(Not So) Complex TV. Framing Seriality as a Practice via Contemporary Models of Italian Television Fiction

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In questi ultimi anni, le serie tv sono diventate un importante oggetto di indagine da parte dei *Media* e *Television Studies.* Obiettivo di questo articolo è sviluppare e illustrare un approccio olistico alle narrative seriali televisive, una prospettiva che tiene conto della complessità di fattori che le definiscono. Difatti, le serie tv sono stati analizzate in modi differenti e da vari punti di vista. Prima di tutto, i formati seriali costituiscono un largo corpo di prodotti – prodotti e distribuiti sia a livello nazionale che internazionale – che sono stati investigati rispettivamente in relazione alla loro estetica, alla propria rappresentazione e alle istanze culturali e sociali, nel loro rapporto con la politica, nelle proprie forme di consumo e fandom. In secondo luogo, una particolare attenzione è stata dedicata al meccanismo testuale della narrazione seriale, così come alla sua capacità di costruire mondi vasti ed elaborati che si espandono oltre i confini dei testi e dei media. Inquadrando la serialità come pratica, l'autore vuole mostrare le connessioni strutturali che collegano le strategie industriali e le produzioni culturale con le tattiche della visione e le culture dei consumi, così come i modi in cui queste connessioni sono negoziate attraverso i testi, le loro estensioni e la loro circolazione sociale e culturale. Terreno di prova di tale approccio sarà il caso della fiction TV italiana contemporanea, che presenta tre diversi modelli in accordo con i corrispettivi obiettivi ed esigenze del servizio pubblico, della televisione commerciale, e della Pay TV. Ricorrendo ad uno studio articolato sulle politiche editoriali, le strategie di produzione/distribuzione/promozione, i valori di consumo e le pratiche di visione delle serie TV italiane, questa discussione illustrerà il processo per "tentativi ed errori" che ha condotto alla nascita di nuovo modello di serialità lunga, in grado di generare narrative innovative come, ad esempio, i franchise *Romanzo Criminale. La serie*, Gomorra. La serie e *1992.* In finale, l'autore dimostrerà come sebbene questo esempio sia parzialmente differente da quelli tradizionali e nazionali, e più vicino a quelli Americani ampiamente industrializzati, l'operatore pay-tv Sky Italia ha nondimeno fallito, fino ad adesso, nel realizzare un modello di Complex Tv, come ad esempio una produzione multi-stagione, che gli permetterebbe di poter sfruttare appieno un franchising TV di successo.

In recent years, television series have become an important object of scrutiny for Media and Television Studies. The aim of this article is to develop and illustrate an holistic approach to TV serial narratives, a perspective that could account for the complexity of factors that define them. Indeed, TV series have been analyzed in different ways and from various points of view. First of all, TV serials and series form a large *corpus* of products – both nationally and internationally produced and distributed – that has been investigated respectively in relation to its aesthetics, its representation of social and cultural issues, its relationship with politics, and its forms of consumption and fandom. Second, specific attention has been devoted to the *textual* mechanism of serial narration, as well as to its capacity to build vast and elaborate story-worlds that expand beyond the boundaries of texts and media. By framing seriality as a *practic*e, I aim to show the structural connections that link (and cross) industrial strategies and production cultures with viewing tactics and consumption cultures, as well as the ways in which these connections are negotiated through texts, their extensions, and their social and cultural circulation. My testing ground for this approach will be the case of contemporary Italian TV fiction, which presents three different models according to the corresponding goals and needs of public service broadcasting, commercial television, and pay TV. With recourse to an articulated study of the editorial policies, production/distribution/promotion strategies, consumption figures and viewing

practices of Italian pay-TV series, this discussion will illustrate the "trial and error" process that has led to the birth of a new model of long seriality that is capable of generating innovative narratives such as, for example, the franchises *Romanzo Criminale. La serie*, *Gomorra. La serie* and *1992*. Finally, I will demonstrate that though this new model is partially different from the traditional, national ones and instead closer to the fully industrialized American one, the pay TV operator Sky Italia has nevertheless failed, so far, to adopt comprehensively a "complex TV" serial design, such as a multi-season production, that could rapidly and fully exploit a successful TV franchise.

Gomorra's Paratexts and the Media System

In order to explain the aim and the subject of this article, we might begin with two paratexts that "surrounded" one of the most interesting and most talked-about Italian-made TV series: Gomorra. La serie (Sky Atlantic, 2014-…).

In an interview for the Sky Atlantic channel at the time of the launch of Gomorra. La serie in May 2014, Roberto Saviano, the writer of the popular novel Gomorra, offers several intriguing comments on the production of a television series "inspired" by the book, about its authorship, and about how the project was realised: "I asked for just one guarantee from the screenwriters and the director: that we tell the story of how the [Neapolitan] reality operates (…). When I sensed that that was what they wanted, too – the producer, the screenwriters and the director – I immediately felt that this was my project." (Saviano, 2014)

The writer seems committed to explaining verbally a rather complex (and murky) world: his use of personal pronouns reveals a certain dialectic among those involved. In creating the series, he says, "we" agreed a certain style ("realism"), so that "my" project dovetailed perfectly with what "they" wanted (the screenwriters, directors, producers, and so on). In essence, Saviano is attempting to answer a crucial question: to whom can we attribute the authorship of Gomorra. La serie? Who is the author?

The second paratext is much less official and corporate than the Saviano interview. One of the most popular viral videos that circulated on the Internet during and after Gomorra. La serie was aired stars a character whose features (if not his name) evoke the most grotesque of the "bad guys" in the series, as he drives a poor waiter to distraction in a Neapolitan restaurant. Indeed, "Don" Salvatore Conte reels off the pick of the lines and the underworld language – "stai senza pensieri!" (don't worry!), "fammi capì si me poz fidà de te" (show me I can trust you), "tu s'è figlio a me, non tieni bisogno di possibilità" (you're my son; you don't need opportunities), and more. And he insists that the poor unfortunate must reply in the same vein, as if both were inside the fictional universe of this all-Italian crime drama (The Jackal, 2014).

This entertaining parody by video-making collective The Jackal is the third in a series of audiovisual shorts, lasting just a few minutes, which have been watched and shared thousands of times on the Internet (effectively as an ancillary series parodying the actual series broadcast on Sky). Its finale contains some surprises. The on-going interplay between reality and fiction ends when the writer, Roberto Saviano, enters the restaurant.

First, he has a discussion with the two characters from the short film about how the language of the series is acquiring "cult" status, especially among young people; then, he justifies – if that is the right word – this attitude of "demythologizing" organised crime ("they're right to laugh at the Camorra; that's how to undermine it …"). Finally, he offers the increasingly bewildered waiter the advice "stai senza pensieri!" (don't worry!)."

These two paratexts, which complement, extend or somehow complete Gomorra's fictional universe, are just two possible examples of how a television series like Gomorra gains cultural currency. We can take them as meaningful examples because they spotlight two important issues in this cultural circulation, and they raise as many problems.

The first issue obviously centres on producing the series – its intentions and the range of people responsible for planning, conceiving, writing, filming, editing, promoting and distributing it. Roberto Saviano problematises the question of a television series' authoriality with his complex "I-we-they" pronoun interplay. So who really is the author of a television series?[1] Can we answer this question, looking beyond the evident promotion and marketing requirements that ascribe the authorship of a series such as Gomorra to Roberto Saviano and, say, "the idea" of a series like 1992 (Sky Atlantic, 2015) to the main actor Stefano Accorsi? And, again, this genesis, this process of producing and making, comes about differently when the series concerned is made for pay TV – in contrast, for example, with the traditional production model for generalist Italian television network fiction? (Scaglioni – Barra, 2013, 2015).

The second focus of attention concerns consumption, and particularly what we could term "productive consumption" (Fiske, 1987). Regarding the consumption of Gomorra. La serie, there are would be a number of interesting cases to mention. Among others, the app called "iGomorra", created by a fan of the series, springs to mind. The app offers a digest of all the best-known lines, and is naturally dominated by Don Salvatore Conte and his pearls of underworld wisdom. Over 150,000 fans downloaded the app in just a few days, during and after the airing of the series.

As with the mini webseries, this paratext illustrates the type of relationship that arises between production, text and viewer in the age of convergence. The two paratexts, among others, are examples of "extensions" of the text, in one case by semi-professional "petty producers" - to use Abercrombie and Longhurst's expression (Abercrombie – Longhurst, 1998) - like The Jackal, who have made an ancillary product to Gomorra that immediately went "viral" and became "spreadable" (Jenkins, 2013), thus contributing to the product's cult status. The second example is about a fan creating something for other fans and thus also contributing to "the cult" (Scaglioni, 2006) of Gomorra, with particular attention to the character Salvatore Conte.

Of course, these points could easily mutate into a discussion of the realms of the television medium's transformations in the "media convergence age" (Jenkins, 2008; Grasso – Scaglioni 2010), with the proliferation of extensions to the text, of means of access, and of strategies for "branding" the content that result.

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[1] The issue of TV series' authorship is particularly relevant for contemporary Television Studies: see, for example, Mittell, 2015; Fiacco, 2015; Scaglioni, 2015.

The present article will nevertheless remain more general: it will explain in what sense and in what way television series have become one of the most interesting fields for those who study not only television but also – to make the point straight away – the media in general. For, as will become clear, in the age of convergence, dealing with an app like iGomorra or a web series like The Jackal's "Gli effetti di Gomorra sulla gente" ("How Gomorra affects people") obviously broadens our scope, bringing us from television to the wider contemporary "media ecosystem" in which we are all immersed. In the following, I will examine the statu nascenti model of Italian pay-TV series, which in recent years has come to complement the existing models of fiction made for public-service television, on one hand, and for commercial television, on the other (Barra – Scaglioni, 2015). Studying a nascent model, as with pay-TV series, offers a fruitful opportunity for research.

Television Series and Television Studies

Television series have been an important subject of analysis for what we can now call Television Studies (Gray – Lodz, 2012), especially in a country like Italy, which lacks a strong seriality tradition of its own (and not just in the television arena). We could even venture to say that, in a sense, scholarly work on series has shaped an important dimension of the Television Studies discipline in Italy. In just over 30 years of thought and analysis on this subject, three key moments stand out. The third represents partly the current state of play in the research and partly the an objective for the future.

The first phase might be termed one of exemplariness and discovery. In 1983, a conference was held in Urbino, whose proceedings were published in the book L'immagine al plurale (The image in the plural) edited by Francesco Casetti (1984). That volume's relevance lies not only its affirmation of the importance of how seriality works in the media and in popular culture but also what we can call the television medium's status as an exemplary case. Television is seriality's natural terrain, because seriality permeates it in various ways: in its genres (the most serial, "repetitive" genre on TV then was not so much fiction but the newscast); in its continuity with other forms of popular culture (from the feuilleton to the detective novel); in its "flow-based" communicative form (Williams, 1974); and in how the schedule is organised, with its "machinery" of recurrent-consumption models (Rizza, 1989; Barra, 2015). As the prime domain for studying seriality, the television medium opens up a whole arena of discovery that is still ours to explore today. Indeed, a mostly textualist approach derived from the Humanities, Semiotics and Film Studies reveals a whole potential area of application that aims, for instance, to pit "an aesthetic of repetition" against the traditional aesthetic of oneness (Calabrese, 1984), or to focus on a type of product labelled a little hastily as "telefilm", whose massive use was a prominent feature in the offering of commercial television's nascent model at that time. Another book, also edited by Francesco Casetti (1984b), entitled Un'altra volta ancora (One more time), analysed quite different productions, from prime time soaps as Dallas to dramas as Starsky & Hutch and sit-coms as Archibald. This strand can extend to the

present day, because new genres introduced over time into the television schedules become objects of "discovery", starting from the analytical frame centred on the textuality of "series", understood in a broad sense, from reality shows to factual entertainment (see, for example, Penati – Sfardini 2015).

The second stage we could term legitimation – though effectively it is a dual legitimation: both of the subject of study and of the approach to studying it, that of Television Studies itself. It is curious to reflect that, starting with a topic like seriality, we take an important step towards legitimating the study of television. Television, like seriality, is not stupid or trivial, banal or formulaic. On the contrary, it is complex and intelligent, challenging and mould-breaking (Thompson 2003; Johnson 2005; Grasso, 2007; Mittell 2015). Clearly, a particular serial object has been taken as a model for this dual process of legitimation, namely American-produced TV series, imported and scheduled in a less haphazard and more orderly fashion by the generalist networks from the 1990s and by pay networks too from the 2000s. This somehow necessary legitimation entails an obvious risk, too, that of a "fetishised" and "partial" treatment. We can deal with television intelligently when we deal with intelligent television, i.e. the "complex" series in the "quality popular television" arriving from the USA (McCabe – Akass, 2007; Jankovich – Lyons 2008). Or, as Enrico Menduni once summed up, with a kind critique of a conference paper which I delivered in Turin, on American series in particular, "here, we are dealing with the steak not the offal, but that's a part of the beef, too".

As Michael Newman and Elana Levine (2012) have observed with regard to the American context, this "complex television", and its study, is legitimated to the detriment of the "rest" of the ordinary television, in association with a particular institutional and technological development in contemporary TV, i.e, media convergence. This second stage, beyond the risk of fetishization, certainly has the merit of combining the plurality of methodological approaches that have emerged in the meantime. Thus, we begin to shift from "seriality as text" to "seriality as practice", looking on one hand also at consumption and the cultures of consumption - such as fandom - and, on the other, albeit more recently, at the production world and the associated production cultures (Scaglioni, 2006; Innocenti – Pescatore 2008; Grasso – Scaglioni, 2009; Buonanno 2012; Pescatore – Innocenti 2013)

Stage three partly represents a hope, or something to aim for. Whereas the second stage featured a plurality of study approaches, stage three adopts them in what I would call a systemic or "holistic" vision that, in my view, represents Television Studies' key, defining characteristic. Television (and perhaps the media) can only be studied via an approach that is at once hybrid, multidisciplinary, open to other ideas, and, indeed, holistic, an approach that can keep control of the complex cultural circuit generated among industry and production and distribution, textuality and storytelling, viewing and consumption. Aldo Grasso and I noted as much in the 2003 book "Che cos'è la televisione" (Grasso – Scaglioni, 2003), and Jonathan Gray, Amanda Lodz (2012) and others (e.g. Miller, 2010) have reiterated the point more recently, too. Television Studies necessarily explores the text as much as the practices: the text with the context. To return to the examples we started with, a coherent discussion of Gomorra. La serie or of the

other pay-TV series – from Romanzo Criminale (Sky Cinema 1, 2008-2010) to 1992 – would be impossible without reflecting, at least at the level of a reference framework, on that broad circuit that includes the production, distribution, promotional and other strategies of a pay broadcaster like Sky Italia in the context of contemporary Italian (and European) TV, the associated textual and narrative outcomes, and the characteristics of consumption both quantitatively and with regard to practices and taste (Scaglioni – Barra, 2013; Scaglioni 2013).

I will now turn to the case of the statu nascenti Italian pay-TV series as a testing ground for how series contribute to defining the interests and the boundaries of Television Studies, and how I believe Television Studies can become a model for Media Studies more generally.

The *Statu Nascenti* Seriality of Pay TV as a Test Ground for Television Studies

The research on pay-TV series in Italy (and in Europe) which has been conducted in recent years at the Ce.R.T.A. – Centre for Television and Audiovisual Media at Università Cattolica in Milan (Scaglioni – Barra, 2013), and which is ongoing, has adopted an analytical model that can indeed be termed "systemic" (Ortoleva, 2002; Grasso – Scaglioni, 2003). This research has considered the production context (and culture), using a production studies approach to analyse production on both the broadcaster's side (Sky) and that of the production companies involved, as well as promotion, communication and scheduling. A second part of the work has looked at the world of consumption, involving both quantitative data on consumption of these series products and a more qualitative analysis of how pay fiction has been perceived and watched in Italy. A third strand has also been dedicated, naturally, to the texts produced and to continuity and discontinuity in narration and representation.

The core research question, which has provided a framework thus far, is whether and how an Italian series model is emerging that is different from and an alternative to those traditionally developed by public-service and commercial television (see also Barra – Scaglioni 2015).

To characterise the pay-TV fiction phenomenon in Italy, we first need to mention three economic and institutional "macro" factors, namely:

- the advent of a new era in Italian and European television, where direct subscription is a more important revenue source than the licence fee and advertising (Richeri – Cucco, 2014);
- the resulting emergence, first in the USA then in Europe, of pay TV series associated with American cable networks and more recently the European ones, too (as with Canal+ as well as Sky in the UK, Italy and Germany), and of production associated with new operators such as the OTT providers, primarily Netflix;

- the specific case of Sky Italia, which transitioned in 2008 from a phase of "growth" (characterised typically by "premium" products, like sport and cinema) to one of "consolidation" (with the production of its own original fiction and entertainment products).

The pay-TV series model is a direct competitor of, or radically "different" from, its traditional generalist-fiction counterpart, as the "motto" that has been doing the rounds at Sky since 2008 suggests: "If it works for Mediaset and Rai, it ain't good for Sky" (Scaglioni – Barra, 2013).

Fiction is a strategic genre for TV. It is one of the most important areas of investment for the generalist broadcasters, and it has brought in significant and growing revenue since the '90s. (Buonanno, 2012). Fiction is an expensive and risky genre – the ratings can be measured only after the entire production chain has been completed, sometimes many months before the actual airing, and a flop is especially critical for long series. But it is also an extremely popular one, a place to reflect stories rooted in the nation's culture and imagination, and indeed Italian fiction exhibits long-established models and themes. Moreover, producing original TV fiction is something quite new for the pay operator. Over the last five years, Sky has attempted to establish a specific model of its own, feeling its way by trial and error. In contrast to the long-standing marriage between fiction and generalist television, which has made the genre one of the most important for Rai (with over 120 primetime screenings on Raiuno) and Mediaset (with over 90 on Canale 5), Sky's fiction model began to take shape in 2008. It differs from the generalist model in several ways.

First, in purely quantitative terms: Sky's schedules have limited space for original fiction, although this is growing. In the first five years, eleven productions have been developed, produced and broadcast on the Sky platform in different formats, namely the TV films Un Natale per due (Sky Cinema 1, 2011) and Un Natale coi fiocchi (Sky Cinema 1, 2012), the miniseries Quo Vadis, Baby…? (Sky Cinema 1, 2008), Nel nome del male (Sky Cinema 1, 2009), Moana (Sky Cinema 1, 2009), Faccia d'angelo (Sky Cinema 1, 2012) and I delitti del Bar Lume (Sky Cinema 1, 2013), and the long series Romanzo Criminale 1 & 2, In Treatment (Sky Cinema 1, Sky Atlantic, 2013-2015), Gomorra and 1992. To all these, we can add the shows produced by the Fox Italia subsidiary, Boris (Fox, FX, 2007-2010), Non pensarci. La serie (Fox, 2009) and Il mostro di Firenze (Fox Crime, 2009). It is all on a rather different to that typical of the generalist networks.

Another difference is the target audience, a pool of subscribers that, at five million households, makes up little over 20% of the national television audience but has a characteristic profile, in particular, being much younger than generalist viewers. They are a "paying" audience that expects higher quality, for they are accustomed to consuming US-made series even more than domestic Italian fiction. A final difference is the production context. Generalist/mainstream fiction is conceived almost entirely for the Italian TV market, with very rare exceptions of products that can be distributed more widely overseas, such as Il Commissario Montalbano (Raidue, Raiuno, 1999-…). But pay fiction – almost necessarily – has a different ambition: to maintain high production values (with the

costs they entail) to satisfy a more demanding audience. And that naturally opens the way to international-distribution and co-production opportunities.

Fewer projects to develop, an audience of subscribers and not just viewers, and the chance to make products of international scope: these, therefore, are the characteristics that have shaped the pay-TV series scene from the outset. They translate into an editorial policy that has gradually gained sharper focus and (at least up to a point) that marks Sky fiction as something original, a step change in the history of Italian-made TV series. This editorial policy, then, has various defining features:

- Formats. A trial and error process involving various formats has settled on the "long series" (of at least 10 or 12 episodes) as the preferred production framework.

- Content and style. Pay fiction must distance itself from the everyday generalist fiction series. Instead, it must somehow represent a case, a highly recognisable and communicable product. The projects have been based on subjects or scenarios of immediate impact, i.e. media brands already established in other products, such as bestsellers that became hit feature films, as in Romanzo Criminale and Gomorra; or the popular character of Diabolik (to be produced). Or, again, high-profile, much-followed nationwide phenomena and stories that have not yet been told elsewhere (such as the characters of Moana Pozzi or the gangster Felice Maniero in Faccia d'angelo or the season on the Mani Pulite inquests into the Tangentopoli political-corruption crisis, in 1992). The recognisable theme must be expressed in an equally characteristic style that resonates through all the audiovisual product's creative features and permeates its brand: the aesthetic and visual look, the logo, the overall tone of voice, the cast, the writing, and the communication and marketing tools. From this perspective, too, the most successful brand has been Romanzo Criminale, which has been developed in a convergent, "extended" manner while allowing the grassroots and fandom cultures to extend it further. Moving away from the commonplaces of generalist fiction also means adopting a view that is less Manichaean and edifying about reality. For, by tapping into the established canons of various genres (in particular, the gangster movie for Romanzo Criminale, Faccia d'angelo and Gomorra), the story often overturns traditional fiction's representative tenets. And biopics may be dedicated to characters who are much more controversial in the collective imagination, like a porn star or serial criminal.

- The quality of the writing or even the product's "complexity". Both in the work to develop the storyline and the screenplay and in the later stages of production and post-production, the frame of reference is closer to the cinema than to traditional generalist fiction. The products are scheduled in a package of channels dedicated normally to cinema (or to high quality, major, American-made series), and the subscribers have great expectations; hence the drive for high quality standards. The desire to involve professionals and talent from the Italian film industry, albeit in an industrial TV-production scenario (i.e. series), is therefore another characteristic feature of Sky Italia fiction.

Fiction's arrival on national pay TV has brought innovations of various kinds, from the nature of the texts (their content, styles and formats) to aspects of the production machinery. On the latter note, I believe it is worth underlining one point that I feel is perhaps the most significant.

Increasingly clearly, a production practice is emerging that is inspired by the American industrial models – albeit inevitably with investment and output volumes on a different scale; a practice that ideally suited to the production of long fiction series.

This "American-style" production approach had already emerged, at least in part, on generalist TV over the last 15 years. Indeed, some series (in particular, the products created by the Taodue production company) have featured multi-strand plots, interwoven horizontal and vertical narrative lines, planned multiple seasons, and established a complex, "ready-furnished" narrative (Grasso – Scaglioni, 2009) and diegetic ecosystem to which might satisfy viewers and thus encourage their return.

The production of Romanzo Criminale season one is already a very significant example, later replicated in quite similar vein for Gomorra. La Serie.

Note, first of all, that the screenwriting team hired for Romanzo (Daniele Cesarano, Barbara Petronio, Leonardo Valenti and Paolo Marchesini) are all from Taodue, the "school" that cut its teeth between 2003 and 2008 writing "American-style" scripts, especially dramas like Distretto di polizia (Canale 5, 2000-2012) and RIS (Canale 5, 2005-2009). And it is precisely in a series like Distretto (with 11 seasons comprising 282 forty-five-minute episodes) that the story editor becomes an especially important role. This is a professional with a screenwriter's background who "writes the storylines, works with the screenwriters on all the line-ups and all the plot lines, and basically constructs the series". An analogous production model was adopted for Romanzo, with a few additional innovations thrown in.

A second characteristic feature is the series' actual production phase. In adapting the "American-style" model to pay-TV fiction's needs, they invest in a unique personality that, more even than the story editor, could oversee and steer each stage of the work according to the requirements negotiated with the broadcaster, from coordinating the screenwriting team to working on the set with the director and actors, and from post-production to editing. Thus emerges the role of a showrunner, a production professional who coordinates and ensures consistency across all the steps in the complex business that is making a long series.

In the overall economy of pay-series production, a single coordinator is vital to ensure consistency across the different steps in producing a long series, from writing and pre-production to the production and especially the direction led by Stefano Sollima, through to post-production, editing and promotion/communications for the product.

The communications and promotions for Romanzo, in fact, were planned as the product was being developed, and that is a priority for Sky. As series showrunner Gina Gardini notes, "The fundamental thing for Sky was promotion. Before filming even began, they were already working on the promotion set-up: so they recreated an existing brand in a very innovative way" (Scaglioni – Barra, 2013).

The textual outcomes of this process are very interesting, and we can sum them up in two points:

- promotion has the same value as production, and this is a crucial factor in the Sky model, since the pay platform needs its channels to "shine" with original productions (to "push" network brands like Sky Cinema, Sky Atlantic or, for entertainment, Sky Uno);
- the series becomes a brand in its own right: each series product must have a complete and coherent image (based on the "complex" American cable series model). The motto is "sell the brand before the actual product". And, at least in the most successful cases of Romanzo, Gomorra and 1992, that is what has happened, thanks partly to the high media profile that the products have achieved.

For Romanzo Criminale, the product brand's construction can clearly be seen, for example in:

- the tag-line "Il crimine paga" (crime pays), provocatively turning the rhetoric of traditional fiction and commonsense on its head;
- the "ten commandments" with which the series was promoted, an arrogant affirmation of a criminal code that broke through the wall of communication noise;
- the visual dimension, especially the image of the 100,000-lire banknote that became the series' real trademark: from the opening credits to the key visual, from the corporate brochure to the wads of fake banknotes distributed as a form of guerrilla marketing on the streets of some Italian cities.

These "paratexts" help to shape the series brand, from the plaster busts of the bandits in Rome's EUR district to the flyer for the merchandising launch party with items including T-shirts dedicated to the characters. All these examples show how Romanzo Criminale. La serie has positioned itself as a "cult" product where top-down promotion, considered an essential component for the pay-series model, meets bottom-up appropriation by the audiences. A similar process took place for Gomorra, of course.

Conclusions

My conclusions concern the position that a pay-TV fiction model has come to occupy in the cultural context of Italy in the 2000s and the means of analysing it. I will summarize them in three points.

First, Italian pay-TV series clearly aspire to be a high-quality fiction model – "complex" series inspired as much in textual as in production terms, in many ways, by the "high-quality", "complex" series created in the USA.

What we may term an aspiration to complexity results from the melding of two cultures and two practices. I refer specifically to the coupling between, on one hand, the particular need of the Sky brand product to stand out, and, on the other, the demand from a socio-

demographically and culturally circumscribed audience, an audience with the same need for something different, something to suit their taste, an audience "brought up" on the quality standards of American series and who want to consume "quality Italian-style TV".

Of course, and this is my second conclusion, this aspiration to "complexity" and "quality" meets certain limitations.

Some are structural: although inspired by fully industrial models, like American series, the fiction produced by pay TV in Italy is still associated with an artisanal dimension in many ways. Testament to this is that, even for big hits with the target audience (such as Romanzo Criminale and Gomorra), the construction of a multi-seasonal narrative arc still depends on considerations that chronologically follow the broadcasts themselves, and therefore prevent the success of one season from being exploited and used to foster viewer "loyalty" in the next. (Gomorra II will be aired only in 2016, two years after season one, for example.)

Naturally, there are other limits regarding not only the budgets invested in the production (which are quite significant) but also, and more subtly and problematically, creativity. Many of the structural conditions affecting the production of Romanzo Criminale and Gomorra also apply to 1992. But what changes is the production company behind the project, and with it, the creative team. In the end, the three products have certainly had rather different outcomes.

My third conclusion regards the relationship between television series and Television Studies. An understanding of the particular position occupied by pay series, where production practices and cultures, textual and narrative models, and consumption practices and cultures intersect (although a different focus is also possible) can be cultivated only if we adopt an approach to media analysis that uses as broad, open, multidisciplinary and pluralistic an array of research techniques and methods as possible. This seems to me to be the most original approach that Television Studies can offer to the study not just of seriality but also, and more broadly, of highly mediatised contemporary culture.

Nota biografica

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