POST-TELEVISUAL BRUSHSTROKES: *TWIN PEAKS: THE RETURN* AND *TOO OLD TO DIE YOUNG* FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF "PICTORIAL TIME"

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1. INTRODUCTION

Determining the ontological status of contemporary serial fiction is an obviously complex task, as perhaps more than any other artistic product, it is a product existing in the complicated situation of being for-the-masses in an era when no such masses exist. There is no longer a general public; as Gilles Lipovetsky (2000) explains, the small group has brought an end to any possibility of a target audience.[1] Any approach to these diverse forms and formats must therefore be based on the multiple and the fragmentary, taking their quality of seriality as the sole common element for the development of an interpretative strategy. This situation has become more complex in recent years, as with the boom in "quality television", networks and VOD platforms have been investing in fiction series where the psychological depth of the characters, careful attention to narrative development and "cinematographic" techniques

articulate a new audiovisual poetics that is reformulating the aesthetic practices defined by John Caldwell (1995) using the term "televisuality". It is for this reason that the numerous products associated with what we commonly refer to as "television" need to be considered in light of a paradigm shift in contemporary audiovisual studies, which have begun analysing serial production from the perspective, for example, of the theory and philosophy of the image, or visual studies.

In this respect, although television studies have defined a line of research revolving around so-called TV aesthetics, with studies by Newcomb (1974), Williams (1974), Fiske (1987), Caldwell (1995), Metallinos (1996), Butler (2010), Creeberg (2013), Ellis (2017) and Nannicelli (2017), the changeable nature of the medium, the aesthetic impact of some of the more recent series on the contemporary visual imaginary and the intellectual and philosophical depth they offer require a constant updating of the theories and methodol-

ogies applied. As the focus of this research is the pictorial treatment of serial time, and in view of the absence of systematic studies analysing the subversions introduced by the series we have chosen for study, this article draws on other perspectives intimately related to the pictorial, such as aesthetics, art theory, and more specifically, the philosophy of painting. With this in mind, the theoretical framework for this research draws mainly from the theories of Gilles Deleuze and, especially, Jean-François Lyotard on time, the figure and the event, along with contributions from Pascal Bonitzer (1986), Jacques Aumont (1989), Nicole Brenez (1998), Jean-Michel Durafour (2009) and Luc Vancheri (2011), exploring the artistic nature of the cinematic image based on motifs like the *trompe l'oeil*, the landscape tradition, and even the *figure*. None of this is intended to suggest that time has not been a key focus in previous studies of contemporary seriality, as in fact it has been one of the chief concerns of scholars in this field.

Ever since the first TV series appeared, the duration of the season and the fragmentary nature of each episode has resulted in a very different treatment of time from the approach that has characterised cinema. A paradigmatic example of this can be found in *Lost* (J. J. Abrams, Jeffrey Lieber, Damon Lindelof, ABC: 2004-2010) and *24* (Joel Surnow, Robert Cochran, Fox: 2001-2010), two landmark series that have explored the possibilities of time as a narrative and aesthetic feature, popularising time jumps in television discourse through the use of flashbacks and flashforwards, ellipses, and the accelerated dimension of "race-against-the-clock" sequences, resulting in a frenetic narrative pace that directly affects their sounds and images.[2] However, such poetics of the cinematic hardly compares with the development of a mechanics whereby the potential (and dormant) power is kept on hold, waiting to be released. In his widely quoted analysis of poetry and the plastic arts, Gotthold Lessing ex-

IN TELEVISION, […] THE ACCELERATION OF THE DISCOURSE CAN FAIRLY BE DESCRIBED AS THE HEGEMONIC APPROACH: CONSTANT MOVEMENT, MULTIPLE PLOTLINES, AND IMMERSION IN THE STORY

plains that the main difference between the two disciplines lies in the question of time: in painting, time is suspended and the painter has to choose the right moment for the action, while in poetry, time is flowing constantly and it is by means of that flow that the poet must give shape and solidity to the images (Lessing, 1990: 106-127).[3] Although the audiovisual arts, much like dance or theatre, combine time and space, it is the duality of stillness and movement that concerns us here. In television, spaces for alternative forms of creation were—and still are—much more limited than in cinema, and it is for this very reason that the acceleration of the discourse can fairly be described as the hegemonic approach: constant movement, multiple plotlines, and immersion in the story. However, the two series chosen for analysis in this study completely undermine the traditional preference for movement over stillness, and for the "poetic-literary" over the pictorial.

In our view, the time-image does not represent an improvement on the movement-image, any more than photography represents an improvement over painting, or cinema over photography. This is one of the reasons why the discussion here will focus exclusively on painters working since the birth of cinema, as they were working in a context of full awareness of this contemporary development. In considering this co-existence, which has occasionally resulted in boundaries where it can be hard to discern where one discipline ends and the other begins, we will try to steer clear of the stale debate over the definitions of the two types of cinematic image pro-

posed by Deleuze. Although the movement-image has sometimes been construed in relation to certain privileged movements, what matters here is its construction as a mobile section of duration that responds to the causal chain (Deleuze, 1984: 26). In contrast to this category, the time-image progresses in a non-linear manner from the loosening of the sensory-motor links, a condition that precedes the liberation from narrative forms (e.g. Antonioni's idle moments and geophysical landscapes) or the breakdown of space-time linearity (e.g. the blurred lines between dream and the waking world in Resnais and Rivette) (Deleuze, 1987: 11-26). In this case, although Deleuze gives this process of transcending the narration the same level of importance as "the conquering of a purely optical space in painting, with impressionism" (Deleuze, 1987: 13), we are still watching a series of successive images.

However, there is a third position which, rather than reconciling the movement-image and the time-image, isolates any instant from the whole that constructs the continuity of movement. This was the position first proposed by Lyotard in his essay on "acinema" (1973: 71-94), which was inspired by his reflections on the figure and which in turn served as a point of departure for Deleuze's considerations related to the "haptic" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980) and the "sensation" (Deleuze, 2002). But what concerns us here is Lyotard's reformulation of his position several years later in the article "Idée d'un film souverain" (Lyotard, 2000: 209-221), where he expands the application of the concept of *acinema* beyond experimental film to include all cinema, pointing out that the sovereign image is always shown directly as an instant that cannot be totalised as a whole film. This idea already suggests that "pictorial time" is something that can be applied to audiovisual media. The same serialising of the instant attempted by Barnett Newman in his work *The Stations of the Cross* (1958-1966), as the addition of independent moments, may refer equally to the practice of avant-garde filmmakers (Hans Richter) and to "Part 8" (#3x08, David Lynch, Showtime: 2017) of *Twin Peaks: The Return* (David Lynch & Mark Frost, Showtime: 2017). However, the focus of this study lies in the specific fact that the visual coding of the story as painting, through referential strategies and the experimental use of the pictorial image, allows us to expand our understanding of the instant to include the *serialised* nature of television fiction.[4]

The release of *Twin Peaks: The Return* represented the opening of a new breach in televisuality, and it is through that space that we can perceive mutations towards the pictorial, reopening a debate in which the questions have changed as much as the answers. As *Too Old to Die Young* (Nicolas Winding Refn, Ed Brubaker, Amazon Prime Video: 2019) has demonstrated, this new way of conceiving of a device associated with the mainstream as a means of unorthodox expression has not been limited to the unsettling "return" of Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) and his companions, but constitutes the consolidation of a new authorial poetics, and of a new aesthetic approach to be continued by future fiction series. What in cinema was known as "arthouse" has been transferred in these news creations to a territory that it once seemed impossible to conquer: traditional television and streaming platforms, the hardcore of the hypermodern liquid culture in which we continue to drown. Our study is limited to the analysis of the two aforementioned series, symmetrical and opposed in their morphology, syntax and phonetics, both concerned with pictorial time and mechanical potential, since in both the sovereign image can be identified, which, in its pictorial referentiality, is rendered autonomous as an independent picture of the *serialised whole*. Based on this autonomy, the whole of the audiovisual product of which it forms a part is displayed centrifugally, as something different from the reality captured by the camera: in short, as painting.

2. REFERENCE AS A MECHANISM OF TEMPORAL REVELATION

"Go check out the satellite dish, the TV isn't working," Don Ricardo (Emiliano Díez) tells his son at the beginning of the episode of *Too Old to Die Young* titled "Volume 2: The Lovers" (#1x02, Nicolas Winding Refn, Amazon Prime Video: 2019). This setting for the conversation, this arrangement of a family dinner table, with no objects or characters to interrupt our gaze, inevitably recalls the Last Supper. Indeed, like the Last Supper itself, this meal foreshadows a death the following day: that of the *pater familias*, in a moment that again alludes to the pictorial code canonised by Da Vinci on the wall of the Dominican convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie. "It's not the satellite [...]. The satellite dish is fine. We've got no signal because..." replies Miguel (Roberto Aguire) after checking the problem that his father has pointed out. He cannot finish his sentence; Don Ricardo is already looking at something else and doesn't want to be interrupted. Before his eyes is not a television screen, but a painting: the picture of his late sister Magdalena. "Why are you always such an embarrassment to me?" the old man retorts. "I'm trying to fix your problem," his son protests. "Well do it later!" But there is no later. Don Ricardo will die and the television set will remain out of order.

The Last Supper signals a specific moment in the life of Christ, on the eve of his death, but also an event in Biblical history. In this sense, the structure not only indicates the imminence of the father's death, but also hints at the traditional view of the nature of contemporary serial fiction. The "TV isn't working" because something has broken down and someone, like Christ himself, will die the next day. Or in the night, like Don Ricardo. The painting becomes an object of family worship, of dialogue, of communion. An object of devotion for the late Magdalena's brother; of imitation for Yaritza (Cristina Rodlo), who is revealed to be a new "mother"; and also a source of devotion for Jesús (Augusto Aguilera), as the character who resembles his mother. But the introduction of painting to the serial format was already established by David Lynch with his pictorial references in *Twin Peaks: The Return* through the inclusion of the canvases of Francis Bacon, Edward Hopper and René Magritte. In this case, the relationship between the two formats results in the replacement of one with the other: there can be no coexistence. In *Too Old to Die Young*, the TV is broken, so we look at the painting. However, David Lynch's approach is rather more peculiar, as his device broke down many years before. After the opening credits to *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (David Lynch, 1992), the spectator witnesses the explosion of the TV set on which those credits appeared. This is why, in

Left: *Part 2: The Lovers, Too Old to Die Young.* Right: *The Last Supper* (1498) by Leonardo da Vinci

subsequent "Lynchian" products, there is no antagonism between warring opponents; instead, there is a post-cinematic, post-televisual, and post-pictorial symbiosis.

This image from the prequel to *Twin Peaks* (David Lynch & Mark Frost, ABC: 1990-1991) is referenced indirectly in the first episode of *Twin Peaks: The Return* (#3x01: Part 1, David Lynch, Showtime: 2017). In some dark corner of New York, a character unknown to the spectator sits down in front of an empty glass box, waiting for a possible apparition. This is when—and where—the representation of the box, which had served as the outline and boundary that had isolated numerous figures of Baconian imagery, makes it possible to add the specific terms of Bacon's work, recall the explosion of the TV set and re-establish both media through their temporal specificity. The reference, rather than the referent, ascribed to its own tradition, and therefore a signifier with its own meanings, is positioned in the reverse shot of the characters who observe it like a painting. It is in these static shots of the box that the interpretative key to the series is revealed: if the reference is pictorial, the way to read serial fiction will appear by synonymy, analogous to the interpretation of painting. These characters, like the "attendants" in Bacon's painting (Deleuze, 2002: 23), are also spectators of *Twin Peaks: The Return*, who revolt against the degree-zero narration and the slow pace of the story. The series can be painting because the boundaries that should contain it are dissolved, like the glass box, which is not a boundary but glass that is broken.

THE SERIES CAN BE PAINTING BECAUSE THE BOUNDARIES THAT SHOULD CONTAIN IT ARE DISSOLVED, LIKE THE GLASS BOX, WHICH IS NOT A BOUNDARY BUT GLASS THAT IS BROKEN

However, the pictorial dimension does not refer exclusively to the work of Bacon, but also alludes to Edward Hopper and René Magritte. *Figurant* or figured, at times *figure*,[5] the presence of both painters is visible in the imaginary composition of *Twin Peaks: The Return*, taking its own meaning to the limits of what is painted. In this way, the referential strategy serves not only to stretch the relationship constructed between the images, with the purpose of subverting their inherent meaning, but also to undermine the temporal understanding of the whole. The allusion to Magritte would therefore not be a mere tribute, as it reveals a kind of superposition of realities. In this same sense, the introduction of Hopper is equally significant, as it acts as a structural source for the unsettling "Part 8", set in a kind of horrifying reverse universe configured by the painter where the pictorial space is combined with cinematic time.

This "Part 8" is the best example for explaining the pictorial-temporal drift we wish to highlight here. In strictly narrative terms, i.e. as a particle of time positioned in relation to a narrative line, it could be understood as a kind of excessive flashback (Martin, 2018: 48-50), as the return is not located within the narrative boundaries of the story, but in the crypts of a past time unseen by the audience: the 1940s, when a bomb explodes in black and white. The director includes sufficient elements to make the spectator aware of the timeframe of the episode in question, such as the use of captions and the black-and-white image, also intended to recall a time when images had yet to be coloured in. However, these signs seem to be insufficient for the atmospheric (re-)creation of the historical time in question. In this place, in this space, the reference reappears to the immortal art of Edward Hopper, "a storyteller, not a still-life painter" who delved more deeply than anyone into the American dream (Wenders, 2016: 47).

The narration of an enclosed landscape, of a specific time in history that endures iconographi-
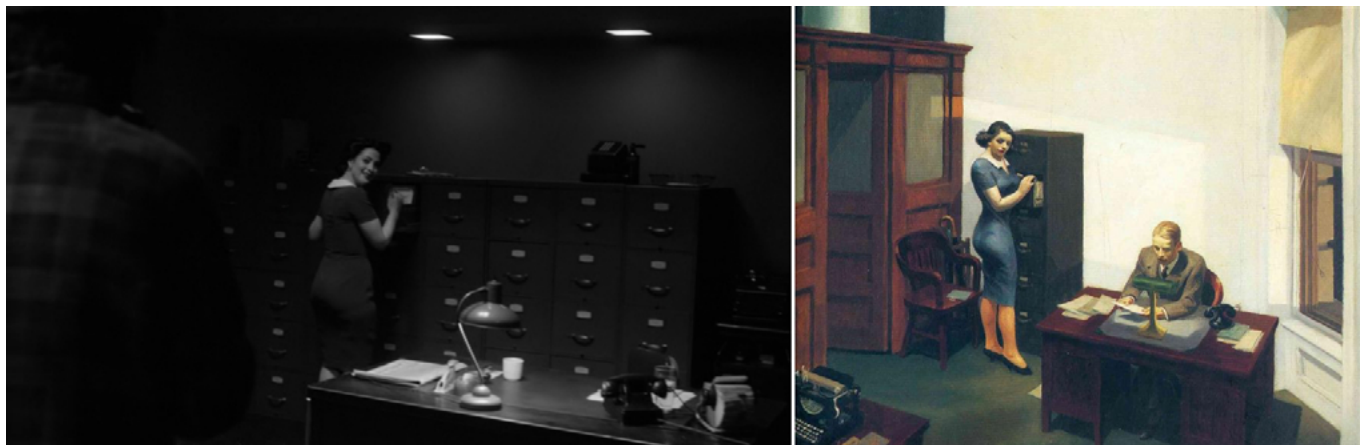
Left: stillframe from "Part 8" of *Twin Peaks: The Return*. Right: *Office at Night* (1940) by Edward Hoppe

cally, is shown to us through the revelation of the Hopperian canvas: his pictorial spaces—theatres, porches, offices, service stations—come together to compose the fictional and temporal universe of the episode in question, and it is here that the emergence of the canvas on screen facilitates a highly unusual temporal disruption, as it is the iconographic recognition of the canvas that enables us to begin the structural interpretation of the flashback. Suddenly, time is depicted as historical while the spectator carries out an analysis to identify the properties of the series. However, the director knows that this referential relationship reveals not only the depiction of a historical time, but also the corollary of the permanence of time through the painting that bears witness to it.

For this mechanism to work, a different kind of relationship within the images is needed: the understanding of the shot as *painting*. The canvas does not appear in *Twin Peaks: The Return* as a composite element of the image; rather, it *is* the whole image. The properties, the details of the painting and the actors are all characters in Hopper's stories. Herein lies the difference between the two series: while Winding Refn's characters look *at* the painting, Lynch makes it very clear that they *are* the painting, because Lynch has in fact dedicated his whole life to painting. Thus, in addition to being his main (albeit lesser known)

activity, it is also the "foundation" of his work.[6] Quite apart from his direct adherence to a particular mode of composing, this activity enables the filmmaker, as a creator of images, to cultivate a series of pictorial references with a particular aesthetic sensibility and from a position within the discourse that underpins his work. Time must emerge, re-emerge, or manifest itself through signs that indicate to the spectator that it has a form, where the "pictorial reference" is articulated as a sign through which time can be conveyed.

An example from a series released around the same time as *Twin Peaks: The Return* may be relevant for explaining this rupture. In the first season of *Westworld* (Jonathan Nolan, Lisa Joy, HBO: 2016-), Dolores (Evan Rachel Wood) discovers, in a shocking revelation for the spectator, that the Man in Black (Ed Harris) is William (Jimmi Simpson): the character who had once adored her now detests her. This revelation takes place in a combination of montage and dialogue, serving as elements that expose the different time-lines that the spectator has not previously identified, which are suddenly made visible by an apparent sleight of hand. Time has been revealed, and in the end the twist that lays bare the temporal structure or device of the fiction makes it possible to reconstruct both the identity of the characters and the temporal identity of the series itself (Salvadó-Cor-

retger & Benavente, 2021: 275). Dolores' realisation of this situation therefore not only entails a narrative proposition of an extreme situation for the psychological conditions of the characters, but also means that the spectator can become aware of the existence of various time-lines over the course of the series that now—and only now, when the revelation occurs—have to be reconstructed.

On the other hand, what *Twin Peaks: The Return* proposes is, first of all, a valuation and comprehension of time on the part of the spectator that subverts traditional narratives of serial space, as the temporal revelation brings a different order to light. The wild sensationalism of the *Westworld* universe contrasts with the artistic turn in *Twin Peaks: The Return*, as its time structure is revealed through the pictorial formulation of the image, through a recognition that requires a referential reading. This time revolution appears as an addition to the artistic quality of the story. Pictorial referencing is the interpretative index that hints the spectator that this type of story has more to do with the painting alluded to than with television. Ultimately, the new sense of time in the series is different from the hegemonic standard for contemporary fiction programming. In both *Twin Peaks: The Return* and *Too Old to Die Young,* the slow tempo, the drawn-out shot, the overwhelming sensation of narrative stagnation and the characters' inaction are all diametrically opposed to the time mechanisms of stories like *Westworld*, but they still reveal an underlying concern associated with the nature of seriality: the possibility of exploring time as inescapable narrative material in contemporary television.

3. THE QUESTION OF THE FRAME: FROM BOUNDARY TO THRESHOLD

In *Twin Peaks: The Return* the reference to Bacon reveals the complex relationship between contemporary serial fiction and painting for the sim-

ple fact that the latter is made tangible. But even more interestingly, with this strategy the reference outlines a particular relationship between the time of the story and pictorial time. As noted above, when the glass box breaks, the boundary between painting and television seriality vanishes. This is the result of a visual formula that isolates the two media, just as in Bacon's paintings the figures are isolated in boxes; yet this makes it possible to relate them to his audiences, as they lead to that "extreme solitude of Figures, extreme enclosure of bodies that exclude any spectator: the Figure does not come into being except by that movement in which it is enclosed" (Deleuze, 2002: 25). As in Baconian iconography, the boundary is established as a need in the story; a visual index is traced or outlined to make it recognisable, a frame which, after the enclosure of the figures, will disintegrate through the visual strategies of the scene. The reference creates a conceptual relationship between pictorial form and serial format, while bringing to light connections of contiguity between them and their external spaces. When the glass box is broken in *Twin Peaks: The Return*, the leap is made from one coding system to its opposite: from the centripetal, which leads the characters to a contemplative state, to the centrifugal, which dissolves the distances between the two. In other words, an abrupt fracture occurs in the different ways of perceiving adopted by the spectator for painting and for television. The scene *indicates* that there is a specifically pictorial (i.e. contemplative) state, which changes the way of viewing the story; but at the same time, the frame—in this case, a box—becomes the screen:

The frame of a painting encloses a space that is oriented so to speak in a different direction. In contrast to natural space, the space in which our active experience occurs and bordering its outer limits, it offers a space the orientation of which is inwards, a contemplative area opening solely onto the interior of the painting. The outer edges of the screen are not [...] the frame of the film image. They

are the edges of a piece of masking that shows only a portion of reality. The picture frame polarizes space inwards. On the contrary, what the screen shows us seems to be part of something prolonged indefinitely into the universe. A frame is centripetal, the screen centrifugal (Bazin, 2004: 166).

Based on Bazin's argument, in *Twin Peaks: The Return* the nature of seriality is quickly transformed into the all-consuming relationship that television engages in with its contiguous spaces, and in that relationship "what the screen shows us seems to be part of something prolonged indefinitely into the universe" (Bazin, 2004: 166). In David Lynch and Mark Frost's series, there is no frame to which the forces must conform: the story expands in every direction to encompass the world beyond and consume it in a centrifugal moment, just as the inner space of the box does to its attendants, like that malignant force that breaks the glass to kill the waiting characters. This is the vocation of the screen: to reach all possible places instead of absorbing the spectator into the area inside the frame, destined exclusively for the painting. This dissolution into the audiovisual whole of the pictorial regime, of the static and inanimate matter inside the glass box, signals that everything in this third season—including what lies *outside* the shot—can become a frameless painting.

In this respect, the exercise proposed by Winding Refn and Brubaker is formulated on different terms. While the characters in *Twin Peaks: The Return* are consumed by the pictorial material, the characters in *Too Old to Die Young* cannot gain access to that space, despite their stillness. Martin (Miles Teller), Janey (Nell Tiger Free), Viggo (John Hawkes) and Don Ricardo are merely spectators of an estranged world, gazing with desire on that which they could never become: the painting, the unattainable libidinal space. In his world, as in our own, Jesus cannot reach his mother because she is on the other side of the canvas, separated by the frame. *Twin Peaks*, however, is not our world; or, if the world of *Too Old to Die Young* is not our world either, the *Twin Peaks* world is not even like our world. There is no frame or curtain here; only a threshold. Sarah Palmer (Grace Zabriskie) demonstrates this when she peels off her face and enters the universe of Magritte, revealing that the Black Lodge, Twin Peaks and New York all form part of the same space: the space of painting.

The approaches in both series forge their conflict on a different perspective, not of audiovisual, but of pictorial activity. It is worth highlighting here that Winding Refn prioritises the two formats' differences over their similarities, dismissing the possibility of "painting" on the screen. He is a filmmaker, and however much his characters may wish to be the painting, to penetrate the Mother's frame, they never will, as the frame is motionless and his work is in movement, even when that

Left: stillframe from "Part 1" of *Twin Peaks: The Return.* Right: still-frame from "Part 6": *The High Priestess* from *Too Old to Die Young*
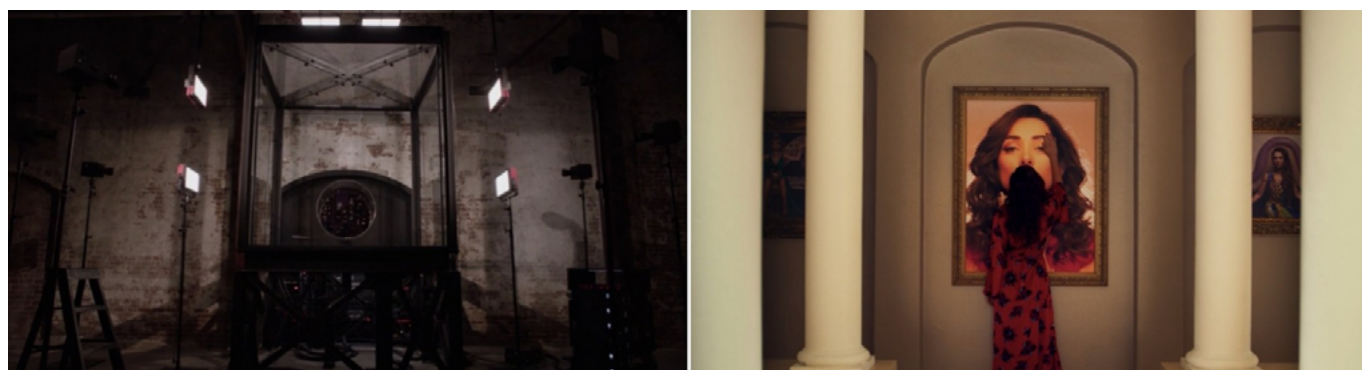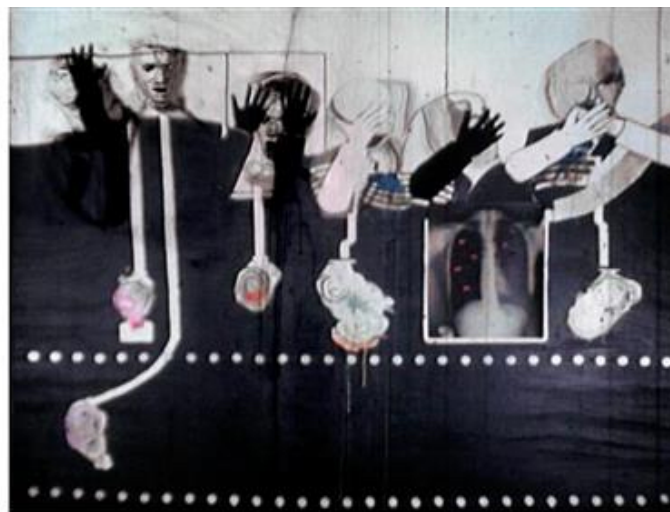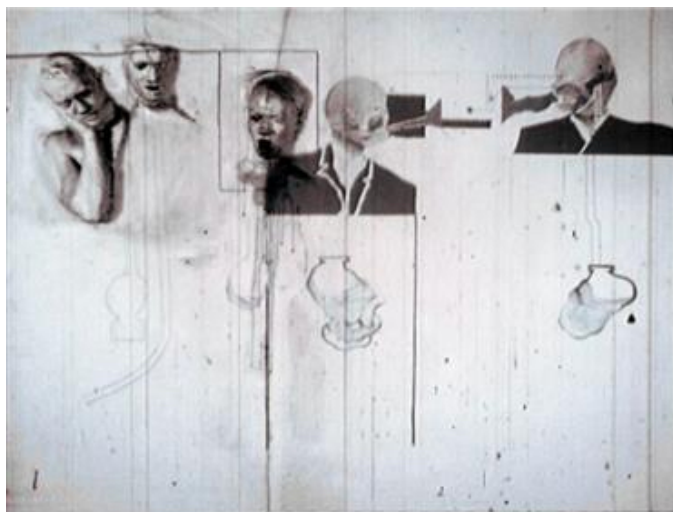
Six Figures Getting Sick (1966) by David Lynch

movement is barely perceptible. On this point, he reflects Walter Benjamin's perspective:

Let us compare the canvas (screen) on which a film unfolds with the canvas of a painting. The painting invites the spectator to contemplation; before it the spectator can abandon himself to his associations. Before the movie frame he cannot do so. No sooner has his eye grasped a scene than it is already changed. It cannot be arrested (Benjamin, 2019: 190).

Standing in opposition to this perspective is Lynch, for whom painting *is* movement that changes and mutates as much as the film shot, which is why he believes he can also paint on the screen. If there are no frames in *Twin Peaks: The Return* it is because we are viewing the screen, the centrifugal force that submerges us in a world where there is no painting because the world it-self *is* painting. What these two perspectives raise is not only the question of painting as an art form, but also the debate about its boundaries, its attrib-utes and specific qualities.

4. THE TIME OF THE INSTANT

In the mid-1960s, David Lynch studied painting at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. He would work there with kinetic dynamic "real"

paintings, or "moving paintings", such as *Six Figures Getting Sick* (1966), a high relief painted specifically for an animated projection that would turn the surface into a screen and the painting into movement. Later, this sensitivity to movement in painting would find full expression in his filmmaking, because, as Allister Mactaggart (2010: 12) points out, "[f]ilm allowed Lynch to add movement and sound to the muteness and static nature of his paintings as well as an opportunity to extend beyond their frame."

This absence of distinction between pictorial and audiovisual material is depicted in "Part 8". The function of this episode—other than continuing the taste for digression established by the iconic "Fly" [7] (#3x10, Rian Johnson, AMC: 2010) episode of *Breaking Bad* (Vince Gilligan, AMC: 2008-2013)—is to explain the origin of evil in the American context through the atomic bomb experiments in White Sands, New Mexico, in 1945. This event combines the social context framing the series, whose story would be the direct consequence of this historic moment, and the artistic concerns of its creator. In this case, temporal dislocation and the emergence of the abstract constitute a veritable vanishing point that distorts the spectator's perception. When the bomb explodes, before the Hopperian imagery fills the screen, the spectator witnesses nearly three minutes of narrative suspension during which fire and smoke take the form of creating a drip painting, bringing

Hopper and Pollock together as part of a single unit of time, as part of a single frame that combines the different times of figurative painting and of abstract painting.

Correcting the naive dichotomy proposed by Lessing, Lyotard explains that there are many times in painting: the time of production, meaning the time it takes to paint the painting; the time of consumption, referring to the time required "to look at and understand" the work; the time of circulation, or the time it takes "to reach the viewer" once it has been "created"; and "the time the painting is", which we have referred to in this article as " pictorial time" (Lyotard, 1991: 78). It is this last category of time, in the specific case of abstract expressionism, as Newman labels it (2003: 580-582), that has the particular quality of not *being*, because once it *is* it already *has been*. In other words, its time is the time of the event itself. On this point, Lyotard clarifies that "the sublime is now" should not be interpreted literally, but as "now the sublime is like this", because "the feeling of the instant is instantaneous" (Lyotard, 1991: 93, 80).[8] There are no elements to identify; there is only *figure*. There is no reading time, because there is nothing to read, only an instant to experience. It is this context that frames the explosion in "Part 8". The screen becomes a painting, but unlike what happened to the paintings of Newman and others of his generation, time is not suspended by a time cut; instead, the serialis-

Left: stillframe from "Part 8" of *Twin Peaks: The Return.* Right: *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)* (1950) by Jackson Pollock
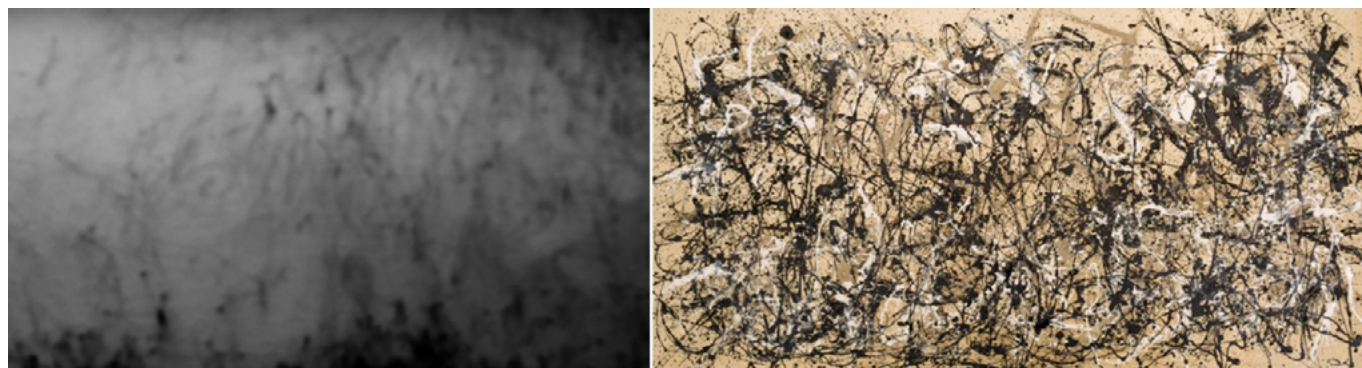
The Stations of the Cross (1958–1966) by Barnett Newman

ing of that cut connects the figurative stain with Hopperian imagery.

A work that helps explain the similarities and differences between such imagery and Newman's abstraction is the series *The Stations of the Cross* (1958-1966), made up of 14 paintings depicting the Via Crucis of Christ. As might be expected of this painter, none of the 14 images alludes to any element that could connect the work with the narrative time of the Passion. All 14, following Newman's poetics, are instants that suspend the logic of progressive time. During the explosion in *Twin Peaks: The Return*, each stillframe resembles an instant, and as they are stains on the screen there is no movement deconstructed into fragments. However, the series of instants extends beyond the stain and reaches Hopper's gas station, extending it into the figurative. The difference here from Newman's *Stations*, a work with which it shares a serial dimension, is that the episode is not a collection of separable paintings, but a single canvas on which Lynch paints stains, but also subjects, as the appearance of the reference has determined that everything must belong to the same space. The lightning flash is placed in 1945,

where Lynch and Frost position it narratively, and it is in the heart of this paradox that the instant that suspends time is inserted into the chronological evolution of humanity.

While Lynch and Frost insert the abstract into the spatio-temporal frame of the real, Winding Refn and Brubaker's characters go on gazing at the painting. They remain still. They keep trying to be abstract paintings when their figurative nature prevents them from appearing as stains. In a recent interview, Winding Refn pointed this out explicitly: "I lost interest in realism when I realised that I would never be able to capture reality faithfully enough. Since then I have felt closer and closer to abstraction. And I have the intention of getting closer still to it" (Salvà, 2019). Indeed, Winding Refn is now a long way from the naturalist poetics that he cultivated enthusiastically and diligently in his early years as a filmmaker in films like *Pusher* (1996), *Pusher II* (2005), *Pusher 3* (2006) and *Bleeder* (1999); nevertheless, as he himself acknowledges, he is also still a long way from complete abstraction. In fact, he is convinced that as an artist he is doomed to pursue the impossible, and that, like his characters, he will never be able to achieve it.

If *Twin Peaks: The Return* is to be read as positive, the screen made painting, *Too Old to Die Young* is negative: the screen cannot turn into a canvas. The insertion of figurative forms in "Part 8" contrasts with Winding Refn's endeavour to hypostasise the figurative. The profusion of paintings that appear in *Too Old to Die Young* remind us that they can only exist in the space where they are presented. The direction taken here is thus the opposite to that taken by Lynch and

Frost: the paintings are on the screen, but they are not the screen. Indeed, all the decisions and comments of their respective creators come into conflict. Both series premièred at the Cannes Film Festival, two years apart; however, unlike Lynch and Frost, Winding Refn and Brubaker refused to present the first two episodes, choosing instead to show the fourth and the fifth. *Twin Peaks* came back to television, where it had begun, but moving from ABC to Showtime, while *Too Old to Die Young* was available on the video-on-demand platform Amazon Prime. David Lynch has often expressed his disdain for mobile devices as film viewers, while Nicolas Winding Refn is a recognised admirer of its possibilities (Salvà, 2019). And yet, the two series are also very similar. It is no secret that Refn is a great admirer of Lynch's work, and the influence of the return of *Twin Peaks* is clear; but his career has taken him in a different direction, while matching him in daring and wit. Their resemblance, as made explicit at the beginning of this article, lies in the artistic turn of both, in moving beyond a "way of making" television which, even in its best manifestations, has prioritised narration: what Lessing calls the "poetic" and which in these two cases is clearly marked by the "pictorial".

This is what we have referred to above as the poetics of the "cinematic", meaning that area of the mechanics—and prior to the mechanics—that studies movement through time without considering the force it generates. Without doubt, the movement of the narration in series like *The Sopranos* (David Chase, HBO: 1999-2007) or *The Wire* (David Simon, HBO: 2002-2008) is not without its artistic forces or libidinal drives, but if this is the case, it cannot be denied that while viewing them our attention is always on the "movement": on the plot, the characters, the conflicts. With *Twin Peaks: The Return* and *Too Old to Die Young*, the characters are transformed into objects, thereby ceasing to be the articulating centre of the story: Martin, the supposed protagonist, dies before we

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IF *TWIN PEAKS: THE RETURN* IS TO BE READ AS POSITIVE, THE SCREEN MADE PAINTING, *TOO OLD TO DIE YOUNG* IS NEGATIVE: THE SCREEN CANNOT TURN INTO A CANVAS

learn much about him, and without even making it to the last episode; Dougie is a character with no traits of his own, constructed out of the rather blurry outlines of the real character Dale Cooper; and Philip Jeffries (David Bowie) is literally turned into a machine. The force is contained in the stillness, in the visual tension of an impregnable surface that is revealed as such when, assessing the movement, we remember the other factors at play. This idea, which of course has been explored in cinema, is now becoming a central motif in serial fiction.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Without denying the multiplicity of criteria involved in a task of such complexity as the analysis of time in contemporary serial fiction, this article has sought to introduce two series into the continuum of theoretical and philosophical reflection on pictorial time. These case studies were chosen because both depart significantly from the now traditional forms of "quality TV" and take directions that require the application of interdisciplinary methods, of which this article intended as no more than an example.

Our findings reveal the existence of two key moments in the history of serial fiction, occurring two years apart. The first was the release of *Twin Peaks: The Return*, in which pictorial reference transgresses its traditional accessory function to become an inherent element of the story, transforming the shot into a canvas and erasing the boundaries between painting and movement-image—a task that Lynch began in his work

as a painter. The analysis of this phenomenon has been supported here by the theories of Lyotard and Deleuze on time, the figure and the sublime, while also considering the work of painters like Hopper, Magritte, Bacon, Pollock and Newman. These painters have allowed us to explore the introduction of abstract forms reflective of the instant into the temporal structure that concludes the eighth episode of Lynch's series. The second key moment was the release of *Too Old to Die Young*, in which Winding Refn and Brubaker offer their own exploration of time and painting, positioning themselves in opposition to Lynch and Frost. The constant that has defined our interpretation of this second series is the idea of the impossible nature of a dialogue between painting and television, articulated through the slowing down—but never full suspension—of the characters, and their strange interaction with the canvases appearing in the series.

While the first example breaks up the literary format, introducing a counter-seriality based on other stillnesses, other repetitions and other plasticities for the images, the second offers a perspective marked by scepticism. It may be expected that the dialectical movement begun by these two productions will be taken further in the future, and we hope that these post-televisual brushstrokes may contribute to a debate that is yet to begin.

NOTES

1   According to Lipovetsky (2000), capital persuades each individual in a personalised way. The standard defined by Marcuse (1972) under the category of "one-dimensional man" has thus become an outdated concept: there is no longer any effort to convince "rigid individuals", as it is in the small group that contemporary narcissism is configured.

2   The methods and notions applied in the analysis and categorisation of time and temporality in serial fiction today are many and varied. As a result, not all the classifications of the temporality of fiction identify *Lost* and *24* as products that treat time the same way. Considering the possibilities of exploring the psychology of characters in American TV fiction, Carrión proposes a categorisation based on a series' "internal velocity", whereby "on one end we would have action products with extreme situations and plot twists occurring at a dizzying pace, like *24* or *Prison Break*; in the middle, changing speed constantly, would be *Dexter* or *Lost*; and on the other end, the relative slowness of the best TV series in history, like *Six Feet Under*, *The Sopranos* or *The Wire*" (Carrión, 2011: 185-186). Yet although categorisations differ, the book edited by Melissa Ames (2012) is one of the most recent and complete compendiums dealing directly with questions of time and temporality in contemporary television.

3   With his approach Lessing calls into question the Horacian maxim *Ut pictura poesis*, which posits poetry and painting as analogous art forms. However, what is of interest for this article is the multiple types of time proposed by Lyotard based on Lessing's model.

4   An entire article could be dedicated to the similarities and differences between the theories of Lyotard and Deleuze, but their ideas are merely summarised here to avoid excessive digression from the focus of this paper: the turning point in serial fiction represented by the two objects of study. For further exploration of the questions raised here, see Durafour (2009) and the anthology edited by Jones and Woodward (2017).

5   The term "figure" is used here not with reference to the image so much as the icon, since it pertains to the discourse. Our intention is to highlight the fact that these three painters (Bacon, Hopper and Magritte) all found ways to subvert the image so that the spectator can sense a kind of pattern in the stains that are more than iconic. To support this idea we refer to Deleuze (2002), and especially to Lyotard (1971).

6   In the interview published by Rodley, Lynch claims that painting is his primary activity, and that "there are aspects of painting that are true for everything in life" (Rodley, 2017: 43). Studies like Mactaggart's (2010) also explore this interdisciplinary dimension of his work, and it is also referenced in works like *David*

Lynch: The Art Life (Jon Nguyen, Rick Barnes & Olivia Neegaard-Holm, 2017), the recent documentary on the director's life and work.

7   Adrian Martin (2018) offers an overview of the many different critical positions that spectators have adopted in relation to these kinds of narrative experiments. He thus points out the romantic attitude of Lynch and Frost, who, in opposition to the demands of the contemporary television format, do not subscribe to the idea that the flashback must have a narrative justification. In this respect, he cites cases like "Fly", an episode that provides the storytelling with a narrative pause that is obvious as a digression from the main line of the story.

8   The specificity that Lyotard saw in Newman's works is the autonomy of the painting compared to the narrative time of *discourse*, a question that the French philosopher had already explored in *Discourse, Figure*. Indeed, our extrapolation of the theoretical framework applicable to Newman to include Pollock follows Lyotard's intuitions on the materiality of the form-figure, posited against the existentialist approaches of critics like Rosenberg (1959) or Tomassoni (1968), who understood Pollock's work as the result of a performative process, and therefore as part of an evolution that is not instant. Of course, what interests us here in Lynch's filmmaking praxis is his complete transgression of these binaries: the screen is a painting that moves, temporalising the instant through sequencing. What is new is not the temporal fracture of the acinematic moment (Lyotard, 1973), but its repetition and, of course, its difference (Deleuze, 1968).

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POST-TELEVISUAL BRUSHSTROKES: *TWIN PEAKS: THE RETURN* AND *TOO OLD TO DIE YOUNG* FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF "PICTORIAL TIME"

PINCELADAS POSTELEVISIVAS. *TWIN PEAKS: THE RETURN* Y *DEMASIADO VIEJO PARA MORIR JOVEN* DESDE EL TIEMPO DE LA PINTURA

Abstract

Just as they did in the 1990s, David Lynch and Mark Frost made an unexpected return to the small screen in recent years that called into question the prevailing artistic and narrative forms of contemporary serial fiction. Understanding Nicolas Winding Refn and Ed Brubaker's *Too Old To Die Young* (Amazon Prime Video: 2019) as a successor in certain respects to *Twin Peaks: The Return* (David Lynch & Mark Frost, Showtime: 2017), this article offers a comparative analysis based on the theories of Gilles Deleuze and, especially, Jean-François Lyotard, related to "pictorial time", with the aim of reappraising these forms of seriality, exploring the treatment of art and time in two series with unorthodox ways of conceiving plot continuity and shot duration, very far from the (still hegemonic) standards established by "quality TV".

Key words

Painting; Contemporary Serial Fiction; Time; *Twin Peaks: The Return*; *Too Old To Die Young*; David Lynch; Nicolas Winding Refn; Jean-François Lyotard.

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Resumen

Como ya había ocurrido en los años noventa, el inesperado regreso de David Lynch y Mark Frost al quehacer televisivo supuso el cuestionamiento de las formas plásticas y narrativas imperantes en la ficción serial contemporánea. Entendiendo *Demasiado viejo para morir joven* (Too Old To Die Young, Amazon Prime Video: 2019), de Nicolas Winding Refn y Ed Brubaker, como sucesora de algunos de los aspectos de *Twin Peaks: The Return* (David Lynch y Mark Frost, Showtime: 2017), trazaremos una comparación entre ambas que se apoye en las reflexiones de Gilles Deleuze y, especialmente, Jean-François Lyotard sobre el «tiempo de la pintura». Nuestro objetivo es repensar las formas de la serialidad aproximándonos al tratamiento plástico y temporal de estos dos ejemplos, heterodoxos en su manera de concebir la continuidad argumental o la duración del plano, y muy alejados del estándar —aún hegemónico— fijado por la *Quality TV*.

Palabras clave

Pintura; Ficción serial contemporánea; Tiempo; *Twin Peaks: The Return*; *Demasiado viejo para morir joven*; David Lynch; Nicolas Winding Refn; Jean-François Lyotard.

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