. Such essentials have a certain normativity built into them: in order to create an episode pertaining to *one* series, rather than the *other*, certain norms have to be instantiated, where it is not clear that such norms relate to producers, writers, networks etc. All these factors are external to viewers' experience and subject to change; thus they fall short as criteria on what makes a certain work one particular work rather than the other. All these criteria are provided by the account I suggested**27**.

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NOTE

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1 Nannicelli 2012: 165-166.

2 My examples will pertain to crime genre, but the account I end up providing can accommodate other dominant genres such as hospital and courtroom drama.

3 This is particularly evident with works which generate the so-called spin-offs. Examples include *CSI: Miami* and *CSI: New York; Law&Order: Special Victims Unit (*hereafter *L&O: SVU), Law&Order: Criminal Intent*, *Law&Order: Trial by Jury*, *Law and Order: LA, Law and Order True Crime;* or the *Criminal Minds: Suspect Behaviour, Criminal Minds: Beyond Borders* and *Criminal Minds: South Korea*.

4 See Kazzloff (1992), Nannicelli (2009), Andrzejewski and Salwa (2018) for discussions on series/serials.

5 As Andrzejewski and Salwa (2018) point out, this is not a trivial matter as it has implications for how we (should) attend to such series.

6 See Davies (2017), Nannicelli (2012, 2013), and Thomasson (2005).

7 While I am aware of the challenges that can be launched against a theory that makes use of 'critical and evaluative practices' without specifying them further, here I have to skip defending this use; an interested reader can turn to Nannicelli (2012, 2013).

8 The notion of 'genre' can be explicated, understood and employed as a category in our art and TV practice and theoretical discussions in different ways, and various criteria are used to group works together under a particular genre. My choice of a subject matter is determined by DO. Namely, regardless of the difficulties involved in our theoretical definitions of a genre, viewers generally have a robust enough understanding of the norms that make up a certain genre, which allows them to differentiate TV series on offer primarily in light of the genre to which they belong. On my suggestion, the particularities of subject matter are the most dominant factor in how viewers categorize series. Illuminative account of genre in relation to TV and cinema was provided by Altman (1999), Bavarshi (2000), Currie (2004), Knight (1997), Moine (2008).

9 Titles are, as Levinson (1985) puts it, constitutive of the series' identity and, I add, refer to its essential mimetic properties. However, as I discuss in the final part, to provide an explanatory rich ontological account of what makes two series different, stating that they have different titles is insufficient.

10 Walton (1970).

11 For example, *CM* on average, features three crimes per episode, *CC* builds the suspense by expanding the pool of potential perpetrators, and *Columbo* amuses by its lead detective's (Peter Falk) social awkwardness. See Mereike's (2016) detailed and insightful analyses of (what I'm calling) genre-specific formulaic patterns spanning over 70 years of American crime fiction.

12 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNjtcXLS7XQ.

13 For numerous examples of how individual series develop their own patterns, see Mittell (2006, 2015) and Mereike (2016).

14 Vidmar (2017) discuses the process whereby a fictional character becomes recogized as a human like individual.

15 As do Scotty Valens and Nick Amaro, both portrayed by Danny Pino. Individuation of characters is further enabled by development of their particular aesthetic features (consider the dark, gothic, Lolita-inspired wardrobe of Abby Sciuto (Pauley Perrette)), distinctive character traits (the intellectual superiority of Spencer Reid (Matthew Gray Gubler) and interaction with other characters (Stabler's (Chris Meloni) rage at the criminal coupled with Benson's (Mariska Hargitay) compassion for the victim). Such traits often become a recognizable feature of a series as a whole, particularly in cases of spin-offs which feature almost identical story-lines but highly diverse patterns of instantiating such stories.

16 Consider a critical commentary by one of the series' makers: «After several decades of viewing cops in ill-fitting suits driving undistinguished government-issue cars, it is an unexpected pleasure to see Sonny Crockett in pastel T-shirts and white linen jackets driving what was soon to become a noir television icon, his black Ferrari» (Sanders, 2010: 22). Sanders further illustrates the role of music in the creation of the series' distinctive identity claiming that Jan Hammer's music «provides an expansive vocabulary for commentary on themes and characters. … The songs that accompany each episode have such an uncanny fit to the images and actions on screen that they often serve as functional equivalents of voiceovers» (25). The point here isn't that only *Miami Vice* makes use of music to enhance its thematic concerns, but to

point to the fact that a particular choice of music and the manner in which music is employed was soon recognized as *distinctive to the series*. For the aesthetic features of series-specific patterns, see an interview with Dick Wolf for his discussion of formal and stylistic patterns of L&O:SVU at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CLA6bNrlAMo.

17 An exception are occasional cross-overs, of which more below.

18 See Moine (2008) who talks about «recurring configurations of formal and thematic elements» and of «intertextual repetition and intratextual accumulation» of elements repeatedly found in wide range of works (where the text can refer to linguistic and filmic medium). For the idea of stereotypes see Schweinitz (2011).

19 I am aware that my analogy between formulaic patterns and musical score is weak, in that each episode (unlike each musical performance of the same score) is a component of a work (rather than a new performance). I am also aware of the reasons why it might be an overstatement to say that series-specific patterns are work-determinative; as Nannicelli (2013) pointed out in discussing screenplays, there are many other aspects in addition to screenplay, which determine the final work – therefore, unlike musical scores, screenplays are not work-determinative. That same reasoning can apply to formulaic patterns: even though series-specific formulaic patterns feature in a screenplay for each episode, the episode is determined by factors other than the screenplay. I do not object to that, but I still think the analogy is useful (even if not all together accurate) because it points to a particular manner in which execution of certain, specified set of norms, brings about episode after episode of highly consistent nature, and we recognize these episodes as one and the same work, just like we recognize different performances, regardless of the differences among them, as performances of one and the same work.

20 As Carroll (1994) points out, part of the satisfaction in engaging with generic works is derived from recognizing their take on the generic norms, particularly when a series brings forward an original instantiation that has not been materialized in other series of the same genre. Arguably, the popularity of *CSI* was related to its revolutionary approach to traditional police procedurals: by replacing detectives with forensic experts, they modified traditionally understood character-slots.

21 The upshot of this is that we need an ontological account of a season, but I cannot develop it here.

22 This is why viewers do not make an identity mistake when an actor switches from one series to another. Kim Delaney and David Caruso were playing detectives in *NYPD Blue,* but when they joined forces as forensic experts in *CSI: Miami*, viewers easily recognized that they now pertain to a different series.

23 See Berliner 2017 for the role of novelty and familiarity in generating aesthetic pleasure. As explained by Carroll (Carroll 1994), part of the satisfaction derived from genre fiction relates to viewers' noticing how any given work develops generic norms. Similarly, part of the viewers' interest in new episodes of the same series is to see how each turns series' patterns upside down, as for example *CSI* franchise does in joining two casts from different series of the *CSI* franchise. Such cross-overs do not cancel individual identity of each show because viewers understand the specific way in which a cross-over episode works and know it is a modification of the existing works, rather than creation of a new one.

24 I am grateful to my reviewer for bringing this up. In what follows, I rely on RA as s/he describes it in his/her review of my original submission.

25 This criterion is developed by J. Levinson in his work on ontology of music, but here I rely on Nannicelli's interpretation of it (2012: 171).

26 This is not to suggest that viewers do not choose what to watch given the type of content, aesthetics and other features they associate with a certain network, screenwriter, producer… – we can be fans of Dick Wolf for the same reason as we are fans of Shakespeare: both make great works that give us pleasure. But if you think of a series being shown all over the world, it makes sense to argue that its original relation to a specific network (in say, America) matters little to a viewer outside the States.

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Torna su

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New Ontologies of Art

Tv series and their boundaries

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I follow Ted Nannicelli in the project of establishing boundaries of television works. I focus on serialized television works pertaining to a particular genre and I set out to provide an account of their identity. My claim is that external identity of such works is determined by their specific genre-affiliation, given the way in which generic norms determine the content of the series, namely, its characteristic storylines and regular set of characters. From the internal perspective, a series' identity is determined by the particular way in which it implements abstract generic norms. I describe the process of such implementation as creation of series-specific formulaic patterns, and I analyze different layers of works where such patterns are evident. My central claim is that series-specific formulaic patterns create a coherent set of norms which, through repeated instantiation in the series' episodes, become associated with that particular series. The function of this set is to establish the series' boundaries, and to maintain its identity when different modifications to the patterns are made.

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1. Ontology of television works

- **1** Nannicelli 2012: 165-166.

- **2** My examples will pertain to crime genre, but the account I end up providing can accommodate other d (…)

1Writing about the ontology of TV works, Ted Nannicelli argued that «the possibility of critical debate about a work of television depends upon our ability to identify and individuate the work – to establish its boundaries in such a way that our analysis is of this work and not any other(s)»**1**. In this paper, I take the task of 'establishing boundaries' to one of the most prevailing TV programs, serialized fictional works affiliated with a particular genre – I refer to such works as genre fiction TV series, GFTVSs for short. Examples include *Columbo* (NBC), *Law and Order (*NBC, hereafter *L&O*), *Criminal Minds* (CBS*,* hereafter *CM)*, *Cold Case* (CBS, hereafter *CC)*, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (CBS), *NYPD Blue* (ABC), H*omicide: Life on the Street* (NBC), *the Mentalist* (CBS) and the like**2**.

- **3** This is particularly evident with works which generate the so-called spin-offs. Examples include *CS* (…)

2Genre-affiliation of works that interest me is relevant for establishing their boundaries because the norms associated with the genre determine the kind of a work that is created. Works pertaining to one genre share a striking similarity with respect to the representative, expressive and formal properties, which is why they are often considered formulaic**3**. In light of the shared genre-determined stories and other homogeneity (which I describe below), what is it – other than different titles – that makes two GFTVSs different works?

- **4** See Kazzloff (1992), Nannicelli (2009), Andrzejewski and Salwa (2018) for discussions on series/ser (…)

- **5** As Andrzejewski and Salwa (2018) point out, this is not a trivial matter as it has implications for [(...)](...)

3An additional reason why establishing boundaries of GFTVSs is challenging relates to their episodic nature. According to the dominant view, series are distinct from other forms of serialized works (namely, serials) because, rather than contributing to an overall arch-story of the work, each episode tells its own story, the conclusion of which is reached by its end**4**. Therefore, episodes are (or can be) considered as stand-alone units, with no necessary temporal or causal connections among them, as rarely does an event X in episode 1 cause an event Z in episode 7**5**. To properly establish the boundaries of such works, we need to explain why we recognize and individuate the compilation of these episodes as one work, rather than as different works. To answer that, we first need to account for the relation between series and its constituent parts, episodes, and we need to determine conditions under which an episode can be rightly recognized as belonging to a particular TV work.

4It will immediately be obvious that, with the exception of *Columbo*, most of the examples on my list gravitate towards serials and thus do not fit nicely into the category of series as just described. Although they hold on to the 'one problem per *episode'* structure – rather than 'one problem per *season'*, as for example *The Wire* (HBO) does – series that concern me exhibit some degree of connecting ties among the episodes, primarily evident in psychological continuity of the main characters, as when *L&O: SVU'*s detective Benson keeps chasing her mother's rapist, or in an ongoing arch-story, as in the *Mentalist*, where the search for Red John does not regulate the action of each episode, but it unites them by being the constant motivational imperative of the lead character. Thus, it might be questionable whether all my examples can fit under the same ontological account.

5Postponing this question for later, I first explain the influence of genre-affiliation on a work's identity, claiming that the so-called genre-determined norms (i.e. generic norms) specify its external identity. By analysing some of the most prominent TV series, I explicate how genre-determined norms are instantiated in a particular series, describing this process as one of individuation, i.e. of establishing work's internal identity. The central notion in my account is that of *series-specific formulaic patterns*, that is, a set of instructions on how to create a certain work. In the second part I analyze these patterns and show how they serve the task of determining and sustaining a series' identity, primarily by uniting individual episodes under a single series.

- **6** See Davies (2017), Nannicelli (2012, 2013), and Thomasson (2005).

- **7** While I am aware of the challenges that can be launched against a theory that makes use of 'critica [(...)](...)

6My account is sensitive to the methodological constraint definitive of descriptive ontology (DO), which asks us to carry out our discussions of works of television with an eye to our critical and appreciative practices**6**. Thus, to explicate the nature of a TV work, we first need to consider what these practices tell us about our conception of it**7**. In line with such constraint, and, I add, with what I take to be *an ordinary viewer's watching experience*, I will consider a GFTVS as a work, perhaps even a work of art, which is the object of our appreciative interest and commitment. By 'work', I have in mind a particular series, nominally individuated by its title (*Law and Order*), and composed of all the episodes that, as they are (or have been / will be) produced, are intended (by the creators) to be constitutive parts of that series, and are recognized and appreciated (by the audience) as such.

2. Genre fiction TV series: a descriptivist ontological account

7The starting point in my account of GFTVSs' identity makes a reference to a genre to which they pertain, where I take genre to be determined primarily by a specific subject matter, which in turn determines the content of a series**8**. The series that interest me can easily be affiliated with a particular genre in light of their *general mimetic focus*: most commonly, they are dealing with a particular social practice that is at the centre of their subject matter and thematic concerns (subject/theme nexus). Some of the most highly acclaimed series nowadays deal with criminal justice system, legal system and medicine. Almost regularly, a series' mimetic focus is reflected in its title – think of 'crime*'* in *CSI* – thus signalling to potential viewers the kind of content the series brings forward**9**. Following DO's methodological constraint and my claim that the mimetic focus of a series is the most easily recognizable factor in how viewers classify TV works, I want to suggest that the project of establishing boundaries of a TV work is best achieved if we recognize the particular manner in which *generic norms* are played out in a series. I will refer to such norms as *formulaic patterns*, and will argue that they are of two kinds: *genre-determined* and *series-specific*.

8Genre-specific subject matter determines what the series is about, which is why I take it as determinative of a series' identity. It establishes the boundaries of the content of the series, by specifying characteristic story-lines and the set of characters and their interactions. Character-slots are as constitutive of a genre as its mimetic focus, as one cannot enjoy a crime story without someone committing the crime and someone trying to find a perpetrator. Such close link between mimetic aspect of a series and its characters is understandable, given that social practices that genre fiction is concerned with are defined by a particular set of problems, conventions specifying how to deal with these problems and agents who perform specific actions to solve these problems.

9Genre-specific subject guides viewers' preferences in deciding what to watch, it sets up their expectations regarding the kind of content the series brings to view and it provides them with clues on how to interpret what is going on. These formulaic patterns determine the identity of a series from the external perspective, by positioning it within a particular genre (i.e. in a Waltonian sense of a category)**10**. The function of this determination is prescriptive: formulaic patterns at this level determine the characteristic story lines and more or less fixed set of characters' functions. These patterns also serve as a set of instructions on how to create a work *of a certain kind*, namely a work that pertains to a certain genre, and are most evident in the consistency along the subject matter and thematic concerns (i.e. subject/theme nexus): crime fiction is always about a crime being committed and measures taken to find and prosecute the culprit. All crime fiction series exhibit this pattern, even if some pile up crimes, some suspects and some the quirkiness of a detective**11**.

10Genre-determined patterns condition the kind of content distinctive of particular genre, not *the details of how such content is developed*. Viewers know beforehand that detectives will chase criminals, but they do not know any details about how such actions will take place in a given show. Each series creates its own particular manner of implementing genre-determined stories (as I'll show below), and in doing so, it creates its own, *series-specific formulaic patterns*, inserting them on

episodic basis. A series thus creates its own identity from the internal perspective – i.e. perspective of the fictional world of the series – and in doing so, it becomes individuated from other series of the same genre.

11Development of such patterns is operative along several dimensions, the most obvious of which refers to a particular way in which the content is organized in terms of narrative complexity, structure, aesthetics and the like. With respect to subject/theme nexus and characteristic plotlines, each series develops its own patterns, usually by focusing on one and downplaying other aspects of the social practice at its core, i.e., by limiting its mimetic focus. While there are overlaps between subgenres and the *specific mimetic focus*, the two are not identical and overlap only partially. Police procedurals *CSI* and *CM* are both subgenres of crime fiction, but their specific mimetic focus differs significantly: *CSI* revolves around the state of the art forensics and *CM* around behavioural analysis. As a way of contrast, think of traditional police procedurals such as *NYPD Blue*.

- **12** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNjtcXLS7XQ.

- **13** For numerous examples of how individual series develop their own patterns, see Mittell (2006, 2015) (...)

12Series-specific patterns are most evident in the manner in which individual episodes are organized, as each series develops a distinguishing narrative style, i.e. the manner in which generic stories are presented, structured and brought to conclusion. An illuminative example comes from the creator of *L&O* franchise, Dick Wolf. «We take», he said, «a newspaper headline and we turn it into a moral puzzle»**12**. Compare such narrative structure to one characteristic of *CC,* which switches past and present, *Columbo,* which reveals the culprit's identity at the very beginning of each episode, or with *CM's* contrasting profilers' efforts to capture the culprit with the culprit's actions**13**.

- **14** Vidmar (2017) discuses the process whereby a fictional character becomes recogized as a human like (...)

- **15** As do Scotty Valens and Nick Amaro, both portrayed by Danny Pino. Individuation of characters is fu (...)

13One of the crucial steps in individuating a series relates to specification of its regularly occurring characters. This is a process whereby genre-determined character-slots are filled in with concrete individuals: agents who perform the relevant actions determinative of social practice, but who also invite recognition as individual human beings in light of their ethical, psychological, moral and other character traits**14**. Creation of such personae is, at the most general level, a matter of a particular actor or actress appearing in a given role. From the perspective of a fictional world, it is a matter of naming a character and providing it with its identity and its own distinctive, highly individualized and personal story-line which enables him to break free from the genre-determined character-slots and patterns of behaviour. Scotty Valens (Danny Pinno) and Fin Tutuola (Ice-T) both occupy the same genre-determined slot (that of a detective) and execute the same function (that of solving crimes), but within the fictional worlds of the series they belong to – *CC* and *L&O: SVU* respectively – they have personalities and recognizable identities with no overlapping similarities**15**.

- **16** Consider a critical commentary by one of the series' makers: «After several decades of viewing cops (...)

14Particularities in development of genre-determined story-lines and the specification of regularly appearing characters are two crucial steps in individuation of any *GFTVSs* – arguably, these two aspects are most absorbing to viewers. However, the relevant series-specific formulaic patterns that

determine the identity of an individual series include additional structures via which a series makes itself different from other series of the same genre. One such structure relates to the consistency of its overall artistic and aesthetic features. Details of technological productions are relevant in the process of developing series-specific patterns, as are visual imagery and auditory features. What made *Miami vice* (NBC) stand out from other cops show was, apart from its focus on undercover cops, the bright and colourful wardrobe, fast cars, rock music and vivid shots of the environmental beauties of the sunny city of Miami – a formula not unlike the one employed a decade or so later by *CSI: Miami***16**.

- **17** An exception are occasional cross-overs, of which more below.

15With respect to the latter, notice the contribution of such vivid geographical location to distinctive identity of the series, in comparison to its close relatives, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* and *CSI: New York*. Repeatedly depicting the state of the art forensic equipment and vivid images of disfigured human body, the *CSI* franchise created a unique blend of aesthetics and science, but each of the three made its own visual identity related to its spatial location. In terms of characteristic story-lines and set of characters, there is not much of a difference between the original *CSI* and its two spin-offs, as these are similar in how they implement genre-determined norms. However, once we zero in on the series-specific patterns related to aesthetic features and regular characters, we can recognize fictional worlds that are worlds apart**17**. For all the similarities between the character-slot of Gill Grissom (William Petersen), Mac Taylor (Gary Sinise) and Horatio Cane (David Caruso), individualization of these characters, their personal stories and intra-series relations with other characters turns them, experientially, into significantly different characters. For eager fans of *CSI*, watching an episode of *CSI: Miami* will be a significantly different experience, one they might not even want to pursue.

16The underlying series-specific formulaic patterns – those concerning a series' specific mimetic focus and thematic concerns, development of individualized characters, their habitual behaviour, appearance and personality, series' aesthetics and artistic features and features of its technological production – are crucial for a series' individuation. To attract viewers' interest, a series has to find new and original ways of implementing genre-specific stories ('subject') into its own unique way of telling them (form), adjusting the two according to the standards of a series' individual, yet highly formulaic framework.

17Creating a story for each episode is thus a matter of coming up with a particular genre-specific 'problem of the week' – a crime in crime fiction, a medical case in hospital drama or a legal case in courtroom drama – that is solved by a regularly occurring characters who occupy genre-specific roles in accordance with the specific mimetic focus of the series. This is where the formulaic nature of the GFTVSs is most evident, as episodes are highly homogeneous with respect to their development: series-specific patterns are implemented episodically, featuring the same set of characters doing the same thing in the same spatio-temporal circumstances over and over again. Notice that this is precisely how series differ from serials, as in serials, the specific patters are implemented at the level of season, not at the level of episode, as each episode has to push the story forward towards its conclusion. What I am suggesting is that series' homogeneity is the result of the same set of series-specific patterns being repeatedly instantiated in new episodes. Such patterns are the backbone to a work's identity: they unite seemingly disconnected episodes experienced as stand-alone units into one work with established boundaries.

3. Formulaic patterns as instructions for creating works

18So far, I have spoken of a series developing its formulaic patterns, though it is more precise to say that creators of the series develop them: it is through their actions that a series comes to exist with the features that it has. As Nannicelli argued, thus uniting his ontological project of establishing works' boundaries with works' makers' intentions, «the collaborating artists' creative decisions and the intentions behind them establish work-identity» (2012: 175). Following the lead of Paisley Livingston, Nannicelli refers to such intentions as categorical intentions, which specify not what the work means, but how it is fundamentally conceived or approached. According to this specification, creation of a series affiliated with the specific genre is a manifestation of its creators' categorical intentions. What my account adds to this is an explanation of how categorical intentions are manifested: by development of series-specific formulaic patterns.

- **18** See Moine (2008) who talks about «recurring configurations of formal and thematic elements» and of [(...)](...)

19With respect to GFTVSs, categorical intentions are primarily evident in creators' treatment of genre-determined norms. Namely, these norms only exist as abstractions, as generalizations or stereotypes which can be specified as broad descriptions of the content habitually found in works related to a genre**18**, but cannot, as such, be the focus of aesthetic appreciation or viewer's engagement. In order for a detective to chase criminals, one has to decide whether a detective is a male or a female, Belgian or English, of considerable deductive skills or with severe drug addiction. In other words, the only way to implement genre-determined patterns is to specify them. In the previous part I showed how this specification takes place via development of series-specific patterns, whereby genre-determined norms become instantiated in a particular work. Such specification thus brings and maintains a particular work into existence; determines its identity conditions and makes it distinctive from other works. Categorical intentions of creators are manifested in the particular choices they make to give content to abstract generic stories, and imbue them with representative, expressive, formal and other features.

20To highlight: creation of a TV series is a process whereby a maker, in light of her categorical intentions, decides how generic norms will be instantiated and she repeats such instantiations, usually with slight modifications, from one episode to the next. Once these episodic repetitions become recognizable in virtue of their uniqueness – they are recognized as specific to one particular series – we can say that a TV series has been individuated, i.e. we know what its identity conditions are. With that in mind, we can offer an explanation of how to establish a work's boundaries, by postulating the following definition:

An instance of FGFTVS is recognized as a distinctive work W (i) in light of its exhibiting all, or most of, the relevant formulaic patterns that make up for the representative, expressive, aesthetic and other features associated with and determinative of W, (ii) which the work does not share with other works, i.e. which are work-specific.

21Condition (i) specifies what it is that makes any work the work that it is: the fact that its features are determined by the particular set of formulaic-patterns, which are in turn determined by work's creators' intentions. While it is neither necessary that all of the work's features are determined by creators' intentions, nor that all intentions are realized, we have to presuppose that the series has the features that it has because its creators intended it so. Condition (ii) emphasizes the fact that formulaic patterns are specific to a particular series and are not instantiated in any other series, regardless of the fact that two series can be affiliated with the same genre, and, as in the case of spin-offs, even have saliently similar features and identical specific mimetic focus and character

slots. The series' boundaries are, on this view, established by a coherence of its series-specific formulaic patterns.

22This explanation can help us determine the exact nature of the relation between a series and its episodes. We saw that with series, instantiation of genre-determined patterns takes place episodically, with each episode telling its own story. This implies that, although series-specific patterns are instantiated in each episode, viewers watch and appreciate a different story each time they watch a particular episode – a conclusion supported by the fact that they can skip an episode and not lose track of what goes on in a series. However, in order to understand individual episodes, and to appreciate a particular manner of instantiating generic norms, viewers need to have sufficient experience of engaging with the series: they rely on their knowledge about the series to make sense of individual episodes. This shows that regardless of the absence of connecting ties among the episodes, or an encompassing arch-story, viewers see episodes as belonging to one particular work – so much so that they usually refer to episodes by the series' name, not by the title of individual episode.

23On my suggestion, what unites such seemingly independent episodes under one series is the fact that each episode is made with the intention that it becomes a part of that particular series, where this intention is evident in and fulfilled by the choice of general and specific mimetic aspect, usual characters fulfilling character-slots, narrative structures and other aesthetic features distinctive and definitive of one particular series. In other words, the systematic implementation of series-specific patterns from one episode to the next generates unity among stand-alone episodes. Paraphrasing slightly P. Livingston's classification of the intentions relevant in creation of art, we can argue that creators of TV series have *a work-specific conscious intention*: the intention to create a constitutive part of a specific work. Thus,

For an episode E to be a constitutive member of a series S, E has to be made with the intention that it belongs to S, which is achieved by its creators intentionally creating E in such a way that E exhibits sufficient similarity with other members of S, where such similarity is achieved by having E instantiate series-specific patterns definitive of S.

24What this means, roughly, is that creators develop new episodes by intentionally reinforcing the particular way in which they *originally* implemented genre-determined norms. By originally, I have in mind the implementation on the first instance of creating a new work, namely, in the pilot episode. As Andrzejewski and Salwa (2018) pointed out, pilot episodes are relevant in instructing the audience on what goes on in a series, and, I add, in revealing to them series-specific patterns. While there are usually modifications in how these patterns are instantiated later on, pilot introduces the viewers to the particularities of the series – its specific mimetic focus, regular cast members, aesthetic features… For the makers, pilot serves as a kind of a blueprint for how to bring new episodes of the same work into existence. With the accumulation of episodes, series-specific patterns are repeated and reinforced, and creation of new episodes is a manner, as it were, of 'looking back' into the previous ones, in order to create enough similarity with respect to their subject/theme nexus, set of individualized characters, narrative structures… By persistently repeating these similarities, patterns develop and are codified and applied to subsequent episodes, which enables viewers to abstract those factors which are constant in a series and to associate that particular specification of generic norms with a particular series.

- **19** I am aware that my analogy between formulaic patterns and musical score is weak, in that each episo (…)

25An instructive way to think about the formulaic patterns is via analogy with different sets of instructions for the creation of works, particularly in the performing arts. Of course, neither episodes not series are performing arts, and series-specific patterns are not composed of the same structural elements as, for example, musical scores: as I will show below, regardless of the consistency and homogeneity of their applications, series-specific patterns can be implemented with high degree of variations. However, once they are instantiated in a pilot episode, more or less general instructions are given on how to create a new episode of the same work. In that sense, series-specific formulaic patterns have a role similar to that of a musical script: by properly executing them, creators manage to bring about an episode that shares enough similarities with other episodes created on the basis of those same patterns. Series-specific patterns thus serve as a set of instructions on how to create a new episode, and are therefore work-determinative, in that they specify most of the features of the final product[19].

- **20** As Carroll (1994) points out, part of the satisfaction in engaging with generic works is derived fr [(…)]

26For a viewer to identify series-specific patterns – and to thus come up with a concept of how the particular series is – she needs to be familiar with the norms associated with the particular genre. That enables her to properly identify creators' categorical intentions and to recognize how genre-determined norms are implemented within individual series via series-specific formulaic patterns[20]. Repeated engagements with the series enable viewers to come up with more or less loose understanding of the relevant series-specific patterns, and to notice modifications that are introduced from one episode to the next. However, series-specific patterns do not exist as a collection of propositions one can verbalize to describe all the relevant features of the series. Rather, they are more or less loosely abstracted schema of how the series is that one acquires through repeated engagements with it, i.e. with its episodes, which is relevant for associating the episodes with a particular work. My suggestion is that episodic connections are generated by the repetitious implementation of series-specific patterns from one episode to the next, and not, as is the case in serials, by an event E in episode E1 causing an event E2 in subsequent episode 2, where both events contribute to the overall arch story uniting all the episodes. We recognize a certain episode as belonging to a certain series primarily in light of its formulaic patterns, which, as experienced viewers, we associate with the work in question.

- **21** The upshot of this is that we need an ontological account of a season, but I cannot develop it here [(…)]

27Contrast that with serials such as *The Wire*, where new episodes are introduced with an eye toward their contribution to the series' main problem, introduced in the pilot. This isn't to say that episodes are not homogeneous in terms of characters, spatio-temporal location… but connections are firmly established by progression of a story, i.e. a causal order of events depicted in episodes. One cannot skip an episode without a loss of understanding of what goes on in the overall arch-story. More importantly, serials-specific patterns are repeated at the level of seasons, as new season puts forward a new problem (e.g. global smuggling operation run from the Baltimore port area) which is then solved in accordance with series-specific mimetic focus introduced in the first season (i.e. keeping tabs on those suspect of a criminal behaviour). So, to answer the question from the beginning, my account can accommodate both series and serials, because pattern-instantiation is relevant in both, although it works in different ways: at the level of episodes in the case of series and at the level of seasons in case of serials[21].

4. Change of patterns and works' identity

28As a coherent set of instructions, series-specific formulaic patterns specify how to bring a new episode into existence. However, unlike with musical scores, creators of TV series do not have to execute instructions down to the very last detail; they can, and often do, modify patterns in various ways and for various, mostly artistic and aesthetic purposes, or to adjust to the circumstances of production. With the exception of Olivia Benson, all of the original characters of *L&O:SVU* have been replaced during the twenty plus years of its existence, thus giving rise to significant changes of formulaic patterns related to characters' interactions. Changes also occur when a series modifies its other patterns, for example – proposed by my reviewer – by having the main detective pair chase romance rather than criminals in an episode, or by having, why not, the series change its specific mimetic focus. If, as I claimed, series-specific patterns are constitutive of a series' identity, it seems that the series is ontologically different once such changes take place. This implies that series-specific patterns are too unstable to anchor the series' identity and keep its boundaries.

> **22** This is why viewers do not make an identity mistake when an actor switches from one series to anoth [(…)](#)

29However, such a conclusion is premature. Nothing on my account prevents shifts in some patterns, as long as other identity-determining factors, internal and external, remain intact. As stated, the series' identity is maintained by the joint working of formulaic patterns, rather than by one pattern, even though with respect to the series that interest me, the most significant identity mark is series' specific mimetic focus: *CM* is recognized as *CM* for as long as the episodic problem is solved by behavioural analysis rather than, say, forensic equipment**22**. However, even if changes occur with respect to mimetic focus, series' identity (i.e. an episode's identity as related to the series) is maintained for as long as such change is coherently incorporated within the fictional world of a series, itself maintained by series' other specific patterns. Given that character psychological continuity is one such element, as long as that continuity is preserved, work's identity is secured: Grissom's turning to behavioural analysis would not jeopardize the identity of a *CSI* episode as long as such a turn is enmeshed with other story-lines, themselves developed in accordance with series-specific patterns.

30The same holds for character shifts. Consider Chris Meloni's decision to leave *L&O: SVU.* Not only was such a course of events embodied in the actions related to the solution of the episodic problem (thus contributing to and maintaining series' subject/theme nexus), but the character who replaced Melony's character (Nick Amaro) went on doing what regular characters in the show always did, solve crimes, and he did so in accordance with the series' specific formulae. Thus, the exit of one regular character and the introduction of a new one did not affect the overall identity of a series – even if it affected its expressive and representative properties, particularly for viewers who were fans of the actor or the character, because it did not jeopardize the fictional world of a series, nor the generic norms associated with it – after all, a change of character does not imply abolishment of character-slots definitive of a certain genre. All in all, the series remained an instance of a crime puzzle turned into moral puzzle, developed in accordance with its overall aesthetic and other formulae.

> **23** See Berliner 2017 for the role of novelty and familiarity in generating aesthetic pleasure. As expl [(…)](#)

31To conclude, various modifications do not disturb the identity of a work; rather, they bring diversity into otherwise familiar experience, thus enhancing viewer's aesthetic engagement with the work**23**. In the process, a series reinforces its own patterns, keeping those that 'work' and modifying those that do not, thus reaffirming its identity. Furthermore, viewer's awareness of the schema of

series-specific formulaic patterns keeps the series' identity intact in face of occasional modification, precisely through viewers' capacity to identify the modification, in light of their familiarity with a series' overall design.

5. Final remarks

- **24** I am grateful to my reviewer for bringing this up. In what follows, I rely on RA as s/he describes [(...)](#)

32To conclude, let me explain why the account I suggested should be preferred to some accounts that might seem more intuitive, such as the Relational Account (RA), according to which two works are different because they have different relational features, such as titles, producers, show-runners…**24**.

- **25** This criterion is developed by J. Levinson in his work on ontology of music, but here I rely on Nan [(...)](#)

- **26** This is not to suggest that viewers do not choose what to watch given the type of content, aestheti [(...)](#)

33Notwithstanding RA's intuitive plausibility, I worry about some of its consequences. For one, it does not fit the ordinary viewer's watching experience. As stated by DO, works must be individuated such that they bear the aesthetic and artistic attributes we importantly ascribe to them**25**, and it does not seem that the ordinary viewer necessarily thinks of a particular GFTVS via the means provided by RA. While we refer to a given series by its title, other relational features are not what primarily comes to mind when one thinks of a given work. Therefore, RA is explanatory poor. In one sense, it states the obvious – two works are different because they have different properties – but if fails to explain viewers' first-hand experience that in watching an episode of *L&O* they are watching something substantially different from watching *CM,* or even *L&O: SVU* (even though, as part of the same franchise, the two share most of the referential properties). This is also why indicating that two works are different because they have different titles might not allow for more than a trivial explanation. In short, RA does not tell us anything that inherently relates to viewers' experience and appreciative interest: in principle (and I suspect, often in practice), a viewer can enjoy each episode of *L&O* without ever taking the effort to learn something about the producers, network and other relational aspect of the show, including the title itself – in fact, I see no reason to claim that awareness of such factors is a dominant aspect of regular viewers' experience**26**.

- **27** This work has been supported by the University of Rijeka, project number uniri-human-18-239. The pr [(...)](#)

34Furthermore, RA should explain how the change of relational properties affects series' identity. In one sense, on RA, a series changes its identity if it is, as it happens, cancelled by one and taken up by another network (screenwriter/producer). This seems highly problematic from the perspective of our experience, as such changes matter little if we want to pursue aesthetic pleasure – pleasure, by the way, we derive from the way a series is, i.e. from its ontological core, namely, its series-specific patterns. What this suggests is that relational properties can be changed without affecting those properties by which we recognize a work as a particular work, and thus, without significantly affecting viewers' experience. This is because relational properties do not (as I think the formulaic patterns in my account do) depict aesthetic essentials of a given work, or, as we just saw, pinpoint their ontological and epistemic identity – what the series is and that by which we recognize and individuate it. Such essentials have a certain normativity built into them: in order to create an

episode pertaining to *one* series, rather than the *other*, certain norms have to be instantiated, where it is not clear that such norms relate to producers, writers, networks etc. All these factors are external to viewers' experience and subject to change; thus they fall short as criteria on what makes a certain work one particular work rather than the other. All these criteria are provided by the account I suggested**27**.

[Torna su](#)

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Torna su

NOTE

1 Nannicelli 2012: 165-166.

2 My examples will pertain to crime genre, but the account I end up providing can accommodate other dominant genres such as hospital and courtroom drama.

3 This is particularly evident with works which generate the so-called spin-offs. Examples include *CSI: Miami* and *CSI: New York; Law&Order: Special Victims Unit (*hereafter *L&O: SVU), Law&Order: Criminal Intent*, *Law&Order: Trial by Jury*, *Law and Order: LA, Law and Order True Crime;* or the *Criminal Minds: Suspect Behaviour, Criminal Minds: Beyond Borders* and *Criminal Minds: South Korea*.

4 See Kazzloff (1992), Nannicelli (2009), Andrzejewski and Salwa (2018) for discussions on series/serials.

5 As Andrzejewski and Salwa (2018) point out, this is not a trivial matter as it has implications for how we (should) attend to such series.

6 See Davies (2017), Nannicelli (2012, 2013), and Thomasson (2005).

7 While I am aware of the challenges that can be launched against a theory that makes use of 'critical and evaluative practices' without specifying them further, here I have to skip defending this use; an interested reader can turn to Nannicelli (2012, 2013).

8 The notion of 'genre' can be explicated, understood and employed as a category in our art and TV practice and theoretical discussions in different ways, and various criteria are used to group works together under a particular genre. My choice of a subject matter is determined by DO. Namely, regardless of the difficulties involved in our theoretical definitions of a genre, viewers generally have a robust enough understanding of the norms that make up a certain genre, which allows them to differentiate TV series on offer primarily in light of the genre to which they belong. On my

suggestion, the particularities of subject matter are the most dominant factor in how viewers categorize series. Illuminative account of genre in relation to TV and cinema was provided by Altman (1999), Bavarshi (2000), Currie (2004), Knight (1997), Moine (2008).

9 Titles are, as Levinson (1985) puts it, constitutive of the series' identity and, I add, refer to its essential mimetic properties. However, as I discuss in the final part, to provide an explanatory rich ontological account of what makes two series different, stating that they have different titles is insufficient.

10 Walton (1970).

11 For example, *CM* on average, features three crimes per episode, *CC* builds the suspense by expanding the pool of potential perpetrators, and *Columbo* amuses by its lead detective's (Peter Falk) social awkwardness. See Mereike's (2016) detailed and insightful analyses of (what I'm calling) genre-specific formulaic patterns spanning over 70 years of American crime fiction.

12 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNjtcXLS7XQ.

13 For numerous examples of how individual series develop their own patterns, see Mittell (2006, 2015) and Mereike (2016).

14 Vidmar (2017) discuses the process whereby a fictional character becomes recogized as a human like individual.

15 As do Scotty Valens and Nick Amaro, both portrayed by Danny Pino. Individuation of characters is further enabled by development of their particular aesthetic features (consider the dark, gothic, Lolita-inspired wardrobe of Abby Sciuto (Pauley Perrette)), distinctive character traits (the intellectual superiority of Spencer Reid (Matthew Gray Gubler) and interaction with other characters (Stabler's (Chris Meloni) rage at the criminal coupled with Benson's (Mariska Hargitay) compassion for the victim). Such traits often become a recognizable feature of a series as a whole, particularly in cases of spin-offs which feature almost identical story-lines but highly diverse patterns of instantiating such stories.

16 Consider a critical commentary by one of the series' makers: «After several decades of viewing cops in ill-fitting suits driving undistinguished government-issue cars, it is an unexpected pleasure to see Sonny Crockett in pastel T-shirts and white linen jackets driving what was soon to become a noir television icon, his black Ferrari» (Sanders, 2010: 22). Sanders further illustrates the role of music in the creation of the series' distinctive identity claiming that Jan Hammer's music «provides an expansive vocabulary for commentary on themes and characters. … The songs that accompany each episode have such an uncanny fit to the images and actions on screen that they often serve as functional equivalents of voiceovers» (25). The point here isn't that only *Miami Vice* makes use of music to enhance its thematic concerns, but to point to the fact that a particular choice of music and the manner in which music is employed was soon recognized as *distinctive to the series*. For the aesthetic features of series-specific patterns, see an interview with Dick Wolf for his discussion of formal and stylistic patterns of L&O:SVU at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CLA6bNrlAMo.

17 An exception are occasional cross-overs, of which more below.

18 See Moine (2008) who talks about «recurring configurations of formal and thematic elements» and of «intertextual repetition and intratextual accumulation» of elements repeatedly found in wide range of works (where the text can refer to linguistic and filmic medium). For the idea of stereotypes see Schweinitz (2011).

19 I am aware that my analogy between formulaic patterns and musical score is weak, in that each episode (unlike each musical performance of the same score) is a component of a work (rather than a new performance). I am also aware of the reasons why it might be an overstatement to say that series-specific patterns are work-determinative; as Nannicelli (2013) pointed out in discussing screenplays, there are many other aspects in addition to screenplay, which determine the final work – therefore, unlike musical scores, screenplays are not work-determinative. That same reasoning can apply to formulaic patterns: even though series-specific formulaic patterns feature in a screenplay for each episode, the episode is determined by factors other than the screenplay. I do not object to that, but I still think the analogy is useful (even if not all together accurate) because it points to a particular manner in which execution of certain, specified set of norms, brings about episode after episode of highly consistent nature, and we recognize these episodes as one and the same work, just like we recognize different performances, regardless of the differences among them, as performances of one and the same work.

20 As Carroll (1994) points out, part of the satisfaction in engaging with generic works is derived from recognizing their take on the generic norms, particularly when a series brings forward an original instantiation that has not been materialized in other series of the same genre. Arguably, the popularity of *CSI* was related to its revolutionary approach to traditional police procedurals: by replacing detectives with forensic experts, they modified traditionally understood character-slots.

21 The upshot of this is that we need an ontological account of a season, but I cannot develop it here.

22 This is why viewers do not make an identity mistake when an actor switches from one series to another. Kim Delaney and David Caruso were playing detectives in *NYPD Blue,* but when they joined forces as forensic experts in *CSI: Miami*, viewers easily recognized that they now pertain to a different series.

23 See Berliner 2017 for the role of novelty and familiarity in generating aesthetic pleasure. As explained by Carroll (Carroll 1994), part of the satisfaction derived from genre fiction relates to viewers' noticing how any given work develops generic norms. Similarly, part of the viewers' interest in new episodes of the same series is to see how each turns series' patterns upside down, as for example *CSI* franchise does in joining two casts from different series of the *CSI* franchise. Such cross-overs do not cancel individual identity of each show because viewers understand the specific way in which a cross-over episode works and know it is a modification of the existing works, rather than creation of a new one.

24 I am grateful to my reviewer for bringing this up. In what follows, I rely on RA as s/he describes it in his/her review of my original submission.

25 This criterion is developed by J. Levinson in his work on ontology of music, but here I rely on Nannicelli's interpretation of it (2012: 171).

26 This is not to suggest that viewers do not choose what to watch given the type of content, aesthetics and other features they associate with a certain network, screenwriter, producer… – we can be fans of Dick Wolf for the same reason as we are fans of Shakespeare: both make great works that give us pleasure. But if you think of a series being shown all over the world, it makes sense to argue that its original relation to a specific network (in say, America) matters little to a viewer outside the States.

Torna su

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Torna su

AUTORE

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Tv series and their boundaries

Iris Vidmar Jovanović

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I follow Ted Nannicelli in the project of establishing boundaries of television works. I focus on serialized television works pertaining to a particular genre and I set out to provide an account of their identity. My claim is that external identity of such works is determined by their specific genre-affiliation, given the way in which generic norms determine the content of the series, namely, its characteristic storylines and regular set of characters. From the internal perspective, a series' identity is determined by the particular way in which it implements abstract generic norms. I describe the process of such implementation as creation of series-specific formulaic patterns, and I analyze different layers of works where such patterns are evident. My central claim is that series-specific formulaic patterns create a coherent set of norms which, through repeated instantiation in

the series' episodes, become associated with that particular series. The function of this set is to establish the series' boundaries, and to maintain its identity when different modifications to the patterns are made.

Torna su

TERMINI DI INDICIZZAZIONE

Keywords:

TV series, ontology of art, work identity

Torna su

PIANO

1. Ontology of television works

2. Genre fiction TV series: a descriptivist ontological account

3. Formulaic patterns as instructions for creating works

4. Change of patterns and works' identity

5. Final remarks

Torna su

TESTO INTEGRALE

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1. Ontology of television works

- **1** Nannicelli 2012: 165-166.

- **2** My examples will pertain to crime genre, but the account I end up providing can accommodate other d (...)

1Writing about the ontology of TV works, Ted Nannicelli argued that «the possibility of critical debate about a work of television depends upon our ability to identify and individuate the work – to establish its boundaries in such a way that our analysis is of this work and not any other(s)»**1**. In this paper, I take the task of 'establishing boundaries' to one of the most prevailing TV programs, serialized fictional works affiliated with a particular genre – I refer to such works as genre fiction TV series, GFTVSs for short. Examples include *Columbo* (NBC), *Law and Order (*NBC, hereafter *L&O*), *Criminal Minds* (CBS*,* hereafter *CM)*, *Cold Case* (CBS, hereafter *CC)*, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (CBS), *NYPD Blue* (ABC), H*omicide: Life on the Street* (NBC), *the Mentalist* (CBS) and the like**2**.

- **3** This is particularly evident with works which generate the so-called spin-offs. Examples include *CS* (...)

2Genre-affiliation of works that interest me is relevant for establishing their boundaries because the norms associated with the genre determine the kind of a work that is created. Works pertaining to one genre share a striking similarity with respect to the representative, expressive and formal

properties, which is why they are often considered formulaic**3**. In light of the shared genre-determined stories and other homogeneity (which I describe below), what is it – other than different titles – that makes two GFTVSs different works?

- ▪ **4** See Kazzloff (1992), Nannicelli (2009), Andrzejewski and Salwa (2018) for discussions on series/ser (...)

- ▪ **5** As Andrzejewski and Salwa (2018) point out, this is not a trivial matter as it has implications for (...)

3An additional reason why establishing boundaries of GFTVSs is challenging relates to their episodic nature. According to the dominant view, series are distinct from other forms of serialized works (namely, serials) because, rather than contributing to an overall arch-story of the work, each episode tells its own story, the conclusion of which is reached by its end**4**. Therefore, episodes are (or can be) considered as stand-alone units, with no necessary temporal or causal connections among them, as rarely does an event X in episode 1 cause an event Z in episode 7**5**. To properly establish the boundaries of such works, we need to explain why we recognize and individuate the compilation of these episodes as one work, rather than as different works. To answer that, we first need to account for the relation between series and its constituent parts, episodes, and we need to determine conditions under which an episode can be rightly recognized as belonging to a particular TV work.

4It will immediately be obvious that, with the exception of *Columbo*, most of the examples on my list gravitate towards serials and thus do not fit nicely into the category of series as just described. Although they hold on to the 'one problem per *episode'* structure – rather than 'one problem per *season'*, as for example *The Wire* (HBO) does – series that concern me exhibit some degree of connecting ties among the episodes, primarily evident in psychological continuity of the main characters, as when *L&O: SVU*'s detective Benson keeps chasing her mother's rapist, or in an ongoing arch-story, as in the *Mentalist*, where the search for Red John does not regulate the action of each episode, but it unites them by being the constant motivational imperative of the lead character. Thus, it might be questionable whether all my examples can fit under the same ontological account.

5Postponing this question for later, I first explain the influence of genre-affiliation on a work's identity, claiming that the so-called genre-determined norms (i.e. generic norms) specify its external identity. By analysing some of the most prominent TV series, I explicate how genre-determined norms are instantiated in a particular series, describing this process as one of individuation, i.e. of establishing work's internal identity. The central notion in my account is that of *series-specific formulaic patterns*, that is, a set of instructions on how to create a certain work. In the second part I analyze these patterns and show how they serve the task of determining and sustaining a series' identity, primarily by uniting individual episodes under a single series.

- ▪ **6** See Davies (2017), Nannicelli (2012, 2013), and Thomasson (2005).

- ▪ **7** While I am aware of the challenges that can be launched against a theory that makes use of 'critica (...)

6My account is sensitive to the methodological constraint definitive of descriptive ontology (DO), which asks us to carry out our discussions of works of television with an eye to our critical and appreciative practices**6**. Thus, to explicate the nature of a TV work, we first need to consider what these practices tell us about our conception of it**7**. In line with such constraint, and, I add, with what I take to be *an ordinary viewer's watching experience*, I will consider a GFTVS as a work, perhaps

even a work of art, which is the object of our appreciative interest and commitment. By 'work', I have in mind a particular series, nominally individuated by its title (*Law and Order*), and composed of all the episodes that, as they are (or have been / will be) produced, are intended (by the creators) to be constitutive parts of that series, and are recognized and appreciated (by the audience) as such.

2. Genre fiction TV series: a descriptivist ontological account

- **8** The notion of 'genre' can be explicated, understood and employed as a category in our art and TV pr [(...)](#)

- **9** Titles are, as Levinson (1985) puts it, constitutive of the series' identity and, I add, refer to i [(...)](#)

7The starting point in my account of GFTVSs' identity makes a reference to a genre to which they pertain, where I take genre to be determined primarily by a specific subject matter, which in turn determines the content of a series**8**. The series that interest me can easily be affiliated with a particular genre in light of their *general mimetic focus*: most commonly, they are dealing with a particular social practice that is at the centre of their subject matter and thematic concerns (subject/theme nexus). Some of the most highly acclaimed series nowadays deal with criminal justice system, legal system and medicine. Almost regularly, a series' mimetic focus is reflected in its title – think of 'crime*'* in *CSI* – thus signalling to potential viewers the kind of content the series brings forward**9**. Following DO's methodological constraint and my claim that the mimetic focus of a series is the most easily recognizable factor in how viewers classify TV works, I want to suggest that the project of establishing boundaries of a TV work is best achieved if we recognize the particular manner in which *generic norms* are played out in a series. I will refer to such norms as *formulaic patterns*, and will argue that they are of two kinds: *genre-determined* and *series-specific*.

8Genre-specific subject matter determines what the series is about, which is why I take it as determinative of a series' identity. It establishes the boundaries of the content of the series, by specifying characteristic story-lines and the set of characters and their interactions. Character-slots are as constitutive of a genre as its mimetic focus, as one cannot enjoy a crime story without someone committing the crime and someone trying to find a perpetrator. Such close link between mimetic aspect of a series and its characters is understandable, given that social practices that genre fiction is concerned with are defined by a particular set of problems, conventions specifying how to deal with these problems and agents who perform specific actions to solve these problems.

- **10** Walton (1970).

- **11** For example, *CM* on average, features three crimes per episode, *CC* builds the suspense by expanding [(...)](#)

9Genre-specific subject guides viewers' preferences in deciding what to watch, it sets up their expectations regarding the kind of content the series brings to view and it provides them with clues on how to interpret what is going on. These formulaic patterns determine the identity of a series from the external perspective, by positioning it within a particular genre (i.e. in a Waltonian sense of a category)**10**. The function of this determination is prescriptive: formulaic patterns at this level determine the characteristic story lines and more or less fixed set of characters' functions. These patterns also serve as a set of instructions on how to create a work *of a certain kind*, namely a work that pertains to a certain genre, and are most evident in the consistency along the subject matter and thematic concerns (i.e. subject/theme nexus): crime fiction is always about a crime being

committed and measures taken to find and prosecute the culprit. All crime fiction series exhibit this pattern, even if some pile up crimes, some suspects and some the quirkiness of a detective**11**.

10Genre-determined patterns condition the kind of content distinctive of particular genre, not *the details of how such content is developed*. Viewers know beforehand that detectives will chase criminals, but they do not know any details about how such actions will take place in a given show. Each series creates its own particular manner of implementing genre-determined stories (as I'll show below), and in doing so, it creates its own, *series-specific formulaic patterns*, inserting them on episodic basis. A series thus creates its own identity from the internal perspective – i.e. perspective of the fictional world of the series – and in doing so, it becomes individuated from other series of the same genre.

11Development of such patterns is operative along several dimensions, the most obvious of which refers to a particular way in which the content is organized in terms of narrative complexity, structure, aesthetics and the like. With respect to subject/theme nexus and characteristic plotlines, each series develops its own patterns, usually by focusing on one and downplaying other aspects of the social practice at its core, i.e., by limiting its mimetic focus. While there are overlaps between subgenres and the *specific mimetic focus*, the two are not identical and overlap only partially. Police procedurals *CSI* and *CM* are both subgenres of crime fiction, but their specific mimetic focus differs significantly: *CSI* revolves around the state of the art forensics and *CM* around behavioural analysis. As a way of contrast, think of traditional police procedurals such as *NYPD Blue*.

- ▪ **12** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNjtcXLS7XQ.

- ▪ **13** For numerous examples of how individual series develop their own patterns, see Mittell (2006, 2015) (…)

12Series-specific patterns are most evident in the manner in which individual episodes are organized, as each series develops a distinguishing narrative style, i.e. the manner in which generic stories are presented, structured and brought to conclusion. An illuminative example comes from the creator of *L&O* franchise, Dick Wolf. «We take», he said, «a newspaper headline and we turn it into a moral puzzle»**12**. Compare such narrative structure to one characteristic of *CC,* which switches past and present, *Columbo,* which reveals the culprit's identity at the very beginning of each episode, or with *CM's* contrasting profilers' efforts to capture the culprit with the culprit's actions**13**.

- ▪ **14** Vidmar (2017) discusses the process whereby a fictional character becomes recogized as a human like (…)

- ▪ **15** As do Scotty Valens and Nick Amaro, both portrayed by Danny Pino. Individuation of characters is fu (…)

13One of the crucial steps in individuating a series relates to specification of its regularly occurring characters. This is a process whereby genre-determined character-slots are filled in with concrete individuals: agents who perform the relevant actions determinative of social practice, but who also invite recognition as individual human beings in light of their ethical, psychological, moral and other character traits**14**. Creation of such personae is, at the most general level, a matter of a particular actor or actress appearing in a given role. From the perspective of a fictional world, it is a matter of naming a character and providing it with its identity and its own distinctive, highly individualized and personal story-line which enables him to break free from the genre-determined character-slots and patterns of behaviour. Scotty Valens (Danny Pinno) and Fin Tutuola (Ice-T) both occupy the same genre-determined slot (that of a detective) and execute the same function (that of solving crimes),

but within the fictional worlds of the series they belong to – *CC* and *L&O: SVU* respectively – they have personalities and recognizable identities with no overlapping similarities**15**.

> ▪ **16** Consider a critical commentary by one of the series' makers: «After several decades of viewing cops [(...)](#)

14Particularities in development of genre-determined story-lines and the specification of regularly appearing characters are two crucial steps in individuation of any *GFTVSs* – arguably, these two aspects are most absorbing to viewers. However, the relevant series-specific formulaic patterns that determine the identity of an individual series include additional structures via which a series makes itself different from other series of the same genre. One such structure relates to the consistency of its overall artistic and aesthetic features. Details of technological productions are relevant in the process of developing series-specific patterns, as are visual imagery and auditory features. What made *Miami vice* (NBC) stand out from other cops show was, apart from its focus on undercover cops, the bright and colourful wardrobe, fast cars, rock music and vivid shots of the environmental beauties of the sunny city of Miami – a formula not unlike the one employed a decade or so later by *CSI: Miami***16***.

> ▪ **17** An exception are occasional cross-overs, of which more below.

15With respect to the latter, notice the contribution of such vivid geographical location to distinctive identity of the series, in comparison to its close relatives, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* and *CSI: New York*. Repeatedly depicting the state of the art forensic equipment and vivid images of disfigured human body, the *CSI* franchise created a unique blend of aesthetics and science, but each of the three made its own visual identity related to its spatial location. In terms of characteristic story-lines and set of characters, there is not much of a difference between the original *CSI* and its two spin-offs, as these are similar in how they implement genre-determined norms. However, once we zero in on the series-specific patterns related to aesthetic features and regular characters, we can recognize fictional worlds that are worlds apart**17**. For all the similarities between the character-slot of Gill Grissom (William Petersen), Mac Taylor (Gary Sinise) and Horatio Cane (David Caruso), individualization of these characters, their personal stories and intra-series relations with other characters turns them, experientially, into significantly different characters. For eager fans of *CSI*, watching an episode of *CSI: Miami* will be a significantly different experience, one they might not even want to pursue.

16The underlying series-specific formulaic patterns – those concerning a series' specific mimetic focus and thematic concerns, development of individualized characters, their habitual behaviour, appearance and personality, series' aesthetics and artistic features and features of its technological production – are crucial for a series' individuation. To attract viewers' interest, a series has to find new and original ways of implementing genre-specific stories ('subject') into its own unique way of telling them (form), adjusting the two according to the standards of a series' individual, yet highly formulaic framework.

17Creating a story for each episode is thus a matter of coming up with a particular genre-specific 'problem of the week' – a crime in crime fiction, a medical case in hospital drama or a legal case in courtroom drama – that is solved by a regularly occurring characters who occupy genre-specific roles in accordance with the specific mimetic focus of the series. This is where the formulaic nature of the GFTVSs is most evident, as episodes are highly homogeneous with respect to their development: series-specific patterns are implemented episodically, featuring the same set of characters doing the same thing in the same spatio-temporal circumstances over and over again. Notice that this is

precisely how series differ from serials, as in serials, the specific patters are implemented at the level of season, not at the level of episode, as each episode has to push the story forward towards its conclusion. What I am suggesting is that series' homogeneity is the result of the same set of series-specific patterns being repeatedly instantiated in new episodes. Such patterns are the backbone to a work's identity: they unite seemingly disconnected episodes experienced as stand-alone units into one work with established boundaries.

3. Formulaic patterns as instructions for creating works

18So far, I have spoken of a series developing its formulaic patterns, though it is more precise to say that creators of the series develop them: it is through their actions that a series comes to exist with the features that it has. As Nannicelli argued, thus uniting his ontological project of establishing works' boundaries with works' makers' intentions, «the collaborating artists' creative decisions and the intentions behind them establish work-identity» (2012: 175). Following the lead of Paisley Livingston, Nannicelli refers to such intentions as categorical intentions, which specify not what the work means, but how it is fundamentally conceived or approached. According to this specification, creation of a series affiliated with the specific genre is a manifestation of its creators' categorical intentions. What my account adds to this is an explanation of how categorical intentions are manifested: by development of series-specific formulaic patterns.

- **18** See Moine (2008) who talks about «recurring configurations of formal and thematic elements» and of (...)

19With respect to GFTVSs, categorical intentions are primarily evident in creators' treatment of genre-determined norms. Namely, these norms only exist as abstractions, as generalizations or stereotypes which can be specified as broad descriptions of the content habitually found in works related to a genre**18**, but cannot, as such, be the focus of aesthetic appreciation or viewer's engagement. In order for a detective to chase criminals, one has to decide whether a detective is a male or a female, Belgian or English, of considerable deductive skills or with severe drug addiction. In other words, the only way to implement genre-determined patterns is to specify them. In the previous part I showed how this specification takes place via development of series-specific patterns, whereby genre-determined norms become instantiated in a particular work. Such specification thus brings and maintains a particular work into existence; determines its identity conditions and makes it distinctive from other works. Categorical intentions of creators are manifested in the particular choices they make to give content to abstract generic stories, and imbue them with representative, expressive, formal and other features.

20To highlight: creation of a TV series is a process whereby a maker, in light of her categorical intentions, decides how generic norms will be instantiated and she repeats such instantiations, usually with slight modifications, from one episode to the next. Once these episodic repetitions become recognizable in virtue of their uniqueness – they are recognized as specific to one particular series – we can say that a TV series has been individuated, i.e. we know what its identity conditions are. With that in mind, we can offer an explanation of how to establish a work's boundaries, by postulating the following definition:

An instance of FGFTVS is recognized as a distinctive work W (i) in light of its exhibiting all, or most of, the relevant formulaic patterns that make up for the representative, expressive, aesthetic and other features associated with and determinative of W, (ii) which the work does not share with other works, i.e. which are work-specific.

21Condition (i) specifies what it is that makes any work the work that it is: the fact that its features are determined by the particular set of formulaic-patterns, which are in turn determined by work's creators' intentions. While it is neither necessary that all of the work's features are determined by creators' intentions, nor that all intentions are realized, we have to presuppose that the series has the features that it has because its creators intended it so. Condition (ii) emphasizes the fact that formulaic patterns are specific to a particular series and are not instantiated in any other series, regardless of the fact that two series can be affiliated with the same genre, and, as in the case of spin-offs, even have saliently similar features and identical specific mimetic focus and character slots. The series' boundaries are, on this view, established by a coherence of its series-specific formulaic patterns.

22This explanation can help us determine the exact nature of the relation between a series and its episodes. We saw that with series, instantiation of genre-determined patterns takes place episodically, with each episode telling its own story. This implies that, although series-specific patterns are instantiated in each episode, viewers watch and appreciate a different story each time they watch a particular episode – a conclusion supported by the fact that they can skip an episode and not lose track of what goes on in a series. However, in order to understand individual episodes, and to appreciate a particular manner of instantiating generic norms, viewers need to have sufficient experience of engaging with the series: they rely on their knowledge about the series to make sense of individual episodes. This shows that regardless of the absence of connecting ties among the episodes, or an encompassing arch-story, viewers see episodes as belonging to one particular work – so much so that they usually refer to episodes by the series' name, not by the title of individual episode.

23On my suggestion, what unites such seemingly independent episodes under one series is the fact that each episode is made with the intention that it becomes a part of that particular series, where this intention is evident in and fulfilled by the choice of general and specific mimetic aspect, usual characters fulfilling character-slots, narrative structures and other aesthetic features distinctive and definitive of one particular series. In other words, the systematic implementation of series-specific patterns from one episode to the next generates unity among stand-alone episodes. Paraphrasing slightly P. Livingston's classification of the intentions relevant in creation of art, we can argue that creators of TV series have *a work-specific conscious intention*: the intention to create a constitutive part of a specific work. Thus,

For an episode E to be a constitutive member of a series S, E has to be made with the intention that it belongs to S, which is achieved by its creators intentionally creating E in such a way that E exhibits sufficient similarity with other members of S, where such similarity is achieved by having E instantiate series-specific patterns definitive of S.

24What this means, roughly, is that creators develop new episodes by intentionally reinforcing the particular way in which they *originally* implemented genre-determined norms. By originally, I have in mind the implementation on the first instance of creating a new work, namely, in the pilot episode. As Andrzejewski and Salwa (2018) pointed out, pilot episodes are relevant in instructing the audience on what goes on in a series, and, I add, in revealing to them series-specific patterns. While there are usually modifications in how these patterns are instantiated later on, pilot introduces the viewers to the particularities of the series – its specific mimetic focus, regular cast members, aesthetic features… For the makers, pilot serves as a kind of a blueprint for how to bring new episodes of the same work into existence. With the accumulation of episodes, series-specific patterns are repeated and reinforced, and creation of new episodes is a manner, as it were, of 'looking back' into the previous ones, in order to create enough similarity with respect to their

subject/theme nexus, set of individualized characters, narrative structures… By persistently repeating these similarities, patterns develop and are codified and applied to subsequent episodes, which enables viewers to abstract those factors which are constant in a series and to associate that particular specification of generic norms with a particular series.

- **19** I am aware that my analogy between formulaic patterns and musical score is weak, in that each episo (…)

25An instructive way to think about the formulaic patterns is via analogy with different sets of instructions for the creation of works, particularly in the performing arts. Of course, neither episodes not series are performing arts, and series-specific patterns are not composed of the same structural elements as, for example, musical scores: as I will show below, regardless of the consistency and homogeneity of their applications, series-specific patterns can be implemented with high degree of variations. However, once they are instantiated in a pilot episode, more or less general instructions are given on how to create a new episode of the same work. In that sense, series-specific formulaic patterns have a role similar to that of a musical script: by properly executing them, creators manage to bring about an episode that shares enough similarities with other episodes created on the basis of those same patterns. Series-specific patterns thus serve as a set of instructions on how to create a new episode, and are therefore work-determinative, in that they specify most of the features of the final product**19**.

- **20** As Carroll (1994) points out, part of the satisfaction in engaging with generic works is derived fr (…)

26For a viewer to identify series-specific patterns – and to thus come up with a concept of how the particular series is – she needs to be familiar with the norms associated with the particular genre. That enables her to properly identify creators' categorical intentions and to recognize how genre-determined norms are implemented within individual series via series-specific formulaic patterns**20**. Repeated engagements with the series enable viewers to come up with more or less loose understanding of the relevant series-specific patterns, and to notice modifications that are introduced from one episode to the next. However, series-specific patterns do not exist as a collection of propositions one can verbalize to describe all the relevant features of the series. Rather, they are more or less loosely abstracted schema of how the series is that one acquires through repeated engagements with it, i.e. with its episodes, which is relevant for associating the episodes with a particular work. My suggestion is that episodic connections are generated by the repetitious implementation of series-specific patterns from one episode to the next, and not, as is the case in serials, by an event E in episode E1 causing an event E2 in subsequent episode 2, where both events contribute to the overall arch story uniting all the episodes. We recognize a certain episode as belonging to a certain series primarily in light of its formulaic patterns, which, as experienced viewers, we associate with the work in question.

- **21** The upshot of this is that we need an ontological account of a season, but I cannot develop it here (…)

27Contrast that with serials such as *The Wire*, where new episodes are introduced with an eye toward their contribution to the series' main problem, introduced in the pilot. This isn't to say that episodes are not homogeneous in terms of characters, spatio-temporal location… but connections are firmly established by progression of a story, i.e. a causal order of events depicted in episodes. One cannot skip an episode without a loss of understanding of what goes on in the overall arch-story. More importantly, serials-specific patterns are repeated at the level of seasons, as new season

puts forward a new problem (e.g. global smuggling operation run from the Baltimore port area) which is then solved in accordance with series-specific mimetic focus introduced in the first season (i.e. keeping tabs on those suspect of a criminal behaviour). So, to answer the question from the beginning, my account can accommodate both series and serials, because pattern-instantiation is relevant in both, although it works in different ways: at the level of episodes in the case of series and at the level of seasons in case of serials**21**.

4. Change of patterns and works' identity

28As a coherent set of instructions, series-specific formulaic patterns specify how to bring a new episode into existence. However, unlike with musical scores, creators of TV series do not have to execute instructions down to the very last detail; they can, and often do, modify patterns in various ways and for various, mostly artistic and aesthetic purposes, or to adjust to the circumstances of production. With the exception of Olivia Benson, all of the original characters of *L&O:SVU* have been replaced during the twenty plus years of its existence, thus giving rise to significant changes of formulaic patterns related to characters' interactions. Changes also occur when a series modifies its other patterns, for example – proposed by my reviewer – by having the main detective pair chase romance rather than criminals in an episode, or by having, why not, the series change its specific mimetic focus. If, as I claimed, series-specific patterns are constitutive of a series' identity, it seems that the series is ontologically different once such changes take place. This implies that series-specific patterns are too unstable to anchor the series' identity and keep its boundaries.

> ▪ **22** This is why viewers do not make an identity mistake when an actor switches from one series to anoth [(…)](…)

29However, such a conclusion is premature. Nothing on my account prevents shifts in some patterns, as long as other identity-determining factors, internal and external, remain intact. As stated, the series' identity is maintained by the joint working of formulaic patterns, rather than by one pattern, even though with respect to the series that interest me, the most significant identity mark is series' specific mimetic focus: *CM* is recognized as *CM* for as long as the episodic problem is solved by behavioural analysis rather than, say, forensic equipment**22**. However, even if changes occur with respect to mimetic focus, series' identity (i.e. an episode's identity as related to the series) is maintained for as long as such change is coherently incorporated within the fictional world of a series, itself maintained by series' other specific patterns. Given that character psychological continuity is one such element, as long as that continuity is preserved, work's identity is secured: Grissom's turning to behavioural analysis would not jeopardize the identity of a *CSI* episode as long as such a turn is enmeshed with other story-lines, themselves developed in accordance with series-specific patterns.

30The same holds for character shifts. Consider Chris Meloni's decision to leave *L&O: SVU.* Not only was such a course of events embodied in the actions related to the solution of the episodic problem (thus contributing to and maintaining series' subject/theme nexus), but the character who replaced Melony's character (Nick Amaro) went on doing what regular characters in the show always did, solve crimes, and he did so in accordance with the series' specific formulae. Thus, the exit of one regular character and the introduction of a new one did not affect the overall identity of a series – even if it affected its expressive and representative properties, particularly for viewers who were fans of the actor or the character, because it did not jeopardize the fictional world of a series, nor the generic norms associated with it – after all, a change of character does not imply abolishment of character-slots definitive of a certain genre. All in all, the series remained an instance of a crime

puzzle turned into moral puzzle, developed in accordance with its overall aesthetic and other formulae.

- **23** See Berliner 2017 for the role of novelty and familiarity in generating aesthetic pleasure. As expl [(…)](…)

31To conclude, various modifications do not disturb the identity of a work; rather, they bring diversity into otherwise familiar experience, thus enhancing viewer's aesthetic engagement with the work**23**. In the process, a series reinforces its own patterns, keeping those that 'work' and modifying those that do not, thus reaffirming its identity. Furthermore, viewer's awareness of the schema of series-specific formulaic patterns keeps the series' identity intact in face of occasional modification, precisely through viewers' capacity to identify the modification, in light of their familiarity with a series' overall design.

5. Final remarks

- **24** I am grateful to my reviewer for bringing this up. In what follows, I rely on RA as s/he describes [(…)](…)

32To conclude, let me explain why the account I suggested should be preferred to some accounts that might seem more intuitive, such as the Relational Account (RA), according to which two works are different because they have different relational features, such as titles, producers, show-runners…**24**.

- **25** This criterion is developed by J. Levinson in his work on ontology of music, but here I rely on Nan [(…)](…)

- **26** This is not to suggest that viewers do not choose what to watch given the type of content, aestheti [(…)](…)

33Notwithstanding RA's intuitive plausibility, I worry about some of its consequences. For one, it does not fit the ordinary viewer's watching experience. As stated by DO, works must be individuated such that they bear the aesthetic and artistic attributes we importantly ascribe to them**25**, and it does not seem that the ordinary viewer necessarily thinks of a particular GFTVS via the means provided by RA. While we refer to a given series by its title, other relational features are not what primarily comes to mind when one thinks of a given work. Therefore, RA is explanatory poor. In one sense, it states the obvious – two works are different because they have different properties – but if fails to explain viewers' first-hand experience that in watching an episode of *L&O* they are watching something substantially different from watching *CM,* or even *L&O: SVU* (even though, as part of the same franchise, the two share most of the referential properties). This is also why indicating that two works are different because they have different titles might not allow for more than a trivial explanation. In short, RA does not tell us anything that inherently relates to viewers' experience and appreciative interest: in principle (and I suspect, often in practice), a viewer can enjoy each episode of *L&O* without ever taking the effort to learn something about the producers, network and other relational aspect of the show, including the title itself – in fact, I see no reason to claim that awareness of such factors is a dominant aspect of regular viewers' experience**26**.

- **27** This work has been supported by the University of Rijeka, project number uniri-human-18-239. The pr [(…)](…)

34Furthermore, RA should explain how the change of relational properties affects series' identity. In one sense, on RA, a series changes its identity if it is, as it happens, cancelled by one and taken up by

another network (screenwriter/producer). This seems highly problematic from the perspective of our experience, as such changes matter little if we want to pursue aesthetic pleasure – pleasure, by the way, we derive from the way a series is, i.e. from its ontological core, namely, its series-specific patterns. What this suggests is that relational properties can be changed without affecting those properties by which we recognize a work as a particular work, and thus, without significantly affecting viewers' experience. This is because relational properties do not (as I think the formulaic patterns in my account do) depict aesthetic essentials of a given work, or, as we just saw, pinpoint their ontological and epistemic identity – what the series is and that by which we recognize and individuate it. Such essentials have a certain normativity built into them: in order to create an episode pertaining to *one* series, rather than the *other*, certain norms have to be instantiated, where it is not clear that such norms relate to producers, writers, networks etc. All these factors are external to viewers' experience and subject to change; thus they fall short as criteria on what makes a certain work one particular work rather than the other. All these criteria are provided by the account I suggested**27**.

[Torna su](#)

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Torna su

NOTE

1 Nannicelli 2012: 165-166.

2 My examples will pertain to crime genre, but the account I end up providing can accommodate other dominant genres such as hospital and courtroom drama.

3 This is particularly evident with works which generate the so-called spin-offs. Examples include *CSI: Miami* and *CSI: New York; Law&Order: Special Victims Unit (*hereafter *L&O: SVU), Law&Order: Criminal Intent*, *Law&Order: Trial by Jury*, *Law and Order: LA, Law and Order True Crime;* or the *Criminal Minds: Suspect Behaviour, Criminal Minds: Beyond Borders* and *Criminal Minds: South Korea*.

4 See Kazzloff (1992), Nannicelli (2009), Andrzejewski and Salwa (2018) for discussions on series/serials.

5 As Andrzejewski and Salwa (2018) point out, this is not a trivial matter as it has implications for how we (should) attend to such series.

6 See Davies (2017), Nannicelli (2012, 2013), and Thomasson (2005).

7 While I am aware of the challenges that can be launched against a theory that makes use of 'critical and evaluative practices' without specifying them further, here I have to skip defending this use; an interested reader can turn to Nannicelli (2012, 2013).

8 The notion of 'genre' can be explicated, understood and employed as a category in our art and TV practice and theoretical discussions in different ways, and various criteria are used to group works together under a particular genre. My choice of a subject matter is determined by DO. Namely, regardless of the difficulties involved in our theoretical definitions of a genre, viewers generally have a robust enough understanding of the norms that make up a certain genre, which allows them to differentiate TV series on offer primarily in light of the genre to which they belong. On my suggestion, the particularities of subject matter are the most dominant factor in how viewers categorize series. Illuminative account of genre in relation to TV and cinema was provided by Altman (1999), Bavarshi (2000), Currie (2004), Knight (1997), Moine (2008).

9 Titles are, as Levinson (1985) puts it, constitutive of the series' identity and, I add, refer to its essential mimetic properties. However, as I discuss in the final part, to provide an explanatory rich ontological account of what makes two series different, stating that they have different titles is insufficient.

10 Walton (1970).

11 For example, *CM* on average, features three crimes per episode, *CC* builds the suspense by expanding the pool of potential perpetrators, and *Columbo* amuses by its lead detective's (Peter Falk) social awkwardness. See Mereike's (2016) detailed and insightful analyses of (what I'm calling) genre-specific formulaic patterns spanning over 70 years of American crime fiction.

12 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNjtcXLS7XQ.

13 For numerous examples of how individual series develop their own patterns, see Mittell (2006, 2015) and Mereike (2016).

14 Vidmar (2017) discuses the process whereby a fictional character becomes recogized as a human like individual.

15 As do Scotty Valens and Nick Amaro, both portrayed by Danny Pino. Individuation of characters is further enabled by development of their particular aesthetic features (consider the dark, gothic, Lolita-inspired wardrobe of Abby Sciuto (Pauley Perrette)), distinctive character traits (the intellectual superiority of Spencer Reid (Matthew Gray Gubler) and interaction with other characters (Stabler's (Chris Meloni) rage at the criminal coupled with Benson's (Mariska Hargitay) compassion for the victim). Such traits often become a recognizable feature of a series as a whole, particularly in cases of spin-offs which feature almost identical story-lines but highly diverse patterns of instantiating such stories.

16 Consider a critical commentary by one of the series' makers: «After several decades of viewing cops in ill-fitting suits driving undistinguished government-issue cars, it is an unexpected pleasure to see Sonny Crockett in pastel T-shirts and white linen jackets driving what was soon to become a noir television icon, his black Ferrari» (Sanders, 2010: 22). Sanders further illustrates the role of music in the creation of the series' distinctive identity claiming that Jan Hammer's music «provides an expansive vocabulary for commentary on themes and characters. … The songs that accompany each episode have such an uncanny fit to the images and actions on screen that they often serve as functional equivalents of voiceovers» (25). The point here isn't that only *Miami Vice* makes use of music to enhance its thematic concerns, but to point to the fact that a particular choice of music and

the manner in which music is employed was soon recognized as *distinctive to the series*. For the aesthetic features of series-specific patterns, see an interview with Dick Wolf for his discussion of formal and stylistic patterns of L&O:SVU at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CLA6bNrlAMo.

17 An exception are occasional cross-overs, of which more below.

18 See Moine (2008) who talks about «recurring configurations of formal and thematic elements» and of «intertextual repetition and intratextual accumulation» of elements repeatedly found in wide range of works (where the text can refer to linguistic and filmic medium). For the idea of stereotypes see Schweinitz (2011).

19 I am aware that my analogy between formulaic patterns and musical score is weak, in that each episode (unlike each musical performance of the same score) is a component of a work (rather than a new performance). I am also aware of the reasons why it might be an overstatement to say that series-specific patterns are work-determinative; as Nannicelli (2013) pointed out in discussing screenplays, there are many other aspects in addition to screenplay, which determine the final work – therefore, unlike musical scores, screenplays are not work-determinative. That same reasoning can apply to formulaic patterns: even though series-specific formulaic patterns feature in a screenplay for each episode, the episode is determined by factors other than the screenplay. I do not object to that, but I still think the analogy is useful (even if not all together accurate) because it points to a particular manner in which execution of certain, specified set of norms, brings about episode after episode of highly consistent nature, and we recognize these episodes as one and the same work, just like we recognize different performances, regardless of the differences among them, as performances of one and the same work.

20 As Carroll (1994) points out, part of the satisfaction in engaging with generic works is derived from recognizing their take on the generic norms, particularly when a series brings forward an original instantiation that has not been materialized in other series of the same genre. Arguably, the popularity of *CSI* was related to its revolutionary approach to traditional police procedurals: by replacing detectives with forensic experts, they modified traditionally understood character-slots.

21 The upshot of this is that we need an ontological account of a season, but I cannot develop it here.

22 This is why viewers do not make an identity mistake when an actor switches from one series to another. Kim Delaney and David Caruso were playing detectives in *NYPD Blue,* but when they joined forces as forensic experts in *CSI: Miami*, viewers easily recognized that they now pertain to a different series.

23 See Berliner 2017 for the role of novelty and familiarity in generating aesthetic pleasure. As explained by Carroll (Carroll 1994), part of the satisfaction derived from genre fiction relates to viewers' noticing how any given work develops generic norms. Similarly, part of the viewers' interest in new episodes of the same series is to see how each turns series' patterns upside down, as for example *CSI* franchise does in joining two casts from different series of the *CSI* franchise. Such cross-overs do not cancel individual identity of each show because viewers understand the specific way in which a cross-over episode works and know it is a modification of the existing works, rather than creation of a new one.

24 I am grateful to my reviewer for bringing this up. In what follows, I rely on RA as s/he describes it in his/her review of my original submission.

25 This criterion is developed by J. Levinson in his work on ontology of music, but here I rely on Nannicelli's interpretation of it (2012: 171).

26 This is not to suggest that viewers do not choose what to watch given the type of content, aesthetics and other features they associate with a certain network, screenwriter, producer… – we can be fans of Dick Wolf for the same reason as we are fans of Shakespeare: both make great works that give us pleasure. But if you think of a series being shown all over the world, it makes sense to argue that its original relation to a specific network (in say, America) matters little to a viewer outside the States.

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