

**Between Continuity and Gap. A Conversation with Jason Mittell**

edited by Massimiliano Coviello and Angela Maiello

Jason Mittell is one of the most influential voices in contemporary television and media studies, and his book, *Complex TV*, has become a major classic in the field. In this conversation, moving from a definition of “series” and “seriality” as continuity with gap, Mittell analyzes the transformations and evolutions of the serial format, the changes in the temporality of serial experience due to streaming, the increasingly tight relationship between film and television and how the new practices of serial consumption are reflected in participatory culture. He also addresses the question of the relationship between tv series and present culture and politics, highlighting the importance of new voices and perspectives emerging in contemporary television.

**The Series at The End of The World**

Piergiorgio Donatelli

Series are an opportunity for entertainment, which is why we watch them and become fond of them, and at the same time they push us to rethink our lives; they offer images, words and situations through which things that happen to us become interesting and deserve our attention. Everyone watches series, they are not a lofty product that hierarchizes public, and for this very reason they have the ability to put us face to face with the culture that shapes the common imagination, making culture meet itself.

**Series, Networks, Nodes: Mathematics and Film Narration**

Daniele Dottorini

Starting from some texts on cinema by Alain Badiou, the essay notes the analytical use of terms from the terminology of mathematics (such as series, networks and nodes) to analyze works by Jean-Luc Godard and Michelangelo Antonioni. The word “series”, seen from this perspective, then acquires a new applicative potential; it becomes, in fact, the model of a possible dynamic structure of a filmic or audiovisual work in general. A structure that, of course, does not exhaust the meaning of the images, but

allows for the organization within it of the formal choices necessary for the production of meaning. A film can therefore also be analyzed by tracing the serial structures it contains; or, on the other hand, a series of films can be seen precisely as a series because they each have a common element that, isolated from the context, can be seen as part of a “series”. Starting from these premises, the essay identifies some of the fields of application of such a conceptual shift, from video essay practices to Ejzenštejn’s reflections on the logarithmic spiral to recent generative models of narrative structures intended for the construction of serial works.

### **Serial Reproduction in Duchamp and Benjamin’s Thought**

Leonardo Passarelli

From the second half of the 1930s, Marcel Duchamp focused on reproducing in series and in miniature his main works of art. In the same period Walter Benjamin wrote *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. The artist and the philosopher were confronting, on different levels, the changing status of the work of art at a time when the new means of industrial production were beginning to play an increasingly present role in cultural and artistic sphere as well. Duchamp and Benjamin met only once in Paris in the spring of 1937. The text highlights both the convergences and differences between Duchamp’s work and Benjamin’s thought, and how artistic praxis can often turn out to be more forward-looking than philosophy about future developments in aesthetic research.

### **Hereditary Image. Film Serialization of Common Destiny**

Vincenzo Altobelli

The essay examines what it means in cinema to inherit, the visual modes of transforming repetition, and the filmic gears that reproduce subjective division. Through examples of contemporary films divided into chapters and episodes, it is shown how the traumatic element acts as both an agent of uniting and separating the parts, especially when they are irretrievably and genetically linked: the family, the common origin, takes on the serial form of trauma, and the decomposition of narrative material into parts becomes the visual translation of its inheritance.

## **Series and Design. Design Objects in Serial Forms**

Chiara Rubessi

The essay examines how design objects and furnishings in serial forms reflect the setting, support the plot, and contribute to character development and narrative continuity. Through case studies such as *Space: 1999*, *Mad Men*, and *Stranger Things*, it highlights how design, ranging from futuristic and metaphysical solutions to historically significant objects, creates atmospheres that enhance the visual experience for the audience. These examples provide an insight into the role of design objects within serial forms, emphasizing how they, in turn, help shape the collective imagination.

## **The Forms of Animation. Ontology of a Frame-by-Frame Sequentiality**

Martina Vita

Animation is identified as a language ontologically based on the serial juxtaposition of static images to which movement is imparted through small structural modifications, establishing a relationship of interdependence between units that maintain a resemblance to each other. The assumption that animation is a separated language from live-action cinema seems to be based on the fact that it's the correlation between sequential elements that allows the perception of movement and the bridging of gaps between one frame and the next.

## **The Central European Photographic Avant-Garde and the Strange Case of the *Röntgenbild einer Scholle***

Camilla Balbi

The article analyzes the interdependence of seriality, avant-garde networks, and reproduction techniques in Central Europe by reconstructing the dissemination, reception, and fortune of an X-ray image taken in Berlin around 1925. The image – reproduced in medical publications, art magazines, and in the exhibition *Film und Foto* – is finally integrated into a graphic by Moholy-Nagy in 1930. By tracing its “afterlife”, I will show how the theory of photography has developed in the central years of the early twentieth century, through partially invisibilized subjectivities and through a sophisticated interplay of repetition and difference that had its material and theoretical

foundations as much in photomechanical-reproduction techniques as in the logic of montage and series.

### **Between Literature and Cinema: Lewis Baltz's Photographic Series** Virginia Gerlero

This essay explores the distinctive nature of the 'series narrative' in Lewis Baltz's photographic oeuvre, focusing on two notable works: *Near Reno* (Steidl, 2010) and *Canadian Series* (1985), unpublished and held at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles. The conviction that photography cannot be separated and thought apart from other art forms, such as literature, cinema and the visual arts, is a central aspect of both the theoretical writings and the photographic work of Lewis Baltz. The series under discussion here serve as exemplary illustrations of this concept, opening up aesthetic considerations of both Baltz's work and, more generally, photography as an art form.

### ***Perverted History: The Contemporary Period Drama*** Andrea Bellavita

The essay aims to illustrate a particular discursive strategy of contemporary period drama, defined as *perverting history*, which consists in producing a displacement of the historical event through the introduction of the fantastic regime, in order to generate new forms of textual pleasure. In the case of *Lovecraft Country*, the presence of vertical focuses of fantasy genre in the horizontal flow, radically transforms the serial historical narrative, creating a new series identity, which allows a coalescence between representation of the past and critical reflection on the present.

### **Standalone: The Television Episode in Contemporary Seriality** Laura Ysabella Hernández García

Drawing on insights from television aesthetics and the ontology of art, this paper focuses on the significance of the episode in contemporary television series.

To this end, we first define the ontology of television seriality, which has significant implications for interpretation, criticism, and appreciation. We argue that within contemporary seriality, the relevance of episodic form is most explicitly evident in its so-called "standalone" variations, of which

we analyze several cases. In this sense, the standalone episode is not an exception that confirms the rule but rather an intensification of the episode's inherent singularity as an object of appreciation.

### **Imagining The End: a Contribution to The Aesthetics of TV Series** Martino Feyles

The article offers an interpretation of an essential feature of TV series, namely the (tendential) lack of a conclusive ending. Referring to Aristotle, Ricoeur, and Kermode, the author seeks to demonstrate that it is possible to provide a symbolic interpretation of the infinite temporal deferral and the lack of conclusiveness that characterize many TV series. In this sense, the fact that many series never end, or end in a disappointing way, could be linked to a tendential practical inconclusiveness and to a skepticism in the teleological dimension of existence.

### **Subjectivity and Serial Temporality in *Droit de regards* by Derrida and Plissart** Martina Tassone

According to Gilles Deleuze, modern art developed on interchangeable series and circular structures. The birth and development of psychoanalysis, particularly reflections on the concepts of repetition and simultaneity, profoundly influenced this new form. The little-known work *Droit de regards*, composed of ninety-nine shots by photographer Marie-Françoise Plissart, accompanied by thirty-six pages of commentary by philosopher Jacques Derrida, fits into the tradition of serial thinking in art and, especially, photography (consider, for example, the enigmatic photographic sequences of Duane Michals) and is an emblematic example of the pervasiveness of the serial form in the aesthetics of the twentieth century and its relationship with the emerging science of subjectivity. The essay will analyze how Plissart's photographs, interlinking with each other and giving rise to «temporalités sérielles» (Derrida 1985), impose the construction of an "off-center" movement and, for this reason, do not define a narrative horizontality. More than a story, «pas d'histoire» insists Derrida from the very first pages of the commentary, *Droit de regards* is a dissemination of gazes, a multiple concatenation of subjectivities: the abandonment of representation towards an informal, bottomless chaos, which has no other law than its own circular and serial repetition (Deleuze 1971).

## **From Paper to Screen. Victorin-Hippolyte Jasset's Proto-Serial** Denis Previtiera

Nineteenth-century serial literature, specifically the *roman-feuilletons* in France and the dime novels in the United States, played a foundational role in shaping and defining the early forms of cinematic seriality that emerged in the early twentieth century. Through the works made by the precursor of serials Victorin-Hippolyte Jasset (*Nick Carter, le roi de détectives; Zigomar; Protéa*) for the production company Éclair, the essay attempts to retrace the historical context that characterises the development of the first serial forms of cinema, the influence played by literature in the production and narrative logics of *films en série*, and the importance that the French director had in preparing and anticipating various trends that are still fundamental in audiovisual seriality.

## **Gold Standard Mission: James Bond, Money, Seriality** Marco Colacino

The essay analyzes the movie *Goldfinger* (Hamilton, 1964) to highlight how James Bond, in this production, is able to embody the functions of the money: medium of exchange; unit of account; store of value; projection. To deal with Bond as money allows to bring to light the simulation's serial mechanisms that accompany the relation between the hero, the villains and the girls, even in other titles, interpreting them as simulacra, as well as that one between Connery and his official epigones, even his comedic parodies, such as the David Niven one.

## **Diffraction Bodies: An Investigation of Multiple Images by Helen Chadwick** Raffaella Tartaglia

This essay draws on the concept of diffraction, as articulated by Donna Haraway, employing this optical metaphor as a critical framework for analyzing the seriality embedded in Helen Chadwick's works. Specifically, it examines *Ego Geometria Sum* (1982–84) and *Of Mutability* (1984–86), where serialized bodies and their metonymic traces, by resisting condensation into a single photographic moment, provide a lens for exploring themes such as the fragmentation of identity, bodies as sympoietic systems, and the interplay between the self and potential forms of alterity.

## **Original, Multiple and Series. Different Media Versions of *L.O.V.E.*** **by Cattelan**

Irene Sofia Comi

Artistic seriality, through processes of repetition and variation, challenges the traditional notion of originality, focusing on the transformative medial and narrative processes that constitute the backbone of the artwork. In this framework, the article explores how *L.O.V.E.* (2010) by Maurizio Cattelan takes on a variety of forms, languages, and narratives, transforming through its encounter with public space, media environments, and creative industries. By examining how aesthetics and storytelling evolve in its multiple serial iterations, the study reconstructs the history of the artwork, tracing its genealogy and its reuses.

## **Hong Sang-soo and Seriality as a Cosmological Principle**

Mattia Gritti

In *Oki's Movie* and *The Day He Arrives*, Hong Sang-soo takes seriously the cinematic investigation of the game of narrative combinations. Going beyond a more literary level of reflection, the two films meet in showing the cosmological echo of every possible repetition and – at the same time – of every possible understanding of them. In the blind spots of the rational method, in the flows of alcohol and desire, putting themes and forms into series makes eventually manifest the forces that simultaneously animate the world (of images) and its inhabitants.

## ***Mom* is More Than Just Another Sitcom**

Valentina Valente

The essay analyzes the series *Mom* within the context of contemporary television comedy, highlighting how it blends elements of both comedy and drama in exploring themes such as alcoholism. It argues that the series challenges traditional sitcom structures and the way certain themes are addressed, moving beyond the episodic structure to focus on character development that spans the entire narrative. The analysis specifically examines how *Mom* reflects broader changes in television, particularly in the representation of women, and how it contributes to the ongoing transformation of the sitcom genre.

***American Horror Story: Hotel and the Eternal Present of Jouissance***

Leonardo Magnante

Using a methodology that draws on Lee Edelman's antisocial queer theory, the essay intends to demonstrate how *Hotel*, the fifth season of *American Horror Story*, defines queer temporality as the negation of the teleology of storytelling. The recursiveness of sequences of sex and violence articulates a transgressive and anal spectacle, capable of resisting the determination of meaning, unraveling the death drive through and against the serial form. On this unscrupulous *jouissance*, the series builds its antisocial queerness, a negative force that breaks the bond with the other and ennoble the unproductiveness of the Edelmanian *synthomosexual*.

**Digital Forms of Serialization: *Material Speculation: Isis* by Allahyari**

Anna Calise

In 2015, Islamic State militants destroyed Assyrian and Roman statues in Nineveh and Hatra, Iraq, with the aim of erasing works considered to be false idols. This act of iconoclasm, documented on platforms such as YouTube, connects material destruction and digital continuity. From these images artist Morehshin Allahyari created *Material Speculation: Isis* (2015-2016), a series of 3D reproductions of the destroyed statues containing USB drives with data about the original sites. The essay explores the critical dimension of seriality and the role of digital mediation as a driver of reappropriation and reconstruction of meaning.

***Mussolini - Son of the Century. Seriality as a Contemporary Transmedia Atlas***

Angela Maiello

The article examines the television series *Mussolini - Son of the Century*, directed by Joe Wright and written by Stefano Bises and Davide Serino, focusing on three main topics. The first is the relationship between television series and literature, with a particular focus on Italian productions and the link between complex seriality and the *New Italian Epic*. The second examines the medial status of serial objects, analysing how *Mussolini - Son of the Century* fits into the flow of images on social media. Finally, the third section considers the relationship between television series and politics, of which Wright's work is a recent and significant example.